SEVERED THREADS, ENDURING TIES.
AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF THE COMPETING IMAGINARIES
OF INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION FROM ETHIOPIA

by

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I dedicate this thesis to

Cecilia, who aimed for the stars;

Teodros, who died in my arms;

Milo and Nora, who walk in the sun for them.

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Abstract

This study is an anthropological exploration of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. Moving from an Ethio-centred perspective, the research aims to disentangle how inter-country adoption is differently perceived and enacted depending on the positioning of the actors involved. When approaching this cross-cultural phenomenon, it becomes evident that Global North and South interpretations clash, and this mismatching produces multiple effects onto the adoptive triad, namely the adoptee, the native family, and the adoptive family.

While transracial inter-country adoption is highly debated from a Global North perspective, little has been explored on the ramifications of cross-cultural child mobility. To date, the entanglement between Ethiopian-based knowledges on child circulation and inter-country adoption remains uncharted territory.

This investigation delves into such ground to determine whether in Ethiopia it exists a conceptual correlation between a) customary and inter-country adoption; b) the choice to give a child for adoption; and c) post-adoption expectations.

Fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Ethiopia shed light on inter-country adoption as a circular relational process of kin separation, transfer, reconnection, and reconfiguration. The thesis reconceptualises adoption processes moving from the epistemic knowledge of the participants, who comprised native and adoptive families, adoptees, intermediaries, staff from childcare institutions and adoption agencies, and other key informants.

The main finding is that amongst Ethiopian families it prevails the idea of inter-country adoption as intended to strengthen kin ties and diversify family collective's migration strategies. Conversely, the narrative that prevails in the Global North does not entail contact with the native family nor the return of the adopted person to her country of origin. This contrasting imaginary of adoption crucially impacts on post-adoption dynamics. Eventually, this study emphasises that inter-country adoption in Ethiopia primarily accommodated the Global North imperatives rather than making the process socially just for native families. The lack of a body entitled to provide post-adoption support to native families and mediate cross-cultural reconnections leaves the adoptive triad alone to sort out the search, negotiation, and reconfiguration of its international extended kin ties.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1   Personal reasons for my commitment to this research

I am not an adoptee. I am not an adoptive parent. I have never worked for an adoption agency.

These are the answers to the first questions participants and other interested subjects ask me when they are informed about my research topic. I have been asked these questions for over ten years, and the answers have never changed. Adoption is part of my maternal family history as an absence; something missed, denied to my mother and her siblings as children and adults. The adoption she begged for whilst she was the young child of an alcoholic father and dreamed of growing up with her informal foster family; the adoption my uncle was turned down as a prospective parent. Maybe this is also why my family has welcomed domestic and inter-country foster children for twelve years. I remember the delicate balance between my parents and the children's birth families. The concern, the apprehension, the gratitude, the jealousy, the affection, the sympathy, the oddity. Eventually, a complex human connection, a relationship.

In my twenties, the search for that relationship, that reunion, was one of the most recurrent topics for my friends who were adopted. One of them used to google the city where he was born to examine the slums closely and wonder where his mother could be. He speculated whether he had siblings, what kind of life they were having, and what they may ask him if he ever tried to get in contact with them. It seemed impossible for us to know what his native family might demand once knowing they had a European relative. Impossible without establishing a contact that he longed for and dreaded simultaneously. During that time, I also started working and researching child circulation and trafficking in the Democratic Republic of Benin. There, for the first time, an adoptive agent told me the cost of an inter-country adoption to Italy for the prospective parents, estimated at an average of twenty-thousand euros. She reasoned with me about the possibility of prospective parents getting a loan for the adoption procedure. Her comment, "People do get loans for a new display, why not for a child?", gave me a hint of what I would find out Graff meant when talking about adoption as a market-oriented mechanism led by demand and supply (2008). That process of commodification and monetisation pushed me to ask and know more about what was happening in sending countries and the connections between the adoptive agent's work, my friend's questions, and my field of research. My main interest became the study of ramifications between child circulation, inter-country adoption, and critical kinship.

Given my interest and knowledge of the topic, I was approached by adoptive parents and adoptees eager to know more about what happens on 'the other side of the adoption', behind the curtains of the adoption agency: in the residential childcare institutions, with the birth families, in the native countries. I learned to listen sensitively to families' doubts and concerns. Eventually, I experienced all these fears and expectations when I was diagnosed as unable to conceive biological children. If possible, this made me reflect on this matter in even more depth, looking for fair treatment of all the people involved in the adoption process. Communication became an essential element of my investigation, a skill that I regularly re-examine, aiming for better ways to transform an interview into a reciprocity process, accept the silences as worthy of consideration, and respect boundaries with empathy and assertiveness.

Amongst several sending countries, Ethiopia immediately popped up as a particular case. Adoptees' information was scarce[1], and the documentation did not match. The accounts given by adoptees and adoptive families raised several questions. Adoptive agents gave evasive answers. Preliminary Information about the involvement, understanding and consent of families of origin was inconsistent. The language and cultural barriers between countries were evident, yet very few organisations seemed to tackle this issue to better understand the phenomenon of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. As an Italian, Caucasian woman, Ethiopia also represented an evident connection to explore a missing layer: that of postcolonialism. In 1935 Italy occupied Ethiopia after invading the country and committed atrocious attacks on the population. Such events are still vivid in the collective memory of the Ethiopians, whilst in Italy the colonial period has been almost eradicated and configured as collective amnesia.

As an anthropologist, I am proud of my disciplinary perspective. However, I believe disciplinary borders must necessarily be transgressed, especially in this field, where sociology, demography, geography, economics, politics, history, and legal aspects are central for a holistic comprehension of this matter. I started a PhD in the United Kingdom, a country where interconnections between academic fields are valued. The Research Centre for Children, Families and Communities offered an inspiring multi-disciplinary and multi-professional glance to explore the conceptual intricacy of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia and its outcomes in post-adoption. I entered the programme as an experienced student eager to know more,

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[1] For reasons of clarity and conciseness, this study employs the term "adoptee" instead of "person who was adopted" or "adopted person".

already infatuated with this topic, with some knowledge of the Amharic language, and aware of the possibility of becoming an adoptive parent myself one day.

1.2   What could go wrong?

The fact that I am writing this introduction with my three-month-old second child sleeping next to me might be a clue that something unexpected came up.

2018 was a turning point. In January, inter-country adoption from Ethiopia was banned. Adoption had been suspended since spring 2017, and I was aware this scenario might occur. What I did not expect was to find out, in May 2018, was that I was three months pregnant. At that time, I lived and conducted my fieldwork in Addis Ababa. It was terrible timing and yet surprising news. In July, I entered maternity leave and returned to Italy after being diagnosed with the amebiasis. In December, my first child Milo was born. In 2019, I returned to Ethiopia with him to continue the fieldwork. In early 2020, I returned to Europe, ready to complete data analysis and write my dissertation. However, another improbable event occurred in a few weeks: the Covid-19 global pandemic. I was in Northern Italy, where we experienced massive levels of contagiousness and extreme restrictions for over eight months during 2020 and the state of emergency in 2021, with quarantines, services disruption, physical distancing, isolation, and consequent weakened social networks. As a PhD candidate parent of a young toddler, this meant a constant re-adjustment of my schedule to address weekly normative changes, nurseries closures, out-of-school care limitations, and temporary quarantines. In October 2021, I had my second child, Nora.

These events also impacted my research organisation. Overall, I went to Ethiopia three times between autumn 2017 and winter 2019 and conducted ethnographic fieldwork for a total of fourteen months. The research took mainly place in the capital city, Addis Ababa, where I was hosted first as an unaccompanied researcher and then as a family group by a transracial, multi-cultural adoptive family. During that time, I conducted three field trips in the Oromia Region and the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region. I established relations with several residential childcare institutions, adoption agencies, Ethiopian Ministries, local scholars and organisations (foundations, associations, no-profit organisations), native and adoptive families, persons who were adopted, so-called orphan and vulnerable children and young adults, intermediaries and brokers. Out of all of them, fifty-six agreed to participate in

the research and contributed to collecting second-hand, first-hand and archival data or taking part in in-depth and multiple qualitative interviews.

1.3   Research aims and questions

Historically speaking, from a Global North perspective, inter-country adoption began after World War II. Even though its development has been classified following different interpretations (Resnick, 1984; Altstein and Simon, 1991; Tizard, 1991; Pilotti, 1993; Lovelock, 2000; Hoksbergen and ter Laak, 2005; Young, 2012), there is consensus that it began in the late Forties as a humanitarian response by the United States to Europe's post-war orphaned children, involving primarily Italy, Germany and Greece (Briggs and Marre 2009, Weil 1984). The same child-only humanitarian corridor was given from Korea to the United States during the war in the Fifties. From the Sixties, in parallel with the decolonising international movement, inter-country adoption began to be rationalised as a universal instrument to tackle 'Third World' struggles (UNICEF Digest, 1998). In the Seventies, the interest in the Asian, Latin American and African countries' orphaned children was raised (Weil 1984). The inter-country adoption tool became more and more operative in Africa, and in 2000, over twenty countries in the continent were to some degree involved with this. Eventually, inter-country adoption degenerated towards a more explicit market-driven policy and as a Global North-oriented tool to tackle declining birth rates.

Of significance to this thesis is that the inter-country adoption mechanism has been practised involving many Global South countries. This type of fictive kinship is borrowed from the conceptual West (informed by North American and European notions) as it is internationally understood. The saviour narrative that rationalises adoption agencies as aid providers and prospective parents as benefactors is a creation of the international community and was perpetuated and legitimised by public opinion. This response to 'emergencies' in Global South countries draws the world's attention to nuclear families and exclusive parental care as both a child's right and an essential environmental condition for the child's best interest and development. The unquestioned underlying assumption was that Global South countries could only offer unsafe child-care praxes, to the detriment of children's developmental milestones and chances of personal accomplishment.

This research explores the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. The specific methodological stand of this thesis focuses on sending countries' priorities and

imperatives and highlights consequent entanglements between international child mobility, children commodification, supply/demand imbalance, and trading financial imperatives of globalised (post)colonial, capitalist fictive kinship practices.

In Ethiopia, reports of inter-country adoption were scarce until the Sixties. The National Law of 1930 did mention the possibility of "the adoption of an Ethiopian child by a man or woman of foreign nationality" (Ethiopian National Law, 1930, art. 10). Hence, it might be assumed that this adoption praxis already occurred in the country. In 1960, the central government under Emperor Mekonnen Haile Selassie explicitly codified inter-country and domestic adoption as a viable option in the Civil Code. Official, registered child placements to local and foreign families started in 1963 in the municipality of Addis Ababa and the Haile Selassie I Foundation. Beckstrom (1972, p. 161) argued that the enactment of the Civil Code was received with reluctance by the courts, which manifested their disapproval in "many, sometimes subtle, ways". Judges' concerns were attributed to:

> (1) a feeling that Ethiopians are gradually becoming or changing into foreigners, (2) a fear that the country may be despised for being so poor that it cannot take care of its own children, (3) a related feeling that local institutions should take care of foundlings, and (4) a suspicion that Ethiopian children are being used as servants in the foreign homes. (Beckstrom, 1972, p. 162).

Despite the lower courts' opposition, inter-country adoption figures increased compared to domestic adoption. According to an informant during the Derg, a socialist military junta that ruled from 1974 to 1991, opponents to the regime tried to bypass the reduced transnational mobility by using inter-country adoption as a last resort to secure their children abroad. Meanwhile, foreigners' mobility to the country remained intact. The international media coverage of political turmoil, internally displaced persons, and natural calamities enhanced Ethiopia's visibility and its centrality in the public debate in the Global North. Many organisations and missionaries stepped in as aid providers to operate in the country to respond to famine, droughts and HIV/AIDS increasing cases (Hladik et al., 2006). Residential childcare was considered an appropriate way to address the issue of unaccompanied, unattended and orphaned children. As such, in the Eighties, the number of orphanages operating in the country proliferated "at an alarming rate" (Chernet, 2001), and Ethiopia turned out to be the leading sending country of the African continent (Ngabonziza, 1988).

Starting from early 2000, inter-country adoption from Ethiopia increased (see Appendix B). In a decade, children adopted abroad septuplicated, and Ethiopia became one of the top five sending countries worldwide (Selman, 2015b). In 2009, during a Southern and Eastern Africa

intergovernmental meeting, "many delegates acknowledged that with the growing pressure from receiving countries to adopt more children, they were struggling to manage" (ACPF 2012, p. 19). In 2010, the MOLSA[2] was processing an average of fifty cases per day. In 2011, Ethiopia temporarily suspended inter-country adoption to revise the procedure. The MOWCYA planned to examine no more than five cases per day to improve the screening and revoked the licenses to operate in the country to some private orphanages allegedly involved in malpractice and child trafficking (USAID, 2012). In 2013, the United States high-profile case of the death from neglect of the 13-year-old Ethiopian-born adoptee Hanna generated a strong public reaction concerning adoptees' safety abroad and the transmission of Ethiopian traditional and moral values. The increasing number of irregularities regarding adoptions from Ethiopia became even more evident whilst adoptees grew up. International organisations and adoption agencies operating in the country started pressuring the Ethiopian government to tackle this issue. In 2017, the Ethiopian government decided to suspend inter-country adoption. Since then, public opinion has split. Those favouring the suspension considered it a form of protection and a chance to "enable children to grow up in Ethiopian culture, custom, social values and practices of their birthplace" (ENA, 2018a, quoted in Hosseini, 2018). Those who opposed it feared that residential childcare facilities, domestic adoption and alternative childcare would not have the capacity to face the needs of the considerable number of orphan and vulnerable children in the country. The choice to ban inter-country adoption, taken in 2018, extended the abovementioned controversial reactions and apprehensions amongst experts working in the child protection sector. Adoption agencies were instructed to conclude the adoption procedure of children already matched with prospective parents in the Global North and then end or repurpose their activity in the country.

Meanwhile, the Ethiopian government started a campaign to implement and promote domestic adoption. In 2019, Prime Minister Abiy adopted a child. This private and political matter had a relevant echo in Ethiopia and was praised as a move to promote domestic adoption amongst Ethiopians (ENA, 2019). Since then, the number of domestic adoptions increased whilst the inter-country adoption office of the MOWCYA manages post-adoption. In Autumn 2020, during the global pandemic, a civil war broke out in the Ethiopian region of Tigray between the TPLF party (Tigray People's Liberation Front) and the federal government,

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[2] The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs preceding the MOWCYA (Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs), which is currently designated as the supreme authority to nationally coordinate activities on the child's rights according to Proclamation No. 691/2010.

involving the neighbouring countries South Sudan and Eritrea. According to UNICEF (2021), the ongoing conflict left over 6,000 unaccompanied children and some 720,000 displaced.

The Ethio-centric perspective of inter-country adoption has never been acknowledged or further investigated by the Global North aid providers operating in the country. For a long time, the most relevant studies concerned the functioning of the Global North adoptive family members from the perspective of psychologists and social workers. Even when malpractices became evident, the assistance tackled solely adoptive family members' resilience and ability to cope with unexpected information. Families of origin residing in the Global South were often summoned as marginal and evoked when necessary to address particular issues related to the adoptive family history. In the adoption process, birth parents have been repeatedly represented as single lone young mothers who had children out of wedlock and decided to give them to a caring family to start their life over. This homogeneous and reassuring paternalistic narrative kept the Global South perspective unquestioned.

Such adoptive-family-oriented perspective is often laced with the idea that for families of origin, adoption was nothing but a brief event that occurred and then ended. Anything that takes place afterwards does not enter the picture. What emerges from this research is rather that, for the native family, the conclusion of the adoption does not mark the end of the process. If anything, it signifies the beginning of a time filled with expectations, waiting for the child's return. Investigations embracing this Global South perspective primarily focus on emotional distress or analytical analysis of legal misconduct. In all cases, Ethiopian families are addressed as helpless, as if they could not expect anything because of the irreversibility of the adoptive act (as the Global North defines it). Whilst it can be argued that there is some measure of 'truth' in this narrative, no apparent research has been conducted (to date) to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

This study moves from three main queries. The first question is what kind of movement(s) inter-country adoption implies. The second wonders what expectations surround inter-country adoption processes. The last question concerns how such expectations impact and transform the post-adoption stage.

In this thesis, I engage with Ethiopia's formal and informal child circulation practices. I present the topic of inter-country adoption seen from the geographical and epistemological Global South. To engage with this phenomenon in its entirety I adopted the ethnographic methodology, aiming at a holistic and comprehensive production of thick data.

1.4   Thesis statement

Much debate revolves around inter-country adoption and the betrayal of its social justice imperatives (Roby et al. 2013, Dickens 2006). Many scholars have disputed the misperceptions of the inter-country adoption Global North apparatus on poverty and fallacies concerning orphanhood, alternative childcare, extended families' dynamics and cross-cultural encounters. Despite several calls for further studies on birth countries' diversified perspectives and knowledges on (in)formal domestic and transnational child mobility, Southern perspectives have rarely been tackled with the importance and the urgency needed. Moreover, inter-country adoption in Ethiopia has often been considered a market-driven phenomenon. Whilst this interpretation reveals the social injustice beneath it, it also dismisses adoption as a mere trading practice, overshadowing Ethiopian conceptual and epistemic considerations on the process. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) described this epistemic disqualification, the 'epistemic line', as the continuation of the 'colour line', the dehumanisation of the subjects who became targets of enslavement and colonisation, because "denial of humanity automatically disqualified one from epistemic virtue (…), an imperial reason that reduced some human beings to a sub-human category with no knowledge" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p.17). To recentre on the Global South knowledges on this matter, it is necessary first to provincialise the conceptual West and move the epistemological and geographical centre of the production of knowledge back to the African continent (wa Thiong'o, 1993), whilst not discarding the epistemic support of European authors that were capable of addressing the issue of marginalised knowledges, such as Foucault and Derrida. This research placed its physical and conceptual starting points in Ethiopia in a conscious attempt to shift geographies and voices of knowledge production.

In doing so, it was necessary to address the problematisation of my whiteness: the (post)colonial issue of who has the right to talk and the privilege to be listened. As emphasised by Högbacka (2014) in her report on first parents of internationally adopted children, "we need to consider whose 'voices' dominate adoption discourse and research and how other 'voices' could be better represented" (Högbacka, 2014, p. 12). Because native families hardly represent themselves and are rarely heard when they do it. Several concerns focused on how Global Northern researchers in the Global South might perpetuate inequalities and asymmetries of power. (Ahmed, 2002; Edwards, 1996; Patai, 1991; hooks, 1990). This research shares the viewpoint of Griffin (1996), who notes that "researchers are always speaking for others" (Griffin, 1996, p. 100) and carry the responsibility of their intentions in the process of

representation, interpretation and participation. In their chapter 'The ethic of intention: research as a political tool', Gillies and Alldred (2002) suggest implementing such responsibility through awareness: be wary of the political nature of the researcher's role, the political stance of the research and its considerations, and ultimately its impact on participants. To address such recommendations, several parts of this thesis are devoted to ethical concerns, reflexivity, and disclosure of the personal reasons that drove my interest towards inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

Looking to disentangle this matter, I also navigated three different streams. First, I decided to opt for ethnographic methodology and methods, thus granting a holistic, open dialogue with my participants, who were considered valuable knowledge owners and providers rather than subjects to investigate. I then aimed to respect the cross-cultural nature of inter-country adoption by involving Global South and North participants, constantly moving from a central Ethiopian perspective. Lastly, the linguistic entanglement of this study conducted in Amharic, English and Italian needed an added effort to recentre power communication. Chapter Three thoroughly explores the relevance of languages in cross-cultural research and participant observation and how I engaged with such concepts during this study.

In addition, I had to make linguistic choices concerning translations from Amharic to English. This occurred because it is challenging to translate some ideas, models, and epistemological interpretations without losing the connotation of the original concepts. In the search for sensitive language, some terms that might be considered outdated offered a more Ethio-centred (or Global North-uncentred) point of view. For instance, the term "native family" has been adopted in opposition to "birth" or "natural family" (that forcibly considers the relation as based on blood), "social family" (that excludes any biological association), and "first family" (that might not consider adoptees' interpretation of their family configuration). The concept of a native family offers the option of a relationship based on blood, care, or both.

In some other circumstances, I had to compromise. For instance, the Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) category, primarily used in the international child protection discourse, is problematic because of "the ways in which orphans are conceptualised and how conceptualisations affect family and social cohesion" (Crivello and Chuta, 2012, p. 538). However, it was necessary to employ such term for explanatory purposes in some specific sections. Another example is the use of concepts such as Global South and North. Some studies use these terms interchangeably with developing/developed countries (Cheney, 2014). This study privileges the notion of the Global South because it "marks a shift from a central

focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power" (Dados and Connell, 2012, p. 12) and combines inter-country adoption with the legacy of colonialism in contemporary cultures and politics. Therefore, Global South in this study identifies 'sending countries' and encompasses countries of the five continents, even though this investigation is mainly informed by the African countries and, even more specifically, by the Federal Republic of Ethiopia. Global North refers primarily to the 'receiving countries', mostly based in Western Europe, North America and Oceania. Moreover, this terminological choice accommodates the Foucaultian metaphors (Foucault, 1980) used in this research to consider adoption as a geographical experience of physical displacements, social interstices and geopolitical inter-relations It aims to push forward the interconnection between social reproduction, global inequalities and social injustice suggested by Dados and Connell (2012). For example:

> North-South terminology, then, like core-periphery, arose from an allegorical application of categories to name patterns of wealth, privilege, and development across broad regions. The term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment. It references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained. (Dados and Connell, 2012, p. 13)

As a statement of clarity, the notion of the conceptual West is informed by British, French and American schools of thought. References to Eurocentrism specifically focus on understandings and knowledges informed by a European-centred perspective.

This conceptual framework is relevant since it allowed me not to dismiss post-inter-country adoption dynamics as mere mono-cultural phenomena but rather to address them as cross-cultural entanglements where uneven expectations rise and clash. The imperative was to recentre the adoption experience on adoptees and native families and substantiate their perspective with the contribution of other actors in Ethiopia, such as aid providers and benefactors (adoptive families, adoption agencies, governmental and non-governmental organisations), and local experts – residential childcare institutions' staff, academics, project managers, to name a few. The goal was to comprehensively understand idiosyncrasies and expectations connected to Ethiopia's inter-country adoption and post-adoption.

Considering my methodological standpoint, I invite the reader to imagine inter-country adoption from an Ethiopian perspective: a phenomenon of child mobility in which an Ethio-

descendant adoptee is supposed to start a new life in the Global North whilst, in Ethiopia, a native family preserves ancestral bonds of kin ties expecting a return, a reconnection. Inter-country adoption can be seen as a practice with a circular orientation rather than a linear succession of events ending with the mere conclusion of the child transfer. To stay true to this unfractured perspective of kin ties, the written form of this investigation is circular. It puts at the centre the epistemological and ontological understanding of adoptees who envisage re-approaching the Global South and native families who have a circular understanding of child mobility. This interpretation points to the conceptual end of inter-country adoption with a reconnection between birth family and adoptee, rather than the physical transposition of the child in their Global North household. Finally, given that participants might attribute different meanings to the same events, repetitions might occur when vital information is transposed in various stages of the adoption process or elaborated by participants with different interpretations. The ramifications of these pivotal elements connect the different chapters, whose borders blur in a polyphony of interpretations of adoption from an Ethio-centred perspective.

1.5   A note on translation and quotations

All translations in the text from Italian or French books are my own unless noted otherwise. Amharic language translations from books are all official translations unless stated otherwise. Interview translations are my own and are marked.

To respect participants' privacy, passages in the original language are not footnoted. In interviews, Amharic terms are occasionally included because the participant used them or because the translation may not be accurate enough. Given the location of this research (Ethiopia), the use of Amharic terms does not necessarily imply such interview was engaged with an Ethiopian participant.

When participants spoke English as a second language, the text underwent minor revisions to even out the interviews. Similarly, quotations from post-adoption reports (PARs) underwent minor corrections and edits, mostly focusing on aligning all the quotes to British English.

1.6   Thesis structure

This thesis has been structured across nine chapters and divided into two parts. The first part includes the opening four chapters and offers an overview of the theoretical backbone of the research. The second part consists of one contextual, analytical chapter and four analytical chapters. Below, I outline each chapter's contents.

Chapters One and Two offer a general overview of the whole thesis and outline where this contribution stands relative to the existing literature concerning the main topics that intersect in this research: child circulation, childhood, parenthood legitimacy, inter-country adoption, and orphanhood. Such macro-themes emerged from the literature and are strictly related to the central questions of this thesis and its theoretical framework.

Chapter Three is composed of three sections. The first presents this study's ontological and epistemological positioning and the methodological choice that led to the investigation in the Global South. The second displays the methodology and methods employed to conduct this research. I implement ethnographic methods as I believe them to be the most comprehensive approach to inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. Ethnography has been adopted as an analytical and methodological lens for this research; the case study has been used as a practical approach to display cross-cultural dynamics and power imbalances. The cross-cultural, polyphonic deployment of the case study to explore the dynamics of the adoptive triad (adoptee, native and adoptive family) is part of my contribution to the existing research on social justice and inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. Lastly, the third section consists of an in-depth outline of this study's ethical considerations.

To provide a context to the assumption that inter-country adoption conceptualisation in Ethiopia is built upon a pre-existent, well-rooted socio-cultural variety of customary adoption praxis, chapter Four merges first and second-hand data collection to unpack the Ethiopian concepts of child mobility, kinship care and fictive kinship. These concepts are anchored to a relational epistemology of what it means to provide mutual aid, experience social cohesion and child mobility, and maintain ties to one's kin. At the core of these concepts is the understanding that personhood, parenthood, and childhood are human and relational states of being, emanating from the individual's and her community's interdependence. In this chapter, I explore customary formal, semi-formal and informal practices of mutual aid, alternative childcare, and fictive kinship. These mutual aid forms are discussed regarding community social cohesion, multi-parental care, and multi-dimensional and intergenerational care dynamics. I argue that there is a connection between juridical and customary fictive

kinship in Ethiopia and the long-lasting, significant concern surrounding the change or reattribution of the Ethiopian nationality.

Furthermore, chapter Four investigates similarities and differences between customary praxes of fictive kinship in Ethiopia and inter-country adoption regulations in the national Codes. This is important to position the theory of inter-country adoption epistemologically and ontologically in the specific country where it takes place and provides a context to the discussion section. This chapter makes use of the Addis Ababa University Database (AAU-ETD) in addition to first and second-hand data collection in Ethiopia.

The second part of the thesis consists of five analytical chapters. It is structured to follow the chronologic experience of native families in Ethiopia and starts with chapter Five. I begin by exploring the concepts of orphanhood, abandonment, and separation in Ethiopia and its socio-cultural constructions. This is central to the findings because I hypothesise that existing native families giving their children up for adoption are moved by poverty, migration trajectories and other reasons that differ from the Western idea of inter-country adoption. In this chapter, I also claim that residential childcare institutions and adoption agency staff facilitated the making of parented children suitable for adoption to satisfy the receiving countries' demand for adoptable children. The backbone of this chapter consists of in-depth interviews, participant observation in residential childcare institutions, and an archival ethnography of post-adoption reports in Ethiopia.

Chapter Six draws on in-depth interviews and archival ethnography to unpack the production of post-adoption reports and discuss their content, use, and socio-political implications. I also argue that native families expect to be reached or able to reach out to their children adopted abroad. I explore strategies that families implement when this eventuality does not happen. Furthermore, I point out that native families expect their children to find 'the way back', and indicate what clues and indications are expected to be grasped by the child. Eventually, the analysis focuses on the biological and social connections that are believed to tie a child to her family of origin.

Chapter Seven looks at the inter-country adoption process as a holistic, life-long journey for all the participants involved. It is a polyphonic case study of the different steps that resulted in the child's adoption and the correlated expectations. In this account, the views of the intermediary, the adoptee, and the native and adoptive family are reported to disclose conflicting interpretations of postcolonial mobility, kinship, and geographies of belongingness. This reading of the adoption process is significant because it illustrates the power dimension

and highlights the most contended concepts in the inter-country adoption discourse for the participants directly involved. This chapter suggests that divergent expectations are addressed in the inter-country, postcolonial regime of truth as contentious narratives. Once again, this analysis discloses that the unique knowledges of sending countries are discarded as marginal and hidden counter-narratives.

Chapter Eight expands the discussion pursued in chapter Seven by reflecting on post-adoption reunifications and their potential for post-adoption family relations and reconfigurations. In this chapter, I tackle central themes of the post-reconnection stage, namely belongingness, transnational contacts, cross-cultural communication, and mobility. Each matter is analysed from the point of view of a specific actors' group (adoptees, native and adoptive families). This approach is consistent with the assumption that the same thematic macro-groups are conceptualised and addressed from different perspectives, thus generating diverse expectations. In continuity with the previous chapter, this reveals an unexplored area of attempts to reconfigure family networks resulting from inter-country reunions and reconnections.

The concluding chapter returns to the starting point of the circular process. After recapitulating the main themes and outcomes, it considers the limitations of this research and the recommendations for future investigations and improvements on inter-country post-adoption policies.

Overall, this thesis finds that whilst the tool of inter-country adoption has been widely deployed in Ethiopia to relocate Ethio-descendant children within Global North families, the organisations oriented to design post-adoption support and policies failed in terms of social justice agenda. Rather than offering an inclusive service that would identify and tackle native families' needs and in-direct, consequent adoptees and adoptive families' potential entanglements, post-adoption is mostly a bureaucratic, exclusive Global North-focused apparatus. Whilst inter-country adoption was premised on the child's best interest and therefore foundationally consistent with a Western idea of social justice, it still failed to address social justice from a sending countries' perspective as it remained anchored on a Global North conceptualisation of adoption.

This research also concluded that the identification of the native family as a 'finished business', marginal subjects functional to the child transfer, was caused by a Global North-oriented outline that did not acknowledge families of origin as subjects of the adoption process entitled to support and closure. This is particularly true in countries where inter-country adoption is no

longer practised, and international actors vanish in thin air, as in the case of Ethiopia. Consequently, post-intercountry adoption processes take the shape of autonomous, unaccompanied, unquantifiable reconnection attempts.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1   Introduction

This chapter considers and discusses the major bodies of literature on inter-country adoption from a multi-disciplinary perspective, explains the selection of sources, and then defines the theoretical ground of this research. It consists of two sections. The first section displays the philosophical underpinnings of the thesis and presents the anthropological and cross-thematic stand that this study takes for investigating inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

The second part of this section discusses the gap in the existing academic literature, and the leading questions of this research project are set out. The third section explains the reasons that make Ethiopia a peculiar case in inter-country adoption and on what grounds this case epitomises the postcolonial relation between Global North and South in making transnational fictive kin ties. The fourth section focuses on the key questions of this research.

The last section moves from the conceptual Western interpretation of postcolonialism as intended by Lyotard (1999) to explore its intersections with gender and race in contemporary African feminism. As part of re-centring knowledge, this part engages with current African feminist scholars who deconstruct the conceptual Western lens on womanhood, motherhood and kinship in African contexts. (Post)colonial feminism is crucial in keeping the analysis balanced between local and international discourses. Moreover, this paradigm makes evident the uneasy positioning of the researcher, and it also problematises her role. The (post)colonial entanglements are particularly true in this research because Ethiopia had endured years of Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941.

2.2   Major contributions on critical kinship studies

Nowadays, anthropology has become more systematic in addressing child circulation as an expression of power relationships implying control strategies, political dynamics, attribution of decisional rights and social advantages, both on a community (Silk, 1987a; Massard, 1983; Silk, 1980; Lallemand, 1976) and international level (Briggs and Marre, 2009; Dorow, 2006; Zelizer, 1994).

The increasing awareness about the existence of a variety of formal and informal child circulation praxes in almost all the societies in the world (Goody, 1982; Goody, 1969) and the growing relevance of inter-country adoption (Selman, 2002) undermined the firm theoretical ground that supported traditional parental and familial relationship studies (Schneider, 1980). The debate began to revolve around new forms of interfamilial, intergenerational, and multi-parental kinship.

Political and social implications of parenthood, motherhood and childhood made critical kinship studies an area of interest, deeply interconnected with contemporary inequality phenomena. Kinship has been rethought in light of stratification of reproduction (Briggs, 2012c) and all those intersectional features that influence the processes of shaping family – such as sexuality, race, global and geographical inequalities, social and structural injustice. In parallel, the different acts of making a family (raise, adopt, foster) have been reconsidered in a perspective that should shed light on the relation of care, which usually focuses on the child-mother experience.

Several scholars have explored the construction of the narration of legitimacy in adoption (Howell, 2009; Herman, 2002; Yngvesson, 2002). They studied the relationship between formal and informal child circulation (Fonseca, 2004; 2002) by investigating families, migration and adoption in post-colonial scenarios (Taliani, 2015; Briggs, 2012a; Briggs and Mantini-Briggs, 2000).

The following focuses on the major contributions of critical kinship studies and considers different cross-cutting macro themes that emerged from the literature review (see Figure 1). Such review is substantiated with several examples to underline the diachronic and synchronic diffusion of child circulation in the Global South and North and point out the plurality of subjects and events involved in adoption and child mobility. The emerging macro-themes give particular attention to different and localised practices of child relocation and the socially constructed nature of specific construals (parental models, parenthood, childhood, adoption and foster). As such, this literature review considers six macro-themes directly connected to the central questions and the following chapters of this work (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: the six macro-themes of the literature review.
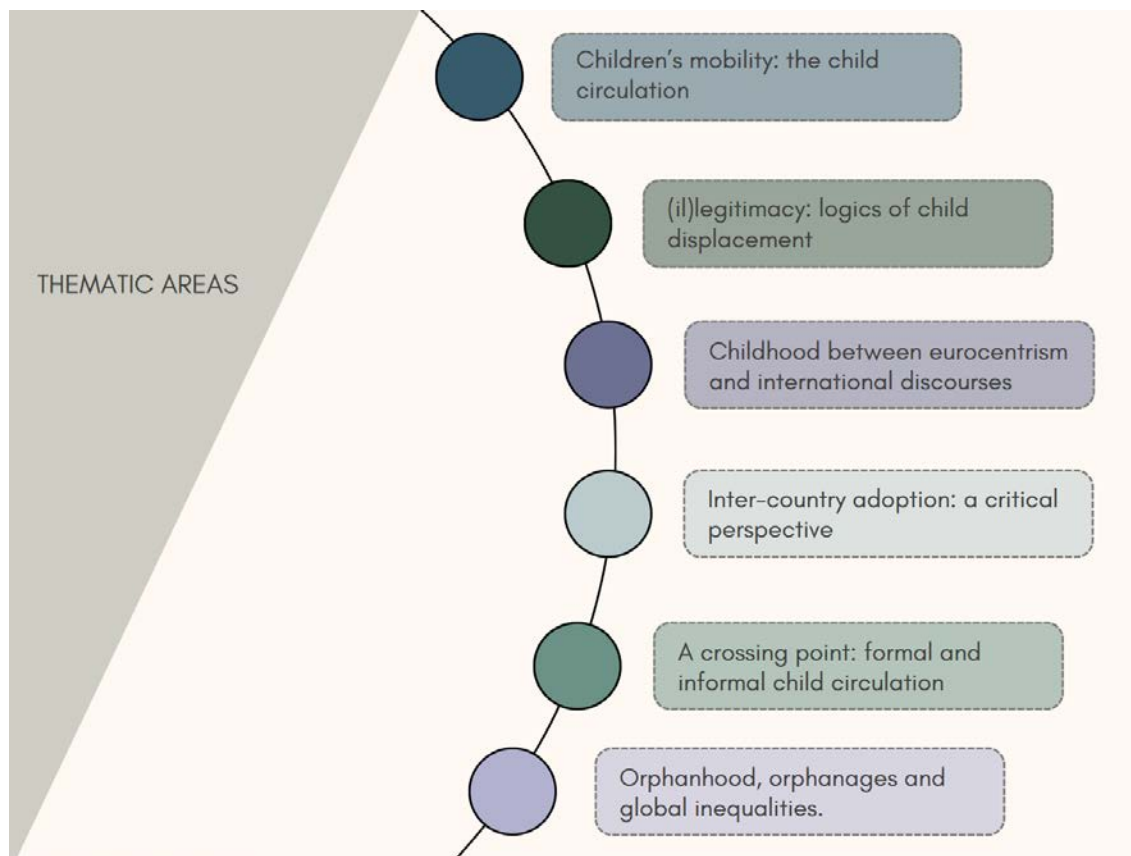
The first macro-theme concerns child circulation. It focuses on the nature-nurture debate and the role of socio-biologism and cultural factors in shaping child circulation and relocation practices. The different interpretation of foster and adoption praxes is relevant because it underlines the socially constructed features of child circulation and its variability in dissimilar contexts. It points out that cultural, economic and historical factors play a crucial role in the bio-political governance of social reproduction and lays a theoretical ground for exploring the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia[3].

The second macro-theme addressed adoption and fostering as top-down tools deployed by policy logics of child displacement to manipulate kinship and family ties. Child relocation and parental skills assessment are pivotal to promoting normative parental models. Simultaneously, parental models differ according to geographic and historical events. Economic, political and policy factors are essential to determining heteronormative

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[3] As discussed in chapter Four on conceptual foundations of the notion of adoption in Ethiopia, and chapter Six, section Four on connections and reciprocity.

parenthood, assessing their legitimacy, and ultimately deconstructing dissimilar family ties to produce traditional households[4].

Whilst this theme focuses on the (un)making of parental legitimacy, the third concentrates on the concept of childhood. It resonates with two assumptions, namely that a) family ties and strategies thrive from a relationship that actively involves both adults and children and b) parenthood and childhood are both socially constructed concepts with different implications according to their contextualisation. Therefore, the children's lives are addressed dialogically with their living context. As analysed in this work, childhood results in a plurality of experiences as an ongoing but limited condition of every human being that adapts to its specific economic, political, and socio-cultural milieu. To better explain the different stand of this perspective from the normative one, this portion of the literature review will also introduce the international agreements intended to regulate the notion of a child as both an individual and social subject in normative terms. However, given this thesis's dialogical and circular nature, the main official documents will be addressed and discussed in specific chapters and sections[5].

The fourth theme focuses on inter-country adoption, specifically its narratives and interpretations of adoptive legitimacy, intrinsic inequalities, and kinship strategies. Inter-country adoption is problematised through the lenses of (post)colonial feminism and global inequalities, international migration and reproductive power stratification. This theme is key to understanding the central parts of this work's analysis[6].

This lays the ground for the next theme, which explores literature at the crossing point between informal and formal child circulation. Particular attention is given to the discrepancy between notions of adoption in the Global South and North and consequent misinterpretations. It is also a preliminary indication of the specific case of inter-country

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[4] Although this theme is relevant to the thesis, it represents explicitly the backbone of chapter Five on separation and abandonment and chapter Seven on Ethiopian adoptees' reconnected kin ties.

[5] For instance, The Hague Convention is extensively discussed in chapter Six, whilst the principal Ethiopian codes related to this thesis topic are addressed in chapter Four, section Five and chapter Six on performing parenthood in the child's absence.

[6] Particularly in chapters Five, Six and Eight on transnational relationships in post-reunion families' dynamics.

adoption in the Ethiopian socio-cultural context. This theme is crucial for exploring competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia[7].

Figure 2: interconnection between macro-themes and chapters.
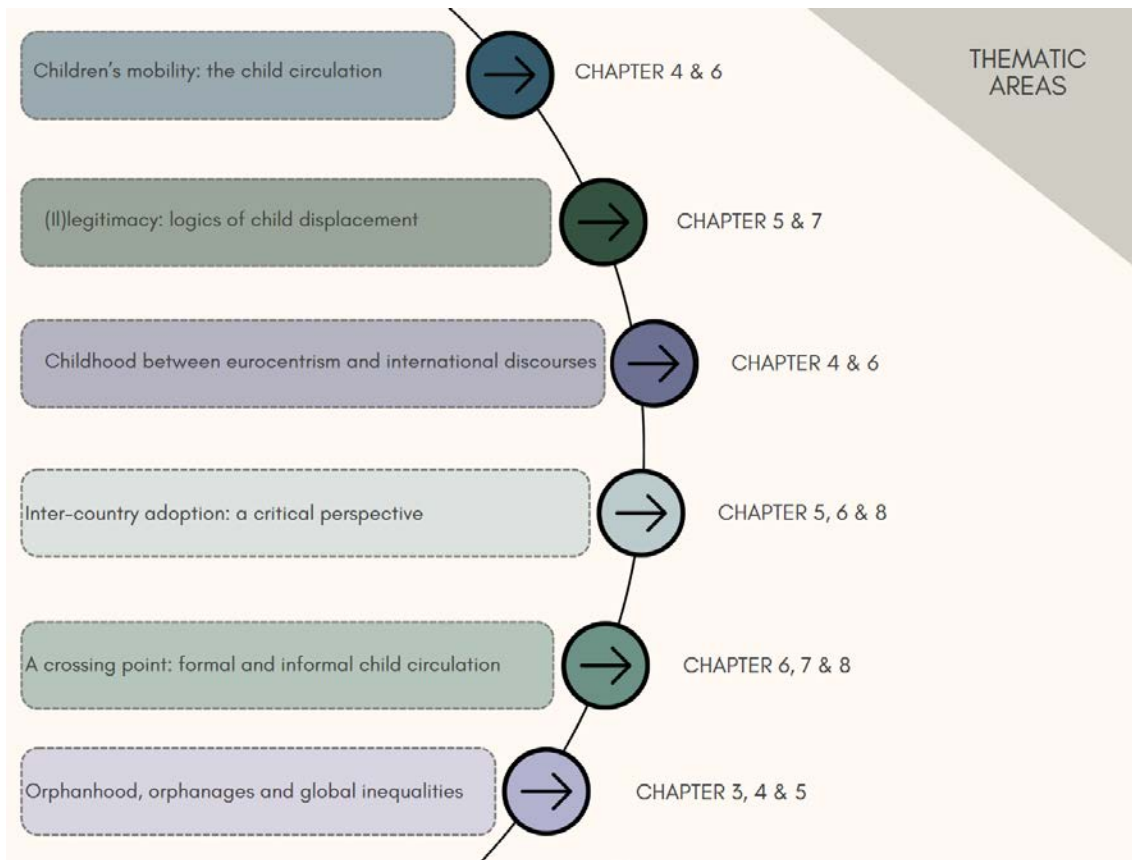
The sixth and last theme relates to where inter-country adoption occurs in everyday life, namely the residential childcare institution. Literature concerning this site investigates the global inequalities that orphanages epitomise and the main theories concerning orphanhood, childcare institutions, and social resilience in the African continent. Such literature review lays the ground to better understand one of the privileged settings of this research, addressed throughout the thesis with a particular emphasis in chapters Three, Four and Five.

This literature review provides further insights into perspectives utilised to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia and constitutes a solid ground on which to build additional knowledge.

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[7] Especially for chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Children's mobility: the child circulation

This section presents the debate concerning the nature of child circulation or relocation. Since the 1980s, a robust confrontation emerged amongst Anglophone and Francophone socio-biologists and anthropologists on a) the role of kinship in human socialisation and interaction and b) the strategies of adaptation that societies put in place to survive. This discussion revealed the need to explore better altruistic behaviours in child relocation and mobility. Regarding symmetric and asymmetric altruism, scholars called into question classic theories of natural selection (Silk 1987a, 1987b, 1980) and the Darwinian basic principles, which declare that the main driving factor of organism behaviours are genetic needs. An influential strand of sociological thought elaborated the theory of kin selection, which assumes that 'acts of altruism' that a person shows in favour of another human being are not expected to be gratuitous and unreciprocated. Conversely, such actions expect in return an immediate or delayed exchange that would benefit the individual or contribute to the whole system. This theory found some applications when exploring child circulation, which is often intended as a process that might benefit the sending and the hosting family, as further explored in this thesis. Enquiries based on human societies' reproduction carried on within several disciplines in the social sciences domain, and the 'nature versus nurture' debate encouraged many scholars to reflect on the evolutionistic function of human models of parenthood.

For instance, socio-biologists hypothesised child circulation praxes are meant to maximise inclusive fitness – namely, raising the intern genotypic variety to every specific group to guarantee maximum evolutionary success. The inclusive fitness level is deduced from every group's reproductive and survival success, in other words, by the average number of children able to reproduce. On the other side of the barricade Marshall Sahlins, one of the most active scholars in demonstrating the primacy of culture in shaping kinship (Sahlins 2013), defends the idea that child circulation is a collective phenomenon that entirely depends on human behaviour, notably indifferent to biological previsions (Sahlins 1976). Looking for a compromise, Joan Silk theorises that child circulation results from the admixture of socio-biological and cultural factors (Silk, 1980). According to her interpretation, the adoption practice is based on a process of socio-cultural legitimation that comprises both biological and socio-cultural answers to human needs, such as household size adjustments and kinship manipulation/selection. Therefore, child circulation might equally occur amongst families in conditions of either hardship or wealthiness as a form of adaptive interventions on kinship quality and quantity (Silk, 1987a; 1980).

The more practical cases were investigated, the more it was evident that local child circulation praxes might differ due to the goal families have to achieve and the specific environmental and cultural context. For instance, Sahlins, amongst others (Brady, 1976; Carroll, 1970), conducted many investigations in Oceania, where adoptive practices were quite common. He highlights that adoption was employed as a device of inclusion to expand the household's size rather than solving issues of lack of offspring (Sahlins, 1976). Likewise, praxes such as adoption and fosterage satisfy different goals in different socio-cultural groups, and their application does not always comply with international child protection agreements[8].

The implications of foster praxes are everything but linear and often represent child relocation in a delicate balance between gift and burden (Perry, 2004; Wozniak, 1999).

Several contributions stress the social and economic opportunity that fostering and adoption provide for children from rural areas (Eloundou Enyegue and Stokes, 2002). Similarly, child circulation offers advantages in social kinship cohesion preservation and respond to the matter of high fertility within families in hardship (Bledsoe, 1993; Bledsoe and Isiugo Abanihe, 1989; Goody, 1984). Nonetheless, fostered children are more exposed to harsh treatments and discrimination when compared to foster parents' biological offspring (Bledsoe, 1995; Castle, 1995; Oni, 1995; Bledsoe et al., 1988).

Several authors highlighted that natural selection *per se* is not sufficient to explain why certain families are willing to relocate their children and other households are available to care for them without any apparent reward in the immediate future. Children's social and practical value within altruistic interactions in peculiar socio-cultural contexts is essential to address kinship and mobility. Researchers investigated the relevance of fosterage in many ethnic groups in West Africa, where it is often considered a crucial part of children's socialisation, social bonding, and professional or educational training (Morganti, 2007; Viti, 2007; Goody, 1982; Etienne, 1979; Lallemand, 1976). To suggest the extent of this, demographic data highlights that in 2010 in Southern Benin, the most significant part of the adults had experienced a period as *vidomegon* (in fon language, "child in the custody of another person") during childhood (Costa, 2011). During his extensive studies on child foster and extended kinship networks in West Africa, Isiugo-Abanihe reported that in Western Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia, 40% of the parents declared they had one or more children placed with another family,

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[8] See Fonseca's study on Brazilian children removed from their families in the *favelas* (Fonseca, 2002; 2004) and Einarsdóttir's research on discrepancies between child relocation practices in Guinea Bissau and the Child Rights Convention (Einarsdóttir, 2006).

and this proportion was even higher in Sierra Leone (Isiugo-Abanihe,1985). Amongst the Baatombu in Northern Benin, claiming biological connections to a child is malpractice because the normative parental model envisages exclusive social parenthood (Alber, 2003). In Cameroon, children's housing in urban communities is highly influenced by fostering arrangements amongst adults (Verhoef, 2005).

Moreover, child circulation might be an alternative to infanticide or abandonment (Silk, 1987a) and demonstrate the gap in the evolution theory for what concerns altruism and empirical reality. Children's displacement may envisage their relocation to either other extended family members or the other world through death, as with the Biombo mothers in Guinea-Bissau (Eisnarsdóttir, 2006). Further research concerning child circulation was carried on in different communities and from different perspectives, such as amongst the Kwaio in the Salomon Islands (Keesing, 1981), in the Malaysian society (Massard, 1983), and in South America – i.e. Argentina, Brazil (Szulc and Cohn, 2012) and Peru (Leinaweaver, 2010a; 2007).

Eventually, most child circulation practices rarely use formal[9] placements. However, their formulation stipulates binding agreements. Finding an explanation of child circulation that can keep this concept broad enough to include all its variety has been an arduous task. Isiugo-Abanihe defines it through the action of child's relocation and therefore calls it "the transfer, giving out, or exchange of children among families" (Isiugo-Abanhie, 1985, p. 53), whilst Fonseca focuses on the parental role and terms it "the transfer of nurturance responsibility for a child from one adult to another" (Fonseca, 1986, p. 15). In her work on Andean child circulation, Leinaweaver attended to reasons to perform the child transfer, stating that child circulation consists of "the relocation of a child or young person into a new household for locally meaningful reasons. These may include accompanying a lonely adult or obtaining better life opportunities for the child". (Leinaweaver, 2007, p. 164). In contrast, Grau Rebollo offers a definition that insists on the extreme variability of this practice. He, therefore, defines it as follows:

> The temporal or enduring transfer, which is potentially reversible, of children
> between adult people who may be previously bound by familial ties and who
> may share responsibilities over the child's care as well as the authority over
> the child's behaviour. Such transfer, often handled in 'informal' ways, does

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[9] Formal, as authorised by the internationally recognised central authority of the territory where the practice occurs.

usually entail for the child the change of his/her residence, and it may have
major effects upon his/her adscription, inheritance and succession at the
bosom of receiving groups and families. However, it neither demands the
discontinuation of the child's relationship with his/her biological parents nor
a complete disconnection between the nucleus of origin and placement
(Grau Rebollo, 2013, p. 6).

Nowadays, it is broadly argued that child circulation is crucial to human societies and social
reproduction. The early investigation pointed out the synchronic and diachronic diffusion of
foster praxes (Goody and Goody, 1976; Goody, 1969) and the active social role that children
and their circulation play within their socio-cultural contexts (Lallemand, 1993; Etienne, 1979).
In their contributions on child circulation in West Africa, both Lallemand and Etienne argue
that the adoptee is subject and object of the transfer, active and passive participant to the
adoption and subordinated to relationships of inter-generational dependence.

In conclusion, child mobility rarely sums up a definitive transfer of the child to the new family.
Each praxis is grounded on specific socio-cultural contexts influenced by environmental factors
and expresses different productive and reproductive strategies. In a context of inter-country
adoption, the tension between conflictual ways to understand child circulation might result in
a mismatch in post-adoption expectations, as further discussed in this thesis.

(Il)legitimacy: logics of child displacement

This section focuses on the policy logics of formal child displacement. The phenomenon of
child circulation in the Global North has historically been primarily described as a form of
infanticide (Badinter, 1980; Shorter, 1975; DeMause, 1974) or as a praxis of child transfer. In
the latter case, the choice might be taken by the native relatives (Albini, 2012) or subordinated
to a centralised, structural device deployed to assess the conformity of a caregiver to
standardised criteria of parenthood or childhood (Beneduce and Taliani, 2015; Taliani, 2013).
Particular attention was given to the 'good mothering' narrative carried on almost exclusively
by biological, White, married mothers (Glenn, 1994). This hegemonic discourse sets specific
care practices as appropriate in opposition to other types of maternity. Parents and relatives
judged short of providing proper care to the child have their parental rights revoked through
the discourse of 'illegitimacy'. These illegitimate, not-acceptable forms of motherhood were
(are) mainly represented in two ways that intersect with a racial component.

On the one hand, unconventional motherhood practices are seen as a moral deviation to reform or contain through specific welfare policies; parental models carried on by not conventional or 'indecent' mothers in terms of customs (i.e., having children out of wedlock), social conditions (i.e., poor or addicted mothers), or both (i.e., mothers sex workers) (Crowley and Kitchin, 2008).

On the other hand, Black mothers are often identified in the Global North as bearers of an unalterable and inherited marker of too cultural, too native motherhood (McDaniel and Morgan, 1996). They are classified as (ex) Africans and ex-slaves, irresponsible and immoral (Solinger, 1994), lacking 'maternal thinking' and coherence in their care, and unable to adapt and acclimate to a proper maternity practice (Taliani, 2017). In both cases, the 'illegitimate motherhood' label runs in parallel with social inequalities and strikes 'subaltern families', who become protagonists of a not-convenient parenthood narrative, a sociological product at the intersection of the economy of race and global inequality (Briggs, 2012b). The concept of good motherhood is substantiated by institutionalised moralising processes that stigmatise unfamiliar parental models as detrimental to proper child development. A set of normative, socially constructed (and yet) universalised criteria corroborates the penalisation of unconventional parenting performances. 'Illegitimate' motherhoods that differ from the normative parenting system are sanctioned with their children's temporal or permanent relocation and the removal of their parental rights. This act means to discourage and socially repress 'bad parenthood' and substantiate the main narrative of motherhood.

There are several diachronic and synchronic cases of family production and reproduction standardisation; in the US and Australia, social services targeted minorities and mothers who gave birth out of wedlock. In Eastern Europe and Argentina, regimes applied mechanisms of child relocation that aimed to sanction opponents and reward political supporters.

In the United States, during the Sixties, the increasing attention on families of the native population and minorities brought them under scrutiny by national welfare institutions. Social services started to tightly control the caring practices of targeted groups, particularly regarding children's scholastic educational level (Roberts, 2014). The growing focus on children of marginalised families led to the application of specific guidelines to assess families' parenting models' adequacy. Households evaluated as inadequate had their children removed and adopted by families considered fit for them. In 1969, 25% to 35% of American native families' children lived within White families' households (Lazarus and Ariz, 1997). The social services' attention moved then to the Afro-American families whilst the adoptive trend shifted: the

temporary stay of children with other families was judged detrimental for both children and the welfare system, so foster was replaced by plenary adoption. The US welfare system promoted somatically and religiously mixed households to encourage families to embrace permanent adoption. Eventually, it was decided to relocate children from 'unfit' families outside the country. The inter-country adoption organisation ARENA (Adoption Resource Exchange of North America) oversaw the adoption process from the US (Swan, 1968). During that period, White children given for adoption were almost none.

In Australia, between 1910 and 1970, figures of native children adopted from their communities were so significant that their generation was labelled the "Stolen Generation"[10] (Manne, 2001; Van Krieken, 1999; Manne and Quadrant, 1998). At the same time, from the Second World War (WWII) until the 1970s, strict national policies forced women who had children out of wedlock (regardless of their class, origins or belief) to renounce them in favour of married couples. Child removal was so widespread that in March 2013, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard publicly apologised to all the women whose children were relocated. Her government officially described that policy as forced adoption against human rights[11].

In Europe, during WWII, the Lebensborn Project consisted of forced[12] international adoption to spread the 'pure' Aryan race. As illustrated by Clay and Leapman (1995), the project initially aimed to offer young mothers with 'Aryan semblances' of the occupied territories the opportunity to deliver their babies in German clinics. The clinics would then relocate the newborns within the Third Reich whilst biological mothers would return to their homes. The project did not register many participants, so soldiers in Poland systematically searched for children corresponding to the required somatic criteria in orphanages, schools, and local households. Children were forcedly separated from their relatives and taken into re-education centres, where they would 'interiorise' a German identity and then be reassigned to Nazi families in Germany through adoption.

Forced domestic and international adoption also happened in Argentina with the children of the *desaparecidos*. During the military dictatorship (1976-1983), one of the tactics of the regime to silence the opposition was to kidnap opponents of the government. Thousands of

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[10] See also the movie : *Rabbit-proof Fence* (2002) Directed by P. Noyce. Australia : Rumbalara Films.

[11] Australian Government, Attorney-General Department (2013) *National Apology for Forced Adoptions*. Available at : www.ag.gov.au/ABOUT/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Pages/default.aspx (Last accessed 21 March, 2013).

[12] "Forced" as in nonconsensual.

young people were *desaparecì por lo Estado*, "disappeared by the state". It is estimated that about thirty thousand young Argentinians, 'terrorists' by the regime, were detained, tortured, narcotised, and dropped from military airplanes to leave no trace of their bodies. Several kidnapped pregnant girls were kept in prison until their due date. Afterwards, mothers were killed, and newborns relocated to families of the regime in Argentina and abroad. Biological relatives were unaware of what happened to the kidnapped and the newborns. As Oren (2001) illustrates, in such context the child relocation is a mean to accomplish a double goal: annihilating the resistance with their offspring and satisfying the parental need of couples close to the regime who could not have biological children.

These examples displayed different contexts where forced child relocation was used as a social and political technique to manipulate the population's demography and create more governable kinships. Within such contexts, institutional logics of the government of kinship and family ties made living parents either renounce their parental rights or be forcedly deprived of them. In these cases, the social injustice and structural inequalities of politics regulating family and society's reproduction seem inescapable.

Such examples highlight that parental praxes are regularly assessed through a set of socially constructed criteria to identify un/suitable parenthood. However, this construal's relativity and biopolitical implications, which vary in time and place, are hardly questioned. Nonetheless, its practical implications are tangible in everyday life. For instance, in Italy in 2012, many families from the Piedmont region were reported to the Court by the social services as potentially inadequate parents and had their caring practices evaluated. These families came to the attention of the Italian welfare institutions because their children actively participated in peaceful demonstrations against a construction project in their area[13]. The political involvement of families in acts of resistance against a governmental project made them suitable for further evaluation of their "parental performances" to assess whether "the minor lives in a family context that would pass on him/her concepts that drive him/her to illegal activities"[14] (Ponte, 2012). Public opinion labelled these parents as irresponsible because their teenage children attended a non-violent demonstration and were identified by the police even

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[13] Ponte, M. (2012) *Val di Susa, la Procure contro i baby No Tav. Convocati i genitori : non portateli piú ai cortei*. Available at : https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2012/11/25/val-di-susa-la-procura-contro-baby.html (Last accessed 25 February, 2018).

[14] "(...) il minore vive in un contesto famigliare in cui possono venirgli trasmessi concetti che lo spingano all'illegalità" (researcher's translation).

though illegal activities were not reported, and charges were not pressed. In these families' cases, their political positioning shifted the assessment of their parental model from 'conventional' to 'defective'.

This example aims to show that child removal might occur in several situations. It also points out that kinship is a private and public concern, a constant expression and exercise of institutional power. Narratives and intimate matters of mothers involved in domestic adoption in the United Kingdom also display interconnections between private and institutional domains and the regulation of politic bodies. It is Cox (2012) who reworks Plummers' concept of intimate citizenship (Plummer, 2003) to reflect on how mothers marginalised by normative discourses and limited in their reproductive autonomy rearrange their procreative choices (Cox, 2012, p. 549), instructed by institutional powers. In their studies, Cox and Plummer reframe the concept of marginality as a condition of structural vulnerability and identify birth mothers addressed by social services as primarily young women who experienced difficult childhoods, homelessness, or were diagnosed with mental health issues. Persons kept peripheral by the central system are also more likely to get caught up in its mechanisms and have their children judged suitable for domestic adoption.

The criteria of parental style evaluation constantly shift because of their social and political nature and might become more persistent when parenthood, motherhood and childhood intersect with paternalism, interculturality and (post)colonialism. In these cases, a cross-cultural tension might be used to justify interventionism and defiance. The socio-cultural nature of parenthood and childhood assessment criteria, and the hierarchical power relation between the Global North and South might be evident in macro and micro intercultural circumstances. For instance, a Eurocentric humanitarian aid perspective may assume that local extended family networks and care are inadequate to provide proper childcare (Costa and Tisci, 2016).

This discrepant interpretation of 'proper' childcare in cross-cultural contexts questioned 'the best interest' of children assessed as suitable for inter-country adoption (Selman, 2000; Therborn, 1996). Inter-country adoption that rose most international concern was finalised to provide children in emergencies with fitting parents. Noteworthy examples of this practice took place in Vietnam and Haiti.

In Southern Vietnam, in 1975, during the war, the children mass evacuation Operation Babylift relocated and gave into inter-country adoption thousands of minors without any confirmation of their orphan status. Similarly, in Haiti, after the earthquake in 2010, there was a request for

Haitian children to 'save' them "from ongoing vulnerability by removing them from Haiti via international adoption" (Hoffman, 2014, p. 6).

In this interpretation of the child's best interest, native families remain invisible and unreachable, and adoptees might struggle for recognition and reconnection. This situation happened to children of compulsory interned patients of Hansen's disease in Brazil in the early 1940s and to children adopted from Greenland to Denmark in 1951.

In Brazil, children were institutionalised by the 'sanitary police' or domestically adopted without their parents' consent (Fonseca et al., 2015; Fonseca, 2015). Once adults, those who searched for their biological relatives struggled to find any information about them.

In 1951, twenty-two Greenlanders aged 6 to 8 were moved to Denmark as part of a social experiment. The project was run by Save The Children Denmark. The Danish goal was to "create a new type of Greenlander"[15] by relocating the children in Denmark and then educating and socialising them as Danes within foster families and the childcare institution. The project was recognised as a failure. Afterwards, survivors tried to reach a connection with their biological families and sued Denmark, which in December 2020 officially apologised[16].

These examples argue with the claim that a) intimate domains are connected to local and broad-scale dynamics of regulation and evaluation of parenthood, and b) there is a manifest socio-political 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1998). The latter notion refers to the theoretical knowledges that are oriented to produce "discourses capable of being declared true or false" (Foucault, 1998, p. 460), whilst the former focuses on the power devices that deploy the register of truth to obfuscate such power relation. The deployment of certain theoretical knowledges as truthful practices, discourses and statements (Weir, 2008) was explained by Foucault himself during an interview in 1976:

> "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power that produce
> and sustain it, and to effects of power which induce and which extend it — a
> "regime" of truth. (Foucault, 2000, p. 132).

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[15] Otzen, E. (2015) *The children taken from home for a social experiment*. Available at : https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33060450 (Last accessed 25 February 2018).

[16] BBC (2020) *Denmark apologises to children taken from Greenland in a 1950s social experiment*. Available at : https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-55238090 (Last accessed 06 January 2021).

The above-mentioned examples of kinship re/production outline the relation between power and truth in the making of kin ties. In this sense, the symbolic, social and legal production of the notion of family is 'inescapably political' (Collier, 1995). Adoption and social reproduction are governed through devices of bio-political governance that, once disassembled, highlight their political engagement and commitment and the practical forms of domination and social engineering that reshape and regroup families. This is relevant to this study because in the tension between different discourses on inter-country adoption, the 'authorised' narratives also have the legitimacy to prevail and impact on family reproduction, as demonstrated in this study.

Childhood between Eurocentrism and international discourses

This section intends to explore the existing socio-constructivist literature concerning childhood and its main, international narratives in terms of . The idea of the 'socially constructed child' lays on the assumption that "the biological facts of infancy are but the raw material upon which cultures work to fashion a particular version of 'being a child'" (James and Jenks, 1996, p.317). This concept is employed to problematise childhood as a phase of life whose contents may profoundly change according to the socio-cultural milieu and time-based factors.

According to this interpretation, the European model underwent significant changes before universalisation. It was common to relocate children outside their family group for training or job purposes until the Nineteenth century. Children were generally relocated to wealthier families. Child mobility was structured to introduce children to work from an early age and was considered a relevant asset for the child's socio-educational development. Young workers were granted board and lodging and might receive remuneration (Protasi, 2008; Cunningham, 1990).

The centrality of the child's health and psychological well-being increased in the contemporary public discourse on the family (Panter-Brick and Smith, 2000). Increasing attention toward children's hygiene practices and education highlighted minors' emotional, social and relational dimensions whilst hiding the economic extent (Wilson, 1980; Saraceno, 2016). In the Global North, the increasing individualism of the raising process ultimately transformed the parent-child relation and the idea of childhood. Child work, which was once encouraged and valued, became a significant concern, enhancing a capitalistic paradox: to maintain the modern concept of childhood cherished in the Global North, Global South countries must undergo

imperialistic market-oriented politics, which tolerate child labour and exploitation (Jones and Cunningham, 2005).

This Eurocentric perspective of childhood was exported to become a universalised, international parameter for assessing the child's best interest in continuity with colonial and expansionist projects. Authors argue (post)colonial subjects forcibly abide by the global agenda and confront a specific conceptualisation of childhood (Jourdan, 2014; Myers, 2001) "suffused with moral assumptions" (Jordanova, 1989, p. 4). This Eurocentric childhood perspective was exported to become a universalised, international parameter for assessing the child's best interest in continuity with colonial and expansionist projects. Authors argue that (post)colonial subjects forcibly abide by the global agenda and confront a specific conceptualisation of childhood (Jourdan, 2014; Myers, 2001) "suffused with moral assumptions" (Jordanova, 1989, p. 4).

The reflection of such evolution in the concept of childhood is the documents on children reached by international consensus, explored by Veerman (1992) and Van Bueren (1998). From a diachronic perspective, it might be possible to divide the production of international documents regarding children's rights into two phases.

Before 1979, public and private international law treaties persistently addressed children as objects to their rights, which were expected to be ensured and exercised by adults. Children's perspective was, therefore, almost absent. For example, the first global charter on child protection dates to 1924[17], whilst the first United Nations child's rights declaration was in 1959[18]. Such rights were focused on the "three Ps"– prevention, protection, and provision. It might be argued that the innovative role of these treaties has been to make explicit the fundamental components of childhood's socio-cultural organisation across societies and time because, as already mentioned in the previous sections, social mechanisms and structures always aim to provide children with some degree of nourishment, education, and protection according to their positionality (i.e., age, gender, social class, to name a few), and to integrate them into a particular generational model.

After 1979, children started to be acknowledged by the international community as subjects holding specific, identifiable rights and entitled to participate in their implementation. This "switch" from the 3P perspective to the 4P finds momentum in the Convention on the Rights

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[17] The League of Nations (LoN) Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1924), originally drafted by the Save the Children's organization's founder, Eglantyne Jebb (Freeman, 1965).

[18] The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959).

of the Child [19] (CRC), which makes explicit that social structures give children opportunities to participate based on the generational model of their society. Articles 20 and 21 specifically incorporated the United Nations Declaration on Fostering and Adoption's detailed description of how the child's best interests are to be met – the need for security, affection, and continuing care[20].

The CRC was different from its predecessors mainly for five reasons. The first, already mentioned, is that the CRC moves the child's status from the object of protection to the subject as an independent right holder (Stahl, 2007). The second relevant difference is that the CRC is a legally binding agreement, which means that by ratifying it, countries also agree to enter it into force in their national policies concerning children's rights. The fourth feature that characterises the CRC is identifying international organisations that implement it, such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). The last element that distinguishes it is combining and integrating "social, economic, and cultural rights with civil and political rights in a single legal instrument with equal emphasis" (Twum-Danso Imoh and Ansell, 2014, p. 1).

These elements might also be found in regional documents most relevant to this study, such as the Charters that addressed the child's rights in Africa in 1979[21] and 1990[22]. The latter has been identified as an expression of the United Nations' suggestion to implement regional arrangements for promoting and protecting human rights following the region's specific cultures, traditions, and history (Mezmur, 2008). The African Charter is recognised as the only human rights treaty that covers all aspects of human rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. Differences between the UN Convention and the African Charter are therefore mainly focused on highlighting a more holistic interpretation of the concept of

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[19] The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

[20] Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with special reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally (1986). It is to be noted that the Convention on the Rights of the Child drew from such Declaration also the uppermost priority for a child to be cared for "by his or her own parents" (Art. 3) or "relatives of the child's parents, by another substitute – foster or adoptive – family or, if necessary, by an appropriate institution" (Art. 4) and, along with it, the UN definition of subsidiarity. Such provisions can be found in the CRC in Art. 3, which stipulates that the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions and decisions concerning children, and Art. 21, which recognizes that intercountry adoption should only be considered if it is in the best interests of the child and safeguards are in place to ensure that the adoption is permissible under applicable laws and international obligations.

[21] The OAU (Organisation of African Unity) Declaration of the Rights and Welfare of the African Child.

[22] The OAU African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

rights, and the relevance of the social mechanism that each specific society and community deployed to implement the 4P according to their peculiar socio-economic, geographical, and historical elements.

Eventually, in 1993, The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption was established as a multilateral treaty. This treaty aims to set an international standard for inter-country adoption practices, focusing solely on adoptions that result in a permanent parent-child relationship. The primary objective of The Hague Convention is to ensure that the child's best interests are upheld and that their fundamental rights, as recognised by international law, are respected.[23].

To confront this standardisation of the child's rights international, normative expression, scholars underlined the importance of addressing children's experiences from their perspective as social actors immersed in an economic and historical context that contribute to shaping the construal of childhood (Jourdan, 2014) and child circulation. Besides, a growing consensus in academia challenged the hegemonic narrative of a universal and incontestable idea of 'the superior interest of the child' promoted by Global North organisations.

A growing number of researchers emphasised the influence of socio-cultural and economic factors in shaping pluralised childhoods (Stryker and Yngvesson, 2013; Leinaweaver, 2010b; Abebe, 2009d; Carsten, 1995; Berman, 2014). The main criticism, quoting Liebel, is that "if children's rights were taken seriously, wouldn't it require producing another childhood, different from the one the Western society considers normative?" (Liebel, 2007, p. 57).

Liebel points out contradictions between the claims of international organisations on what is better for children and what children claim for themselves in different contexts. Liebel worked in particular in Latin America with the NATs (*Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores*), a movement composed of children[24] who demand to be both safeguarded and recognised as workers. Similarly, Saadi (2012) argues the international community's stance regarding child labour mainly focuses on representing children as vulnerable, passive and exploited subjects. Paradoxically, NATs work in unsafe and unprotected conditions precisely because they are not legally recognised as a working category. The concept of the child's best interest was conceived as non-differentiable (Howell, 2006), and tolerating child labour in a specific situation would mean accepting it as a dimension of that universal concept.

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[23] The Hague Convention and its entanglement with this research are in-depth explored in chapter Four and chapter Six.

[24] According to the UNICEF definition, a child is a person with age inferior to 18 years (Art. 1, UNICEF, 1989).

Back to the geographical area of interest to this research, this firmness of the universal understanding of childhood clashes against childhoods that might be counted in the African continent, where neoliberal (post)colonial policies (in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes – SAPs[25]) had profound repercussions on inter-society relationships and dynamics.

During the 1980s, African countries' resources were increasingly affected by international politics. On a regional and local level, households were forced to modify their structure and mix material production with social reproduction (Kawachi et al., 1997). The social reproductive system underwent a massive adaptation toward market logics, resulting in a mutation of childhood and parenthood practices (Latouche, 1998). This is relevant to this research because the concomitant increase of humanitarian aid in the continent, and its Eurocentric narrative, strengthened the tendency to homogenise and universalise a concept of the 'Third World' child based on psychophysical and socio-economic poverty, passivity and vulnerability. Since then, the Global North countries have struggled to understand and recognise self-definitions and local strategies of the inter-relations between childhood, parenthood and society (Óskarsdóttir, Baldursdóttir et al., 2016; Twum-Danso Imoh, 2016; Hopkins and Sriprakash, 2015; Morganti, 2015; Drah, 2012). The Global North normative discourse on local kinship practices often denies the creativity and agency. Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi (2016, p. 304) argue that this narrative equally enforces the idea of "crisis childhoods" and the exotic view of the "tribal child approach". This denial process emphasises imaginaries of 'otherness' of the Global South societies instead of "the complex ways in which social change positions children and how children reposition themselves and, in so doing, produce social change in African societies" (Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi, 2016, p. 304). According to Abebe and

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[25] After the Second World War, Western block countries expanded their markets to the part of the world contested against the Soviet bloc, the so-called Third World. Third World is the label for countries not aligned with the US nor the URSS, and it was created in Bandung in the Sixties. Amongst them, there were the African countries. In 1944, the conference of Bretton Woods established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Development and Reconstruction – otherwise known as World Bank (WB). The IMF and the WB had the duty to apply what Harvey (2007) defines "creative destruction" by re-meaning the market exchange with moral value and overlapping social good with commercial transactions. Since 1973, IMF and WB started to offer loans in US dollars to nations. Because of the independentist wave of the Sixties, many African countries were encouraged to incur considerable debts in risky conditions. During Reagan's government, the IMF started imposing on borrower countries institutional reforms – i.e., the application of fiscal restrictions and privatisations. The aim was to orient economic and industrial strategies to the international markets by increasing socio-political restrictions and de-regulation. The instability of such reforms led to the Nineties' economic crisis, weakening several countries where SAPs were applied. The most vulnerable countries entered a circle of borrowing that led to dismantle the welfare system and social protection, a procedure that directly impacted the population's life.

Ofosu-Kusi, analysing the elements that cross between parenthood and childhood is crucial to understanding social practices and their intersection with class, gender, race, historical, geographical and economic factors. The reciprocal influence of the community on the individual and *vice-versa* contributes to reconfiguring intergenerational and collective dynamics (Phiri and Abebe, 2016).

In this research, childhood is approached as a construal regulated by the collective social imagination (Jenks, 1996) and dependent on socio-cultural, economic and geographical factors. The temporary and fictive nature of this generational, "constant becoming" category (Abebe and Ofosu-Kusi, 2016, p. 309) allows for investigating the creativity of opportunistic and tactical strategies that led to child relocation. Child circulation enhances the socially constructed ties transversally interconnected to the entire kinship spectrum. It expands the horizons of possibility and acknowledges that "we all navigate our lives along multiple trajectories of social becoming related to culturally defined and socially prescribed and desired ideas of personhood" (Vigh, 2006, p. 56).

Inter-country adoption: a critical perspective

This section reviews the inter-country adoption debate, focusing on (post)colonialism, glocal inequalities, and international mobility. Inter-country adoption is a child circulation practice widespread and legally recognised in several countries, including those within the Global North. It is characterised by the predominance of exclusive parenthood, which ends any previous legal tie between the child and her native family (Costa, 2015). During the Twentieth century, formal adoption was re-thought as a transaction with the transformative socio-political power to disconnect the child from her previous kinship ties and make them 'biological strangers' (Herman, 2002). Indeed, inter-country adoption employed the concept of plenary adoption as a universal category to regulate kinship legal and social relationships amongst subjects. Its 'clean break model' (Duncan, 1993) required that sending countries assess the orphan status of the child and the authenticity of the abandonment act, which must be "not induced or coerced, but freely consented to by the parent" (Yngvesson, 2012, p. 328).

Abandonment was a fundamental criterion for providing prospective parents with children who may satisfy the Global North model of exclusive parenthood. Keeping the native family out of the equation became the legal ground to construe family relationships through inter-country adoption. The exclusive parenting model was deployed as an interpretative lens to appraise other models of kinship, stating substantial inability or disinterest to grasp socio-

cultural, geographical and economic reasons for the pre-adoption circumstances of the adoptee-to-be. As illustrated in the works of Fonseca, there was a significant reluctance to recognise informal fosterage in family organisation models. Her research in Brazil highlighted that Global North-informed child-care policies would instead favour the adoptive parents' perspective and let traditional practices "such as informal fostering arrangements (…) completely ignored" (Fonseca, 2006, p. 167). According to this perspective, the main narrative tends to depict native families' child-care strategies as disorganised and improvised, as well as their attempts to maintain post-adoption connections with children adopted abroad. Instead, Fonseca argues that the archetype of the birth family is epitomised by conditions of destitution, internal contradictions and conflicts that are likely mutual to every human practice (Fonseca, 2004).

This section's literature on inter-country adoption focuses on adoption's intrinsic inequalities and narratives of legitimacy and adoption as a conscious kinship strategy of native families. It addresses four themes: the interpretative clash of criteria for adoption, the main narrative concerning adoption and the families of origin, the postcolonial interpretation of glocal inequalities, and adoption as the expression of migratory phenomena and the stratification of reproductive power.

One branch of critical kinship studies focuses on the socio-constructivist nature of kinship. It has been called the "paradox of family normativity": kinship is a construal widespread in every community in the world and yet impossible to reduce to a unique standard set of features because "there is nothing less natural than family" (Saraceno, 2016). Adoption and the criteria to assess the child and the parents' 'adequacy' are therefore an excellent instance to display and epitomise how 'normativity' might be negotiated. Indeed, the semantic interpretation of elements relevant to the adoption process that are often presumed as 'absolute', such as the age and orphan status of the child, might profoundly depend on the context. For instance, adoptees' age has been long considered a fact, a piece of biological information that eludes socio-cultural elements. However, age is defined differently according to the socio-cultural context where it is performed. A person's age might be determined by her group of belonging, for instance, through bodily and social modifications. In opposition to the predominance of the social age, there is the individual and biologically-driven concept of age, calculated from birthdate. This discrepancy between social and biological age measurement rose when adoption requires increased levels of accuracy (Costa, 2013). In these cases, documentation runs parallel with biomedical age estimation methods – such as the wrist test (De Sanctis et al., 2014) – which are often unreliable because of the child's previous economic, geo-politic, and

socio-cultural context. Tracing children's records is difficult, even when medical conditions are checked (Cartwright, 2003). The story that a body might tell through its structure, scars, modifications, fractures, and skin rashes results from a negotiation between the 'signs' it carries and the context where it is questioned. Indeed, the 'evidence of facts' that might be retraced over the child's physical body needs to be interpreted and situated in specific contexts to be appropriately retold. In the same way, social and identity information collected during the adoption process may be unreliable (Fenton, 2016; De Donno, Roca et al., 2013).

The literature review of national and international adoption raised another central point: the concept of 'orphan'. Orphanhood is a crucial element of the adoption process. The encompassing category of 'orphan' has many sub-categories (Abebe, 2009a), but the one taken into consideration in this context is social orphanhood, which occurs when children suitable for adoption have at least one relative who cares about them and eventually gives up their parental rights, thus making the child adoptable. When adoption envisages the living existence of native family members, the narrative that justifies the child relocation is crucial to define the adoptive act and its interpretation. In these cases, particular attention was given to the moral values that vindicated the gratuity of the process and hid the economic transaction issue with the powerful vision of gift (Yngvesson, 2002; Zelizer, 1994). Through this narrative, the adoption of social orphans becomes acceptable together with the vision of giving up the child as a final act of deep love and altruism of the native relatives (Herman 2002). The concept of altruism is also central to explaining why Global North families decide to adopt from other countries. Reasons to prefer inter-country adoption over domestic adoption might be linked to the desire for "mismatched families" or endurance of "group boundaries and racial hierarchies" (Khanna and Killian, 2015, p. 588). Still, some authors argue that the preference of inter-country adoption is the result of (post)colonial paternalistic policies (Briggs and Leinaweaver, 2016; Lecaldano, 2013). According to this interpretation, inter-country adoption works unidirectionally to satisfy the procreative right of a specific class and operates in the interstices of global and local inequalities (Briggs, 2012b). The consistent divergence of age and reproduction habits between sending and receiving countries was addressed through a normative discourse that visualises native families from a specific narrative of moral economy. In the reinterpretation of the adoption ethical dilemma, the adoptable child struggles for love, the native parent lacks the socio-economic skills to satisfy that need, and the adoptive parent is the moral answer to this impasse. This understanding sees adoption as the final resolution and hides informal child circulation practices that native families practice while enduring hardship (Fonseca, 2009; 2004; 2002). An outstanding example of a scholar

who supports this narrative is Elisabeth Bartholet. She expressed her disappointment about the Hague Convention restrictions that keep "lovely" adoptive families waiting in vain whilst birth families struggle to find somebody to care for their children (Bartholet, 2010; 1993). Bartholet's assumptions strongly oppose those who believe inter-country adoption lacks control and protection for children and native family rights. Her articles were readdressed by Laura Briggs (2012a), who underlines the 'trap' that transnational adoption represents to feminism, divided between reproductive rights – the equal rights to become a parent – and the neo-Marxist approach to global inequalities – classes and related privileges (Briggs and Leinaweaver, 2016).

Transnational adoption has also been extensively studied as a migration phenomenon by exploring ideological values that trigger "the migratory movement of adoptees" (De Graeve, 2015, p. 71) and how the difference between them and 'Third World migrants' is negotiated (Hübinette and Tigervall, 2009). Demographers became interested in inter-country adoption as an unusual migration form that concerns population size and age and transfers young people to receiving countries (Leinaweaver, 2014; Selman, 2002). Anthropologists and sociologists who studied the phenomenon more recently embraced this perspective. Inter-country adoption is now claimed as a first-class and 'quiet' migration (Briggs, 2012b; De Graeve, 2010; Selman, 2002) because adoptees are considered the last people who might 'benefit' from mobility and free movement and avoid the "technologies of exclusion" that regulate international migration flows (Yngvesson, 2012, p. 327) and unaccompanied minor migrants (Dietrich, 2015). Adoptees are considered "the ultimate liberal subject" (Yngvesson, 2012, p. 330) in opposition to other categories of immigrants that incorporate otherness regardless of their official citizenship status. The 'process of kinning' (Howell, 2003) that adoptees undergo through the use of affective economies "bind subjects 'with some others and against other others'" (Yngvesson, 2015, p. 548).

Lastly, kinship was re-thought in its political and economic stance of stratification of reproduction. Poverty, precariousness, insecurity, sexuality, race, and global and geographical inequalities were readdressed as factors that influence processes of belongingness and question the meaning of family making (Briggs, 2012b). Borrowing De Graeve's words, "discourses that justify poverty-driven transnational adoption of children stand in uneasy tension with discourses that dismiss immigration on economic grounds and with increasingly restrictive policies regarding economic migration from the South" (De Graeve, 2015, pp. 78-79).

A crossing point: formal and informal child circulation

In the Eighties, scholars in the Global North began investigating family and parenthood models generated through inter-country adoption. Studies addressed adoption as a private experience involving children and prospective/adoptive parents, whilst families of origin were often left out of the picture. Limited investigations focused on issues that might ethically affect the adoption system in the sending countries. Scholars pointed out problematic matters that included reasons for relinquishment of the child (Högbacka, 2014; Johnson, 2012), techniques of persuasion of the native family (Rotabi, Gibbons et al., 2009; Roby and Matsumura, 2002), free and informed consent (Hailu, 2017; Gibbons and Rotabi, 2012). Debates and studies on native countries are sparse (Neil, 2016), even though they might affect the child's and adoptive parents' post-adoption experience. A controversial issue concerned socially constructed categories such as 'orphan' and 'abandoned child' and the impact of the complex interactions caused by the discrepancy of this notion between the Global North and South. Here, the focus is on literature about native families who decided to have their children adopted abroad without knowing the irreversible nature of inter-country adoption. Investigations were conducted in Vietnam (Larsen, 2008), Marshall Island (Bos, 2008), South Africa (Högbacka, 2012), Italy with Roma population (Salza and Piasere, 2010) and Nigerian families (Taliani, 2012) and showed the implications of the misinterpretation of child circulation praxes within different socio-cultural contexts. In several cases, 'misunderstandings' relate to omissions, inducements and manipulations of communication and agreements between native families and intermediaries, as for inter-country adoption in Ethiopia.

A recent article titled 'Children for Families: An Ethnography of Illegal Inter-Country Adoption from Ethiopia' (Hailu, 2017) identifies the techniques deployed to convince native families to adopt their children. According to Hailu, brokers told native families that it would be possible to keep contact with their offspring after the adoption and involve birth parents in data manipulation – age, abandoned status, household information – to make their children fit in the category of 'adoptable children'. Brokers used different escamotages, including the promise of seeing the child again, receiving money from the future adopted parents of the child, or capitalising on "the socially constructed prestige that could be accrued out of having a child living abroad" (Hailu, 2017, p. 14). Hailu further explains this technique to convince parents of origin to agree with the adoption:

> A related enticement is the social prestige that can be derived out of forging
> familial linkage with a *ferenji* (i.e. with a white person). Although guardians

are the main targets, this coaxing rhetoric has a stronger influence on older siblings of the child being prepared for adoption, who consider this as a special opportunity presented to their younger siblings. This is due to increasing globalisation that is creating an image of opportunities and affluence that may be available in the *freng hager* (i.e. the country of white people). Consequently, in addition to persuasion by brokers, siblings who are too old to be adopted put pressure on their parents to place their younger siblings in the hope that the above reported social and economic benefit may eventually trickle down to them as well (Hailu, 2017, p. 15).

The kind of "linkage" Hailu refers to characterises local practices of informal child circulation that significantly differ from inter-country adoption. The more common child circulation practice in Ethiopia is called *guddifaachaa* (or *gudifecha*), which in the Oromo language defines a particular form of social protection[26]. *Gudifacha* means raising, educating, and supporting by fostering and is originally a method to integrate the offspring of the Oromo opponents (Getu and Devereux, 2013). This type of child placement is part of various traditional Ethiopian praxes that aim at social protection and kinship manipulation and move orphans and needy children from the native to the adoptive family (Mapp, 2014; Teshome, 2013; Hebo, 2013), which is further explored in chapter Four. This customary practice of child placement became so common that the Ethiopian civil code deployed this term to define Ethiopian domestic adoption. *Gudifacha* now refers to the formal, national adoption process, whilst its informal version maintained its strong connotation and spread during crisis periods that the Ethiopian population faced during the last decades (Mapp, 2014; Getu and Devereux, 2013; Teshome, 2013).

Orphanhood, orphanages and global inequalities

In his article 'Orphanhood, poverty and the care dilemma', the social geographer Tatek Abebe explores "divergent conceptualisations of orphanhood" (Abebe, 2009b, p. 70) and addresses the problem of what role children's institutions play in contemporary orphanhood. According to Abebe, the contemporary orphanhood issue is strictly connected to global inequalities and age-based deprivation and marginalisation, which find their common roots in the element of

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[26] The Oromo population demographically represents 40% of the Ethiopian population (Jalata, 2005).

poverty. His study argues that in terms of Global South and North relations, orphanages represent a physical point of contact where local and international concepts overlap, and orphans become ''global'' too. In 2012, the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) denounced the attitude of organisations and agencies that concurrently finance orphanages and criticise them as inadequate for children who struggle in precarious living conditions. This attitude has been interpreted as intended to foment inter-country adoption and the Global North paternalistic saviour syndrome (ACPF, 2012; Hübinette and Andersson, 2012). Ironically, it has been argued that the presence of facilities and compounds affiliated with the Global North organisations concurs with increasing the community's social inequalities (Abebe, 2002). The Global North-related media campaign and its discourse on vulnerability, which depicts orphans as victims, have the double effect of disempowering children's agency and resilience (Costa and Tisci 2016) and simultaneously neglecting other children's conditions of poverty and economic marginality.

This approach sees the orphanages as ''places-in-between'' (Drah, 2012), peculiar socio-cultural contexts and the universalised humanitarian policy rhetoric of international aid, and studies childcare institutions as grey areas where Global South and North concepts of appropriate childhood are conveyed and the discourse of care is shaped. The existing literature review reveals a gap in investigating orphanages as spaces of transition and interaction, the arena where local, domestic and inter-country adoption take place.

The Global North perspective on 'otherness' that pretends universal validity (Chirwa, 2002) blurs peculiar situational and socio-cultural factors that contribute to the social construction of orphanhood categories and influence orphanages' spaces and meanings (Evans, 2005). The children do not always live the condition of orphanhood in terms of social disability, dependency and lack of care (Abebe, 2009b), as De Graeve (2015) highlighted about Ethiopian children. This narrative damages children's skills to cope with marginalisation. For all these reasons, Abebe accused international organisations of addressing the 'orphan problem' with inappropriate donor-driven policies and wasting crucial resources at the expense of children's well-being (Abebe, 2009b).

2.3   Theoretical Framework

The previous section aimed to position this work in relation to significant contributions of critical kinship studies from a multi-disciplinary and macro-thematic perspective. This literature review structure aligns with the investigation's aim, which is to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia and constitutes a solid ground to develop the main questions of this study.

This section builds on the aforementioned philosophical foundations to further analyze the existing literature at the macro themes intersection and to present areas that still need to be explored by the current academic scenario where this research is positioned.

Additionally, it provides an overview of the reasons for conducting fieldwork in Ethiopia, presents the central questions of this research, and explains the theoretical perspective of this work.

The gap in academic knowledge and key contribution of this research

The literature on irregularities concerning inter-country adoption is abundant and growing. The discrepancies in the interpretation of the adoption process between sending and receiving countries have been tackled by several scholars (Högbacka, 2012; Hoffman, 2014; Bos, 2008; Larsen, 2008; Collard, 2005). However, the same cannot be said for inter-country adoption reunions. Contacts with the native families need adoptees to grow older to become evident, and represent a long-term outcome, or side-effect, of inter-country adoption (Senchyna, 2016). The expectations of post-adoption encounters largely depend on the nature of the inter-country adoption agreement, which can be closed or open. Closed adoption implies a clean break between the family of origin and the adoptive family once the child transfer is completed. Instead, the open adoption leaves the possibility of contact between families of origin and adoptive families. From a Global North perspective, most inter-country adoption is legally assumed to be closed and will terminate all pre-adoptive kin ties. However, this Global North-driven legal construct of a clean break and its implications for exclusive parenthood is not always shared by all the parties involved, as this thesis claims. Recently, authors tackled open inter-country post-adoption dynamics, such as in adoption between Taiwan and Australia (Lin et al., 2021; Wright et al., 2021). However, very little has been explored amongst what is referred to as 'closed inter-country adoption cases' of reunion. The academic material produced by Ethiopian scholars sheds light on peculiar cases concerning customary adoption

practices (Aredo and Chala, 2019; Kassa and Abebe, 2016; Negeri, 2006), orphanhood socio-cultural construal (Abebe, 2008a), and inter-country adoption irregularities (Hailu, 2017). Ethiopian and international scholars also focused on Ethiopian children's experiences concerning orphanhood (Abebe, 2009c; Abebe and Aase, 2007). Nevertheless, research concerning cross-cultural competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption as a life-long journey interconnected to specific local child circulation understandings and their collision with Global North interpretations remain missing. In particular, the literature concerning inter-country adoption in Ethiopia tends to refer to native families only on a symbolic and imaginary level.

It is worth noting that each adoptive experience has its peculiarities: whilst there are recurrent elements, a diversity of interpretations and actions is traceable. Narratives that diverge from the dominant adoption discourse resonate with the Foucaultian concept of "unqualified, even directly disqualified" low-ranking knowledges that need to re-emerge and re-appear to discuss current logics of subjugation (Foucault, 1980, p. 82). In this research, adoption is addressed as a collective practice incorporated into popular and subjective knowledge. Foucault intended the popular knowledge (*le savoir des gens*) as "a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it" (Foucault 1980, p. 82). In line with Foucault's interpretation, which will be further explored at the end of this section and in chapter Three, this research investigates the relational nature of the adoption praxes, displaying an arrayal of multiple knowledges that spring from the collective and individual experience of whom practice or endure it. With this approach, the investigation envisages six different groups of subjects/narrators and an even number of perspectives for each adoptive process: the adoptees, the native and adoptive families, intermediaries[27], the orphanages and the adoption agencies' personnel. A seventh group is composed by other relevant key informants. This investigation thrives from the assumption that adoption is acknowledged, envisioned and performed by various subjects, who are assumed as knowledge holders. The intention is to draw a reasonably holistic picture of what (re)connections in the post-adoption stage represent and embody according to all the participants involved, with particular attention to the Ethiopian perspectives in their entirety.

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[27] This category is further explained in chapter Five.

This research does not intend to be a mere theoretical exercise. It focuses on reflections concerning analogies and dissimilarities of international and local child circulation within a circumscribed area. The intent is to shed light on different and overlapping regimes of truths within a diverse but definite geographical, socio-cultural and economic arena such as Ethiopia to then understand the repercussions of such understandings in the post-adoption stage. Approached as a place still influenced by inter-country adoption, Ethiopia as a sending country is analysed starting from the interconnections and fictive kinship bonds generated through mobility.

This research intends to fill the spaces left untouched by other investigations in the same vein upon such premises. After a careful analysis of the existing literature, two areas were considered underexplored:

- Geographically located inter-country adoption perception and beliefs and its entanglement with customary informal adoption;

- Consequences of these entanglements in post-adoption on family ties, bonds and expectations of the triad adoptee-native family-adoptive family.

The key contributions aim to fill the above-explained gaps, challenge current Global North policies, generate new debates about this topic, and ultimately complement an innovative perspective of critical kinship studies. Within this framework, Global South and North experiences are not seen as elements to compare. Rather, they are addressed as autonomous and dynamic phenomena that intersect when inter-country adoption takes place.

This thesis addresses inter-country adoption as a phenomenon that moves circularly from and to Ethiopia; therefore, the study develops circularly, too. The starting point is the perspectives of the Ethiopian families concerning child mobility. It progresses around native families' agency after their children leave for another family; it ends focusing on the consequences of the continuous intertwining of adoptive and native families' paths and voices, together with the adoptees. The focus will ultimately be on a) Ethiopian beliefs and practices surrounding inter-country adoption; b) the implications of their intertwining with Global North-driven practices.

The thesis lastly emphasises the potential improvement of Global North inter-country adoption policies. This research hopes to contribute to deepening such understandings.

Addressing inter-country adoption in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has been chosen as the country that best epitomises the contradictions of inter-country adoption praxes and power dynamics. The first reason is the distinctiveness of its law and history concerning inter-country adoption. Secondly, its worldwide prominence as a sending country in the last decade (2008-2018). Lastly, the expectations of native families in the post-adoption stage.

In Ethiopia, inter-country adoption was legally practised from the 1970s until January 2018. It was regulated by the Civil Code[28] and the Ethiopian Family Code[29]. Ethiopia never ratified the Hague Convention regulating inter-country adoption[30]. The country's high rate of adoption cases (up to five per day) was one of the reasons that pushed several organisations and individuals to call out irregularities, including child abduction and trafficking, inaccurate testimonies, and falsification of documentation. In 2011, the Ethiopian government interrupted inter-country adoption for several months to tackle this issue. During that timeframe, orphanages and Ethiopian-based adoption agencies were closed and accused of conducting unethical and illegal adoption practices (USAID, 2012). After that event, inter-country adoption re-opened for almost seven years until the Ethiopian government decided to suspend and ban it in January 2018, during the fieldwork of this research. The ban occurred after repeated reports of adoption-related misconduct (Steenrod, 2021a; Bunn, 2019; Hailu, 2017). At the same time, disapproval arose within local public opinion, backed by the country's state-run Ethiopian News Agency, which cited concerns over adoptees' abuse and "various crimes and social crisis in the country they grew up in" that would make adopted children "vulnerable to identity crisis, psychological problems, and violation of rights" (ENA, 2018a, in

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[28]From 1970 to 1999, Gregorian Calendar (henceforth G.C.).

[29] From 2000 to 2018, G.C.

[30] The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption is a multilateral treaty establishing the international standard of practices for inter-country adoption. It was written in 1993 during the Hague Conference on Private International Law and covered only adoptions that create a permanent parent-child relationship. The scope of this Convention is to ensure the child's best interest and respect her fundamental rights as recognised by international law. Its main aim is to prevent either child abduction, sale, or trafficking. Even though the Convention applies only when it enters into force in both the receiving and sending country, its principles are considered, from a Global North perspective, an essential guideline to detect malpractices and ensure heedfulness in the process. The Convention might be ratified, accepted, or approved to enter into force. By ratifying the Convention, a country commits to implement its legal content. Countries involved in inter-country adoption are not compelled to ratify the Convention. On the 26th of October 2020, the Convention was either accepted, approved, or ratified by 104 countries (HCCH, 1993).

Hosseini, 2018). Many Ethiopian native families demanded more information about their children adopted abroad[31]. Furthermore, post-adoption reports became more difficult to obtain since inter-country adoption ended. Consequently, issues related to post-adoption received high visibility in Ethiopia, with particular attention being to cases of native family members who were either looking for their children adopted abroad or had managed to reunite or reconnect with their biological children.

Key questions

The macro-themes that emerged from the literature review and the consequential identification of the gap in academic knowledge laid the foundation to recognise three key questions overarching this research:

1. What kind of movement(s) does inter-country adoption imply? Is it linear with a definitive separation (as appears from a Global North legal perspective) or circular with potential reconnections (as emerging from Global South narratives)?

2. What expectations surround inter-country adoption processes? From the perspective of adoptees, adoptive families, intermediaries, and institutions but mostly from native families.

3. How do these expectations impact and transform the post-adoption stage?

This research project aims to study inter-country adoption's transformative effects on (re)connections in the making of relatedness in Ethiopia. The main focus is on transnational practices of belongingness and inter-country adoption as a privileged form of international migration from the Global South to the Global North. The study emphasises how adoption shapes the concepts of kinship, mobility and space within the broader framework of customary and international child-transfer practices. This research hypothesises that native families with

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[31] Borkena (2017) *Twenty-five thousand children taken away from Ethiopia through offshore adoption scheme*. Available at : https://borkena.com/2017/12/06/twenty-five-thousand-children-taken-away-ethiopia-though-adoption-scheme/ (Last accessed 12 April 2022); Zelalem, Z. (2016) *Solitary struggles: Of soul-searching Ethiopian adoptees*. Available at : https://addisstandard.com/solitary-struggles-of-soul-searching-ethiopian-adoptees/ (Last accessed 12 April 2022).

particular conformations[32] decide to give their children into adoption because they believe that the child relocation and mobility would provide their children with better lives.

(Post)colonial feminism

This study intends to address inter-country adoption as a colonial construct that epitomises socio-cultural conflicts and paternalistic relations between Global South and Global North. The study builds upon the intimate relation between the imposition of Western notions as universal models and the colonial and imperial projects of domination. This study looks at Global South and North connections as incessantly affected by structures and institutions imposed during the colonial era. This relation has been addressed by postcolonialism and decoloniality. The former found its origins in the late Seventies; in *Orientalism*, the scholar Edward Said (1978) introduced the concept of colonial discourse analysis, which further studies explored in a multidisciplinary analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, political, and historical impact of colonialism in formerly colonised countries. The prefix "post", which until the Nineties was intended as a temporal marker for a neat transition to independence, became the marker for the ongoing effects of colonialism, as noted by Shohat (1992). To explain this difference, it is generally understood that the hyphenated "post-colonial" refers to the period right after the independence of a former colony, whilst unhyphenated "postcolonial" denotes the effects generated by the colonial era from independence onwards. The notion of decoloniality is rooted in social studies in Latin America by Anibal Quijano (2000). Quijano's idea of "the coloniality of power" was further examined by Walsh and Mignolo (2018). Coloniality diverges from colonialism because whilst the latter refers to a historical phenomenon, the former emphasises the epistemological nature of the colonial relation and its impact on the structures of knowledges and institutions in former colonised or occupied countries.

This difference also affects the concepts of decolonialism and decoloniality. Indeed, decolonialism discusses a time when former colonies' agenda was for native people to take back state control. In contrast, decoloniality looks at 'delinking' people from the colonial logics and reconceptualise them in a colonial-free agenda. Mignolo's remarks focus on a substantive difference between postcolonialism, which he considers linked to a specific time, and

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[32] The criteria used to select the participants are explained in depth in chapter Three, where the sample's size and conformation are addressed.

decoloniality. Moreover, postcolonialism has been criticised because its epistemologies generate from Global North's theorisations, thus interfering with the production of de-colonial Global South knowledges. Contrary to this, Bhambra (2014) argues that both postcolonialism and decoloniality address colonialism's epistemological, ontological, and structural interference with the current forms of power and thoughts. For this thesis, the notion of postcolonialism seems the most adequate. This study does not seek processes of liberation but instead intends to debunk some universalised logics about inter-country adoption and kinship. The perspective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the lingering colonial logics underneath the inter-country adoption discourse on sending countries, and to offer some insights into the customary structure of knowledges marginalised by the imperialist structure of thoughts.

Coloniality is here addressed as something that did not reach to its end, and as such it cannot be not truly 'post', as argued by Lyotard (1999) in his definition of (post)colonialism. This theoretical framework was valuable in identifying the inter-country adoption praxis as a prolongment of the colonial logics. For this research, three perspectives are considered relevant because they focus on mobility, hybridity, and cross-cultural connections: a) the geopolitical imbalance and capitalist imperatives of power reproduction; b) the matter of people mobility and commodification; and c) the question of 'hybridity' concerning adoptees' identities. The first is further addressed in the literature review section whilst the last two points are briefly considered in the following paragraphs.

For what concerned mobility, Hübinette and Arvanitakis (2012) argue that even though inter-country adoption thrived in the Global North belief that international child transfer was the best solution for children living in the Global South, this paternalistic approach refers to the colonial project of 'whitening', civilising, and assimilating the "Other's children" (Hübinette and Arvanitakis, 2012, p. 700). Kim's contribution (2012) on Korean adoptees' returns also shed light on the relation between inter-country adoption and Global South human capital. Similarly, Sidhu emphasises the spatial politics that inter-country adoption expresses in its selectivity in determining the right to mobility (2018). The underlying assumption is that in the postcolonial aftermath, political and social bodies are constructed to be positioned within social groups interlinked by hierarchical relations. Boni-Le Goff identifies the position of the postcolonial body at the intersection of segregation, domination, exclusion, or inclusion (2016). The permeability of social groups and international borders depends on criteria of desirability and affinity, and the child's body subjected to inter-country adoption reflects these criteria. However, this research contests the linear interpretation of this mobility from the

Global South to the Global North and argues that the post-adoption stage mobilises kinship connections and strategies that defy the univocal interpretation of mobility in inter-country adoption. Indeed, this study suggests that inter-country adoption mobility retraces established (post)colonial affective and migratory routes.

On hybridity, the (post)colonial influence on the construal of inter-country adoption is also relevant to tackling transracial adoptees' identity and categorisation in the Global North. Bhabha's (1994) psychoanalytic suggestion to analyse the relations between colonised and colonisers and the resulting hybridisation process resulted in the (post)colonial theoretical notion of hybridity. This concept has been applied by Ben-Zion (2014) to discuss the notions of belongingness and identity in Northern Europe adoptees, whilst Ang (2001) applied this concept to the challenges that Asian-born adoptees face in societies with strict dualist boundaries, such as Australia. The idea of hybridity has also been applied to second-generation returnees in the Global South. Potter and Phillips (2006) revised the notions of blackness, whiteness, domination, and colonisation in Frantz Fanon's work 'Black Skin, White Masks' (1952) to explore the experience of the 'Bajan-Brits' second-generation returning to Barbados. In their work, returnees are categorised as postcolonial hybrid returnees, and the focus is on the pervasive effect of their symbolical whiteness on notions of otherness, belongingness and in-betweenness. Their presence embodies the manifestation of Global North privilege but also stands as a token of the returnees' socio-cultural, racial and economic liminality.

Similarly, this study re-centres the focus on the Global South to investigate adoptees and adoptive families' token whiteness. Furthermore, it questions the postcolonial constructions of the logics of production and mobility of legitimised bodies entitled to be relocated from the colony to the colonisers. This interpretation addresses both native families' racialised bodies and adoptees' postcolonial and political subjectivity before, during and after the adoption. These main applications of postcolonial theories suggest that the relationship between the colonial subject and the colony develops upon the space of interstices, seen as slits to stretch for emancipation or spots of resistance against institutional knowledge power and imposition.

This specific focus on marginality in its spatial, political and cultural forms echoes the theoretical orientation of (post)colonial feminism and efficaciously cross-cuts the intersectional feminist arena. Postcolonialism and feminism's narratives antagonise the logics and discourses of coloniality and patriarchism, which move and reproduce from the same vertical expansionist project (Ashcroft et al., 1998). Within this scenario, one of the most contested narratives concerned the colonised Black woman, a disputed intersectional subject

of the colonialist and paternalistic agenda. A pioneer in this scenario was Spivak's deconstruction of the process of othering and the intersectional examination of race, gender and class on an international scale (Spivak, 1999). Spivak, as well as other Global South scholars inspired by European philosophers, has been criticised because her theories are rooted in Global North logics and borrowed notions like the Derridean deconstructionism and the Gramscian military concept of subalternity (Parry, 2004). Her works have been accused of perpetrating the pervasive colonial discourse and the Western logics in the Global South. However, Spivak (1985) started from European notions of postcolonialism, feminism and Marxism to deconstruct their Western-centred universalised logics and move the discourse from Europe as subject to Europe as an Other. Indeed, her main works on postcolonial feminism differentiated the Global North's socio-cultural and political notion of female from the objectified, colonised, subaltern and racialised intersectional category of the woman (Spivak, 1988). Moving from her studies, the postcolonial feminist theory was applied to unveil how economic expansionism influenced the notions and practices of symbolical and material subjugation of Black, feminine bodies (Mohanty, 1991). In addition, it underlined the condition of double subalternity that colonised women had to endure within postcolonial contexts (Ha and Trinh, 1989). The postcolonial feminists' imperative was to deconstruct the epistemological silence surrounding the intersectional notion of woman and contribute to reconfiguring this category within economic, political, colonial, and socio-cultural logics of domination.

For this study, postcolonial feminist theories have the double benefit of re-centring the discourse in the Global South and addressing the subaltern, marginalised subjectivities of people twice silenced by colonial and capitalist discourses. Postcolonial feminist theories are also relevant because the adoption discourse on practices and studies pivots around feminine-centred narratives that involve the adoptive mother, the native mother, and the researcher. Thus, postcolonial feminism is key to addressing the narrative of women that surrounds this topic. Moreover, postcolonial feminism operated an epistemological operation to deconstruct universalised categories, such as that of woman, demonstrating that this construal is the result of pervasive logics of domination. In the capitalist framework, identified as the aftermath of imperial and colonial dispossessions, Federici (2004) offers the contested construal of woman as a transversal political and analytical category to tackle the struggle of social and labour reproduction. Federici (2020) positioned this transversal category in a constant re/negotiation amongst narratives and counter-narratives and placed it in a subjective, bodily experience that expands beyond the periphery of the skin. To her, the unity expressed by the woman category

becomes a tool to oppose the divisive logics of capitalism and tackle diversity as a ground for communing rather than division. Federici claims that this categorisation is legitimate whenever the genderised social and labour division of activities related to reproductivity has not been transcended.

Meanwhile, African feminism's main theories claimed the uppermost relevance of the intersectional interactions of gender, race, class and systemic injustice over Western-centred universalised assumptions (Magadla, 2020; Mama, 2020; Honwana, 2013). According to African feminisms, structures of domination such as colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and patriarchalism have to be demystified and dismantled. In addition, bottom-up and anarchist forms of self-representation and organisation are valued to detect the practices and politics of women's liberation. Federici's theoretical stance of gender-based collective struggle intersects with the African feminist epistemology that seeks to achieve local and global connections between "the micro-politics of subjectivity and everyday life, and the macro-politics of global political economy" (Mama, 2007, p. 152). Therefore, the contribution of (post)colonial feminism to this research is to keep the analysis glocal (Robertson, 1995) in a dialogic relation between international, local, public and intimate kinship ties and concepts. Moreover, it provides an adequate framework to address models such as the abovementioned 'primacy of mothers' (De Graeve, 2015; Yngvesson, 2002).

To this study, (post)colonial feminism is also central because it addresses the "special place" that African women inhabit "in Western mythology, a dark and antithetic land of fables and fantasies, imbued with sexuality, violence and taboo" (Mama, 2007, p.153). In her considerations, Mama suggests that postcolonial African feminists free the African woman category from its derogatory terms – pitiable, rural, voiceless – and addresses it as a transversal tool to a) investigate trans/national kinship practices through a gender-based approach in a local/global colonialist relation; and b) map outcomes generated by the implementation of paternalist global development policies. Backboned by deconstructionism, this approach is in line with the epistemological, ontological, and methodological stand of this investigation. This research moves from a discipline, anthropology, which was deeply linked to colonialism and was long used to both validate imperialism's expansionist projects and devalue the human nature of non-European populations through the celebration of 'exotism' and 'otherness'. In their study on sexworkers in India, Bandyopadhyay et al. (2007) illustrate that the reworking of dominant discourses and interventions aims to identify disregarded acts as 'push factors' and establish subjects' own perspectives and interests. In the same way, this investigation considers (post)colonial feminism (as it will be called from now on) central to this

investigation because it challenges the hegemonic discourse of relentless victimhood and voices women's participation and engagement outside the intimate domain.

This conscious feminist methodology problematises the investigation's conduct and the sharing of the researcher's subjectivity with participants (Moran-Ellis, 1996). The researcher is framed as a gendered subject with specific features. The crucial contradictions concerning her access to the fieldwork are addressed as an integral part of the research process (Stanley and Wise, 1993; Wilkins, 1993). Engaging the positionality of the researcher also consists in locating the intersection of her "identities" – namely, race, nationality, gender – and being ready to be called into question "through a more extensive questioning of the entanglements of one's history within History" (John, 1996, p. 6). Borrowing John's words, "the problems with the 'I' and 'we' slots are obvious. Each one asserts too much: the 'I' too much authenticity, the political becoming purely personal and the 'we' too much commonality, when the identity of this 'we' is exactly what needs to be discovered and demonstrated, not assumed. The strategy of shifting uneasily between them is a poor one, but perhaps it is indicative of where I/we stand" (John, 1996, p. 13).

2.4   Conclusion

Chapter Two focused on the theoretical framework of this research. It first introduced the theoretical backbone of this work by explaining the elements of (post)colonial feminism that will inform this work. Furthermore, it briefly situated the geographical choice of the fieldwork. After addressing the gap in academic knowledge and what is identified as the key contributions and key questions that orient this research, it explains the philosophical underpinning.

The literature review is the concluding section of a chapter that argues that adoption and social reproduction are 'inescapably political'. It consists of six intertwined macro themes that cross-cut the topic of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. This section displayed the practical forms of domination and social engineering that divide and form families. Several examples of kinship re/production substantiated that child circulation and relocation are diachronically and synchronically practised across the Global South and North. Furthermore, it contended that the un/making of kin ties manifests postcolonial logics of power among subjects involved. The literature review also identified the most problematic points the inter-country adoption debate highlighted, focusing on (post)colonialism, global inequalities, and international

mobility. It then illustrated the socially constructed nature of construals such as parental models, parenthood, childhood, adoption and fostering. Through this cross-cultural lens, it concentrated on formal and customary child relocation in Ethiopia. It identified residential childcare institutions as 'places-in-between' (Drah, 2012), where the international rhetoric on child protection and local conceptualisation(s) on adoption and foster meet, overlap, and intertwine.

This chapter provided pertinent insights into the theoretical backbone of this work and cross-cultural child mobility, a solid ground to build the research paradigm that anchors this thesis' methodology.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of this research's methodological, ethical and representational approach. It focuses on the research paradigm, theoretical perspectives and methodological assumptions behind the practice. Furthermore, it explains the incorporation of methodology and ethical considerations and the absence of a distinction between ethics and fieldwork research.

The first section discusses the ontology and epistemology of this study to clarify the assumptions beneath the surface of the theories and practices of this project. The second section describes tools and approaches used to collect and reflect on information gathered. This part also aims to provide information on participants involved in the interview and the analytical process followed to sort out the findings. The final section illustrates this research's ethical standpoints and implementation during fieldwork and data storage. Furthermore, it investigates the representational issues, questioning the political and ethical challenges of representation.

This chapter defines the appropriate methodological and ethical approach to explore competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. Data collection techniques and ethical issues surrounding informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, potential harm and benefits to subjects involved in the research, and data storage and retention, are presented and explained[33].

3.2   The research Paradigm

The postulation this qualitative study operates from is that reality is socially constructed as it is known. Therefore, human perceptions and experiences are assumed as an emergent narrative actively engaged in the co-construction of g/locally situated meanings and knowledge. From this perspective, knowledge is inextricably linked to its holders and their social system: their context, values, positioning within their society.

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[33] See Appendix C.

Consequently, knowledge is not necessarily internally consistent or generalisable and cannot be produced but only contextually interpreted through observation, interactions, active understanding and communication. To support this point, this section addresses the theoretical standpoints of this study, namely the Derridian deconstructivist approach, Foucault's concepts of biopolitical and hierarchical knowledges, and Scheper-Hughes and Lock's theoretical concept of the three bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987). These perspectives align with the (post)colonial feminist theoretical framework and favour a dialogic relation between inter-country adoption's international, cross-cultural nature and the chosen ethnographic methods displayed in the following sections.

Ontology and epistemology of the research

The ontological assumption of this research is that reality is defined starting from a subjective perspective. Subjectivities produce a polyphony of perceptions that shape collective interpretations of social relations and structures. According to this supposition, each living being looks at the world from a substantially different and peculiar viewpoint. Specific historical, geographic, socio-cultural and economic conditions and other personal features such as gender, race, and social class shape the participant's standpoint in living, performing and recounting a specific occurrence. Local conventions demarcated in each social group dialogically regulate this multiplicity of representations. This hypothesis does not recognise biological-driven authenticity in how people experience life and reality. It instead describes interpretations of life and social norms as socially constructed and collectively shaped. Each lived experience is legitimate and has meanings connected to peculiar socio-cultural understandings that can be deconstructed (Liamputtong, 2007).

This perspective is in line with the theoretical backbone of this work, (post)colonial feminism, and overarches the epistemological approach chosen for this study, socio-constructivism, which looks at concepts, categories and events as:

- diachronically and synchronically embedded in relations and structures of power;

- contextualised in specific geographical and cultural spaces;

- limited to several persons or groups;

- the result of constant and persistent tension between individualism and collectivism, and 'internal' and 'external' actors ('us' and 'them');

- a dynamic consisting of contestable and contested processes from both participants and external actors (Hübinette and Tigervall, 2009);

- never complete nor absolute, but rather the result of continuous acts of negotiation and co-construction;

- processes to decode and deconstruct reality from a non-deterministic and not-positivistic view.

The socio-constructivist epistemological backbone of this research was implemented through the ethnographic method. The ethnographic methods aim to grasp the complexity and diversity of factors that shape a particular situation. These specific contexts are addressed as cultural systems, echoing Whitehead's description (2005) of socio-constructivism. Five main operative aspects cited by Whitehead have been integrated with the ontological line of this research:

- The holistic approach: a cultural system is seen as the result of an internal dialogical continuum of negotiations and interrelations. Concepts (such as orphanhood and parenthood) are addressed as integrated into a system of values, symbols and ideas (Bălan, 2011). Therefore, this research explores notions and practices as part of a specific socio-cultural ecosystem of symbols and representations that contribute to such concepts' meaning.

- The crucial role of socio-cultural contexts, processes, and meanings: interactions amongst actors involved in child circulation practices are the starting point to shape categories such as 'kin', 'personhood', 'orphan', 'adoption', and the conflictual ways to interpret them in inter-country adoption.

- The complementary emic and ethical perspectives: the emic perspective is intended as "facts, beliefs, attitudes, understood in the way they are real and meaningful for members of the studied culture" (Geană, 2008 in Bălan, 2011, p. 63). Bălan further explains his understanding of the ethical approach as a description "using concepts considered to be universal and culturally neutral" (Bălan, 2011, p. 63). His point of view differs from the ethical perspective of this study, which builds upon a socially constructed stance and therefore designates its ethical perspective as taking responsibility for the process of interpretation, representation and writing (Griffin, 1996) and being wary of the researcher's subjectivity. The ethical standpoint of this research is further explored in the last section of this chapter.

- The open-ended emergent learning process: this approach allows data collection of information and insights that might differ from previous hypotheses, thus giving space to the emic perspectives that shape behaviours and ideologies of social groups.

- The constructivist process: described by Whitehead as highly flexible, creative, interpretative and reflexive, this methodology is used to 'capture' emic perspectives. This tool aims to support the understanding of specific dynamics, and its use is encouraged when a more detailed or precise idea of processes is needed. Applications of this are, for instance, the amendment of interview questions and a deeper exploration of notions observed from a different or unprecedented perspective.

The ethnographic methodology is intended as a device to access complexity by merging "sensory, discursive, spatial, temporal, and material" (Atkinson et al., 2008, p. 2). This methodological choice might be labelled as lacking scientific rigour and suspected of being too dependent on the researcher's subjectivity, beliefs and presumptions. Reflexivity is a powerful tool to deal with such limitations because it helps improve clarity about the researcher's positioning whilst (re)producing knowledge and negotiating interactions with participants, as it will be explored in the third section of this chapter.

Engaging the interstices

The ethnographic method is based on a dialectic, multidisciplinary process. It aims to let the theory arise from the fieldwork activity. The interpretative stance that comes with the socio-constructivist epistemology encases the research practice into a clear set of practical perspectives in line with (post)colonial feminism, the theoretical backbone of this research. The theoretical standpoints of this study are the Derridian deconstructivism, the biopolitics approach of Foucault with its application in the production of marginal knowledges, and the theory of the three bodies developed by Scheper-Hughes and Lock.

The first perspective used to 'anchor' this study's reflections is the Derridian deconstructionism. In 'Psyché' (2007), Derrida describes a deconstructionist strand of disclosing and destabilising existing structures to let the performative 'other' take place. The practice of deconstruction consists of looking at categories as socially constructed assumptions built upon a relation between subjects and objects of knowledge – a system of signs and actions.

The geographical metaphor of interstices for not-hegemonic contesting knowledges, forged by Foucault (1980), introduces the second theoretical approach, namely practices of knowledge and resistance in biopolitical socio-spatial exclusion. Whilst interrogating the different dimensions of power, Foucault – and his considerations on the concept of *épistemè* – applies a deconstructivist approach to mechanisms, relations and effects of power. In this sense, the Derridian deconstructionism finds a common stance with Foucault in challenging the coherence of instituted categories and their consistency and unity in the discourse.

Neither Derrida nor Foucault intend research as a means to 'produce' knowledge: they rather see it as a tool to observe and reproduce it. They claim the researcher stands in the position of welcoming and observing knowledges made silent by the acknowledged categories. These subjugated knowledges lie on the margins of formal systems – such as the psychiatric institutions in Foucault's work. This metaphor of physical marginalisation becomes a geographical location of "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity […] unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges" (Foucault, 1980, p. 82).

The structuralist Foucault argues that to understand a research object, the object itself must be investigated with the system of knowledge that produced it. This research explores this interpretation of biopolitics, the production of competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia, and their governability. Bio-politics are also valuable for addressing the violence and historicity of these phenomena, and investigating the binary opposition between local and global child-care practices. Finally, this concept helps deconstruct actors' agency within their context of strategies and histories (Britzman, 2003).

Foucaultian metaphors are welcomed as suggestions to consider adoption like a geographical experience of physical displacements and geopolitical inter-relations. During the adoption, the adopted child transfer is addressed as the displacement of a diasporic body. In the post-adoption stage, the young adult adoptee's mobility from and to Ethiopia contrasts the standard linear representation of inter-country adoption (from point A in the Global South to point B in the Global North) and rather suggests a circular narrative of adoption trajectories and interactions that entails kin reconfigurations, as it is further explored in chapter Eight.

This process begins when children are legally defined as suitable for adoption, a procedure that requires a reinscription of their social and political bodies. Adoption is therefore interpreted as an experience of displacement and movement of physical, social, political and

imagined bodies. Starting from the theory of embodiment proposed by Nancy Scheper Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987), the child transfer is reinterpreted as a break between the individual body and the social body through the regulation and the control of the third body, the politic one (Scheper-Hughes, Alter et al., 2000). In inter-country adoption, the individual body with its symbolic space (the essential cognitive map representing its relations and spaces) is moved from its constellation of meanings. In this perspective, the adoption process becomes an act of dispossession, and the space of the childcare institution turns out to be the bureaucratic and spatial arena where social and political bodies of the to-be-adopted child begins to be decontextualised, selected and manipulated to be compliant and adoptable. Within this physical and symbolic space, actors involved in adoption – children, birth families, adoptive families, orphanages and adoption agencies' personnel – employ their creative power to express and claim their subjectivities. The entanglement between this theory borrowed by medical anthropology and inter-country adoption is further explored in chapter Six.

Lastly, this study examines the interpretative schemes of the Foucaultian geographical metaphors. In her critique of Foucault's use of geographical notions and imperialism, Spivak argues that his Western, White privileged *bourgeois* positioning that never physically nor theoretically moved from his experiential horizon. As Spivak suggested:

> Foucault is a brilliant thinker of power-in-spacing, but the awareness of the topographical reinscription of imperialism does not inform his presuppositions ... The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university all seem to be screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narrative of imperialism. (Spivak, 1988, p. 292)

The pervasive analogies employed by Foucault to critique imperialism also contribute to crystallising the very objects of his critics. Describing imperialism as a monolithic arena dismisses the fluid creativity of those social agents that produce socio-spatial relations within and against the spaces and logics of domination, as argued by Keith and Pile (2013).

This study argues that space is problematic, and inter-country adoption dynamics easily unveil the entanglement between spatial geographies, the hierarchy of power and its counter-discourses. The standard, Western-oriented understanding of inter-country adoption does have geographical coordinates, pre-determined spatial trajectories, and urban/rural interactions. The reversion between central and marginal knowledges also refers to a geographical re-centring of the focal point. In this sense, this study intends to differ from Foucault's use of geographical metaphors and make the space concrete to corroborate and

build upon the fundamental assumption that inter-country adoption arises from the structural inequalities which guarantee freedom of choice of a few to the detriment of others (Harvey, 2007; Scheper-Hughes, 2005).

3.3   Toolbox

As anticipated, the research draws on engaging (post)colonial feminism at the interstices, hybrid (physical and metaphorical) spaces-in-between where cultures, histories and geographies of kinship practices meet, overlap, and influence processes of subjects' production. The research engaged with the pre-structuralist approach to observe how normative structures and systems working for social transformation are implicated in the mechanisms they attempt to deconstruct.

Figure 3: data sources of this ethnographic research.
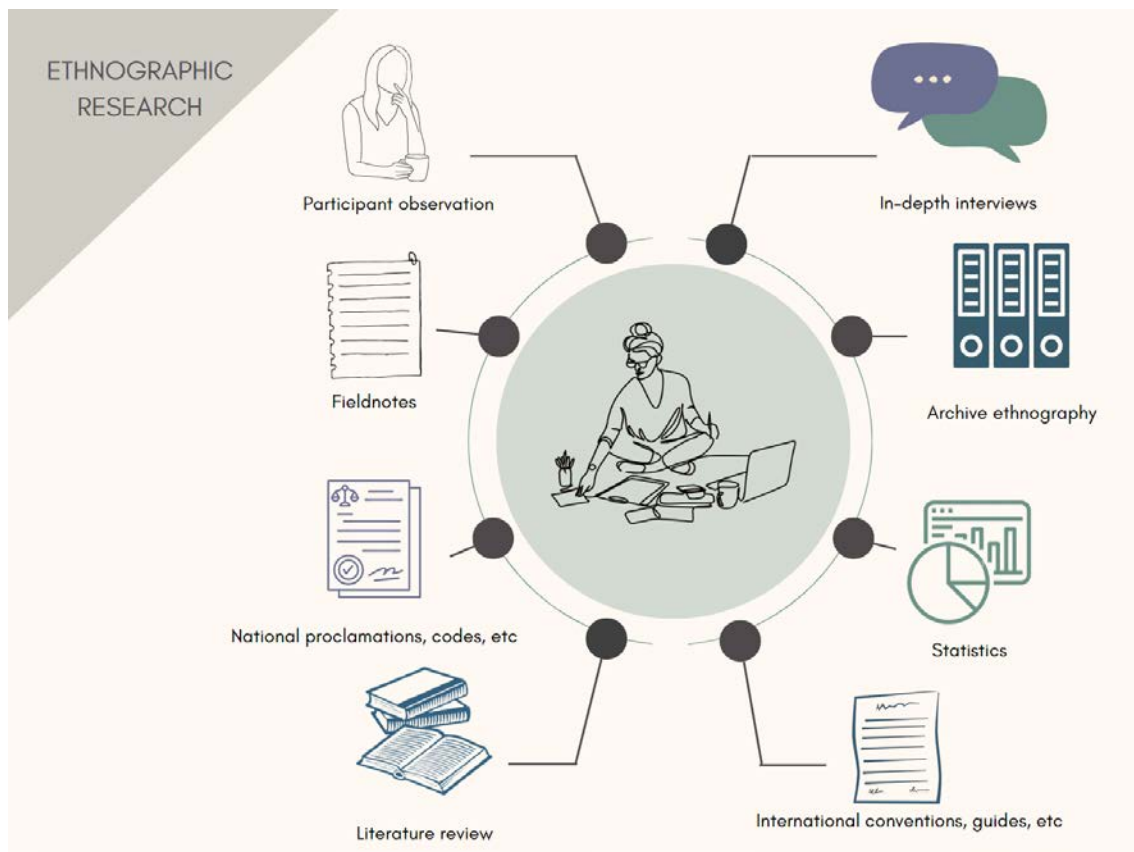
Based on such premises, the research uses participant observation and mixed qualitative-qualitative methods that combine archival ethnography with qualitative interviews to give a central space to children and families' personal experience(s) (Costa and Tisci, 2016; Costa,

2013), and focus on triangulation and thick data to produce a dense and comprehensive coverage of data collection (Layder, 2012) (see Figure 3).

A set of steps were taken to translate the mixed qualitative-qualitative methods rationale into practice and grant consistency between the theoretical framework of the research and its implementation (see Figure 4). As such, the methods deployed in this ethnographic research inform one another during fieldwork because each method naturally opens the possibility of implementing the other. In other words, identifying locations, acquiring explicit permission and negotiating the conditions to conduct research in specific locations created the trust relation to identify gatekeepers and conduct participant observation. The prolonged stay on the fieldwork and consistent presence of the researcher that inherently characterised participant observation built the relational trust needed to conduct interviews related to the critical questions of this research. Participant observation and interviews run with specific attention on the ethics and politics of representation (as it will be explained more in detail in the last section of this chapter), further strengthened the relation of reciprocal trust and unlocked the possibility to conduct an archival ethnography. Of course, these methods might be applied separately. However, the entanglement between them is an essential feature of the ethnographic methodology. This methodological aspect is particularly crucial for this study because it offers a holistic overview of the researched phenomenon and the opportunity to 'clasp the stream' and let the study move along with people entangled with kinship production and transformation trajectories.

Eventually, this set of mixed qualitative-qualitative methods successfully traced the circulation of subjects, objects and documents correlated with the circulation of children. Combining such methods allowed the exploration of material, economic, socio-political, symbolic and affective fields in their entanglements, contradictions and contingencies in reconfiguring boundaries and trajectories to determine and retain connections and ties.

This section presents and explains the set of qualitative methods applied – namely, participant observation, interviews, archive ethnography, and the case study – and the data analysis process.

Figure 4: the rationale for the implementation of mixed qualitative-qualitative methods.
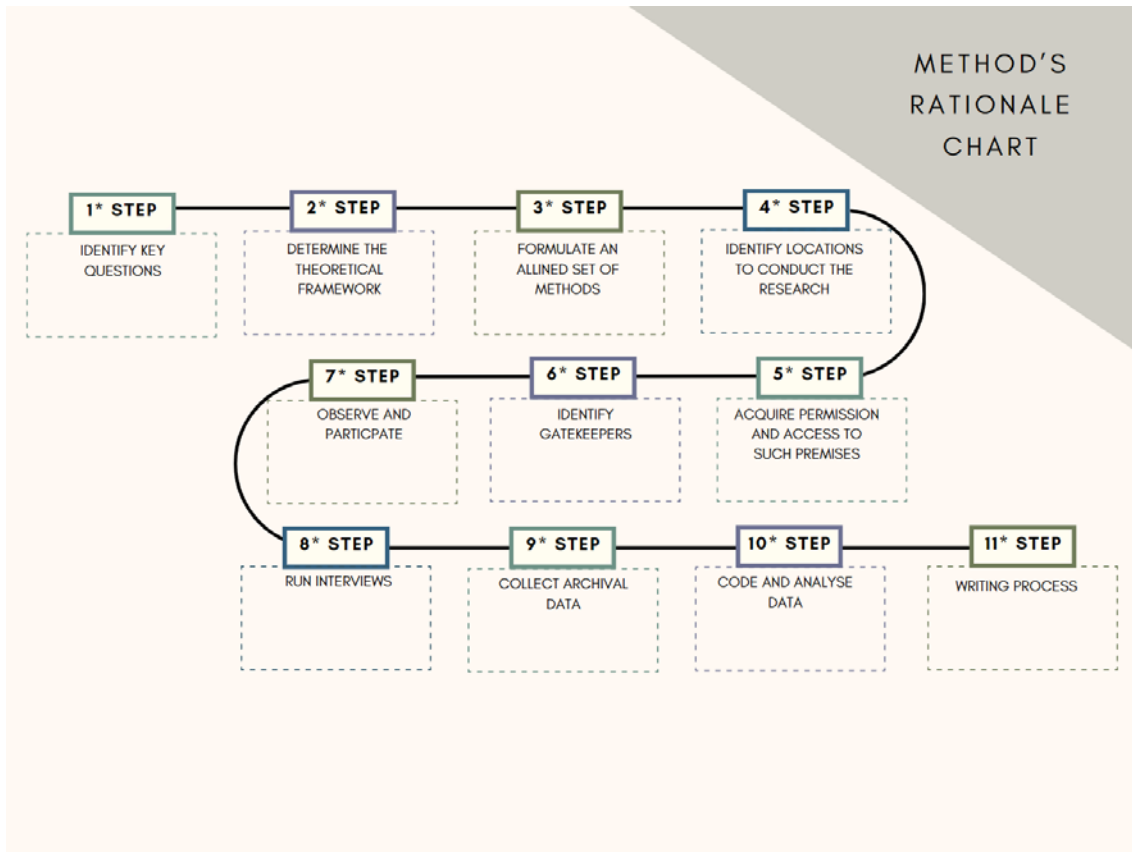
Participant observation

During the fieldwork, a long-term commitment was preferred to 'parachute research', which considers the presence on the field for the minimum time needed to 'extract data'. The paramount relevance of extended stays is also connected to one of the main methods of data collection, which is participant observation. DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) illustrate how this analytical tool enriches both the quality and interpretation of data. It allows sharing contexts, praxes and insights with the actors over a significant amount of time. Furthermore, observing and participating in the social action offers new perspectives on the issues. Within a relationship of intimacy and distance, the incorporation of experiences becomes a complementary tool for interpreting meanings and social settings. Nonetheless, the "ethnographic discomfort" in "awkward social spaces, some of which are more difficult to inhabit than others" (Hume and Mulcock, 2004, p. 16) might be challenging, as residential childcare institutions are perceived in some cases (Collard, 2015).

This research benefitted from a prolonged presence in the field because it enhanced the researcher's understanding of the settings and milieus where the adoption process occurs. Besides, an extended stay favoured interactions between the researcher and the participants and offered the possibility of preliminary meetings, multiple interviews, and follow-ups.

Such an approach also provides a thick understanding and contextualisation of the gathered data and a more holistic view of participants' experiences, as explained in the following section concerning representations. In addition, extended stay offers the researcher precise empirical knowledge of spatial geographies of the adoption and the ability to navigate physical and symbolic territories meaningful to participants – such as Addis Ababa.

The process of participant observation included interactions, activities and monitoring of Ethiopian children aged between 0 and 17 years. In this study, the term 'child' is deployed in line with the standard UNICEF's definition of a person with an age inferior to 18 years (Art. 1, UNICEF, 1989). On several occasions, participant observation implicated minors.

Several participants (intermediaries, adoptees, native and adoptive families) allowed the researcher to carry out participant observation during their stay, search and mobility in Addis Ababa. Settings of relevance were the residential childcare institutions and the household of the hosting adoptive family. In such contexts, where pre-adoption, adoption and post-adoption processes occurred, participant observation allowed the exploration of different sceneries and situations and to appreciate participants' perspectives and representations of their experiences.

In the family setting, proximity and close interactions were favoured by the presence of the researcher's family. Co-habitants, extended family members and visitors were informed of the researcher's presence and intentions. Eventually, the researcher's presence was reframed as a process of co-living, thus sharing daily life chores, childcare, living spaces, and offering an economic contribution to support cohabitation.

Three residential childcare institutions became preferential settings. One month of participant observation was conducted in an institution in Addis Ababa. Another month was spent in an institution in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region of Ethiopia. In the third institution, located in Addis Ababa, participant observation lasted from the beginning until the end of the fieldwork. Activities carried by the researcher with the institutionalised children consisted of volunteering within the centres, organising multi-modal activities and spending leisure time with them. In this way, children had the chance to get familiar with the researcher in a friendly environment and build a relationship of continuity. Participant observation was

instrumental in addressing the residential childcare institution's setting and distinguishing the researcher from other Global North persons involved in voluntourism.

The phenomenon of 'voluntourism' targets childcare institutions and mainly involves the Global North population. It consists of organising holidays that include spending short periods doing activities with organisations in the 'humanitarian aid' sector. Voluntourism has a connotation of moral consumption and occurs in childcare institutions and orphanhood-focused organisations. Its related consequences on a local and international level have been labelled the Orphan Industrial Complex (Cheney and Ucembe, 2019; Cheney and Rotabi, 2017). In residential childcare institutions' settings, 'orphan tourism' configures a constant presence of volunteers who arrive to stay for a short period – from half-day to a few weeks – and then leave. Ritcher and Norman (2010) argue that one of the significant issues of this practice is that it exposes institutionalised children to repeated experiences of abandonment, thus jeopardising their ability to form attachments. Moreover, a study conducted in a Ghanaian orphanage illustrated that children modulate the quality and intensity of their relationship with volunteers with the awareness "of the fact that there is a leaving date" (Voelkl, 2012, p. 36).

Similar dynamics have been identified in the residential care centres where the participant observation occurred. Volunteers' short stays and the socio-cultural and linguistic barriers limited a deep understanding of this setting. The narratives of local personnel confirmed that volunteers tend to establish a biased relationship with the staff and the children. Moreover, volunteers most primarily spoke English, which limited cross-cultural exchanges or encounters amongst adults, as participant observation made evident. This research aimed to discern the researcher's presence and therefore entailed learning the Amharic language and, more importantly, planning an extended period in the field to favour interactions.

An observational checklist was drafted to explore the setting and conduct descriptive observations. Focal points included the nature, organisation and use of spaces and objects – i.e., functioning, spatial and organisational use of the facility, schedules, events. The focus was on groups' dynamics and patterns of interaction (in linguistic, spatial, and non-verbal terms), language choice, discourse content, and ideational elements. A wider category, 'networks or interconnections', encompasses the aspects mentioned above and focuses mainly on actors, actions, motivations and the broader social system(s) of reference.

Fieldnotes were audio-recorded and written in first person and then re-arranged. Jotted notes were extensively used to keep track of events and contexts. Fieldnotes were overall oriented

to tackle accuracy and their correspondence with events occurring during fieldwork. Therefore, they included the depiction of settings, descriptive notes, dialogues, verbatim quoted talk considered as relevant. They also included the description of episodes, and characterisation in detail of persons who acted centrally in a scene. Fieldnotes were composed of three independent sections: a) setting's information; b) interactions and events; c) in-process reflections and preliminary considerations such as asides and commentaries. Fieldnotes were written in English but primarily audio-recorded in Italian; however, verbatim quoted talk and conversations were transcribed in the original language.

In-depth interviews

Qualitative interviews are another designated tool for gathering multiple perceptions during fieldwork. This tool provides the researcher with relevant data by boosting accuracy and avoiding misinterpretations. Adoption process' participants were distributed into seven analytical groups to provide the research with data triangulation and a more holistic perspective of the phenomenon: native families, adoptees, adoptive families, intermediaries, residential childcare institutions' personnel, adoption agencies' staff, and other relevant key-informants (see Figure 5).

As further explored in chapter Six, many adoption agencies closed their headquarter in Ethiopia after the ban on inter-country adoption. Therefore, this group is underrepresented. To provide insights into the dynamics involving adoption agencies, the group of childcare institutions is overrepresented. For the same reason, the group of other relevant key informants includes a variety of participants who provided first-hand information concerning adoption agencies' roles, activities, and entanglements with other organisations.

Figure 5: in-depth interviews.
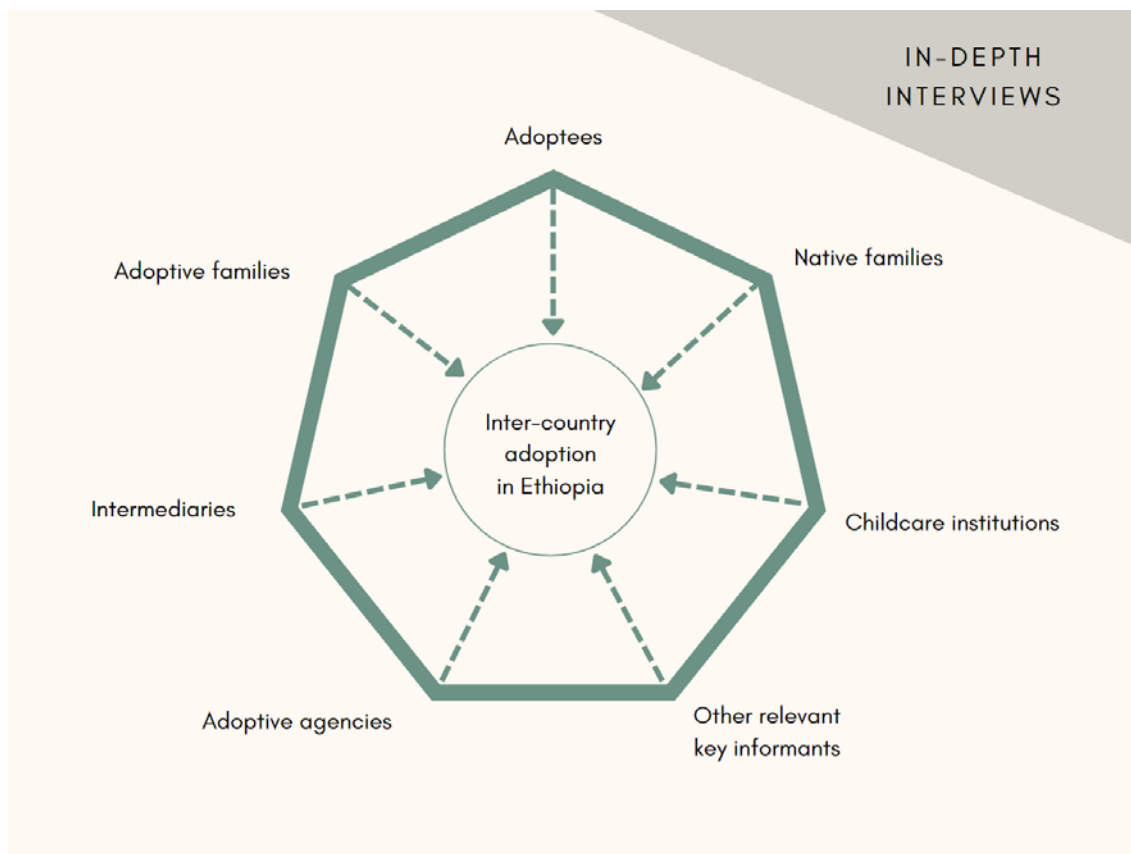
Interviews' sample

A total of fifty-six participants were interviewed in this research. Interviews were conducted in Ethiopia between October 2017 and December 2019. For what concerns participants' recruitment, three different phases might be identified.

The first phase concerns childcare institutions' and adoptive agencies' staff, who were recruited in the preliminary stage of the research during the identification of locations for participant observation.

The second phase concerns the other participants' recruitment, which stemmed from the prolonged presence on the field and the conduction of participant observation. Most participants were met at the sites where participant observation was conducted. Many of them believed that this research's focus on competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia was underrepresented by the current narratives surrounding inter-country adoption and yet relevant. Therefore, they offered to be interviewed to contribute to producing a narrative more representative of their experiences.

The level of involvement of these participants and the prolonged presence of the researcher on the field led to the third phase of recruitment, where some of them offered to play the role of gatekeepers between the researcher and other participants whose contribution might be relevant to a better understanding of the studied phenomenon. Participants were mostly of Ethiopian origin, with heterogeneous backgrounds. All participants' involvement was voluntary, and all names were changed.

This section focused on presenting the characteristics of the seven groups of participants. The data of each group is delivered through data anonymisation and aggregation to grant participants anonymity and privacy. The primary information of the fifty-six participants is presented in an infographic tailored to show the sample's common demographic indicators (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: participants' demographic indicators: a general overview.
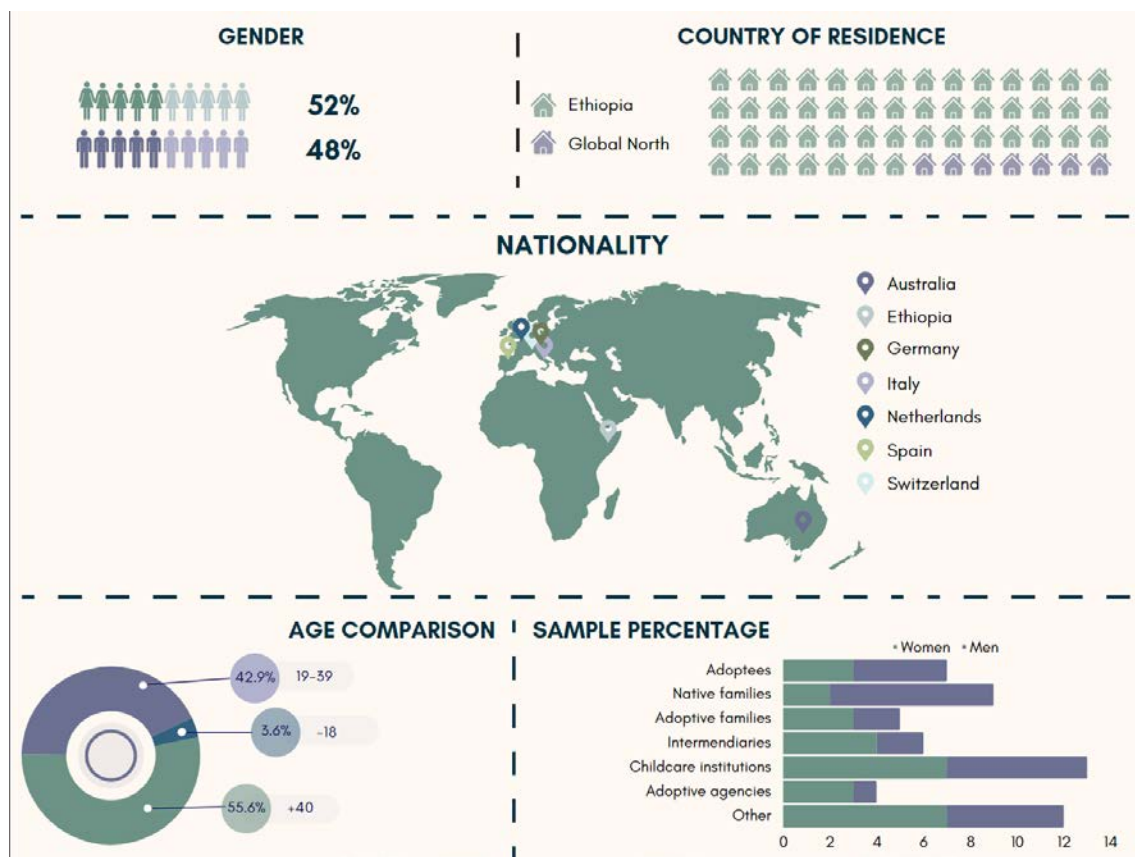
The nine members of native families were aged between 18 and 51 years, and they had their children placed for adoption ten to fifteen years earlier. They were primarily from the regions of Addis Ababa, Oromia, and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples, which are also the locations where they were interviewed. Native families were located through adoptees, intermediaries and residential childcare institutions, who thus acted as gatekeepers. Native

families were mainly from the countryside and farmers. Their family was composed of multiple family members; they had from one to six native sons and daughters. Three interviewees were native uncles; three were native fathers; two were native mothers; one was a native sibling.

The five adoptive parents were between 40 and 56 years old and adopted six to twenty years earlier. They were from Italy and Australia. Adoptive parents were detected through an adoption agency and participant observation in Ethiopia. They were all interviewed in Addis Ababa. Two lived in Ethiopia at the time of the interview, whilst the others resided in their country of origin. Three of them have biological offspring, whilst two have one or more adopted sons or daughters. Three were mothers; two were fathers.

The seven adoptees were aged between 15 and 36 years and were adopted nine to thirty-two years earlier. They were from Australia, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and Germany. Adoptees were located through adoptive families and participant observation in Ethiopia. They were all interviewed in Addis Ababa. Two lived in Ethiopia at the time of the interview, whilst the others reside in their country of adoption. Five have native siblings. Three were women; four were men. Three were minors, two were young adults, and two were adults.

The six intermediaries were aged between 26 and 48 years. They started working on post-adoption from ten to one year before the interview and are all Ethiopians. Intermediaries were located through participant observation, websites and word of mouth. Five have previous experience working in the inter-country adoption sector. Four are women, and two are men. All speak at least one Ethiopian language (Amharic) and another foreign language: four speak English, two Italian. Four have lived or experienced extended stays in a Global North country. Two were institutionalised children: one was inter-country adopted, and the other stayed in the institute until major age was reached.

The thirteen childcare institutions' personnel participants were from eight residential childcare institutions. Six were still active, whilst two closed down. In three of them, participant observation was conducted. Of thirteen participants, two worked in no longer active institutions. Nine participants are Ethiopian, and four are from a Global North country. Six are men, and seven are women.

The four participants from the adoption agencies were from three different agencies. Three were still active organisations working in the country. All participants were from the Global North. Three were women.

Twelve other participants were included in this research because of their knowledge and expertise in an area of the inter-country adoption sector. All were Ethiopians; seven were women, and five were men. Six had expertise in adoption and child protection, two in inter-country adoption Ethiopian law, and four in post-adoption and child institutionalisation. Two were employed in the academic sector, two in the legal sector, one in the MOWCYA, three in the child protection sector, and the remaining four were employed in other activities but had first-hand knowledge of Ethiopian customary adoption praxes, institutionalisation, pre and post-adoption.

The standard qualitative interview was in depth, and funnel-structured, intended to elicit participants. Besides, the long stay allowed to conduct multiple interviews over an extended time. Multiple interviews provided further insight into participants' knowledge and included preliminary interviews, follow-up interviews, and conversational interviews.

Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Audio-recorded transcriptions were completed with interview scripts taken during and after the interview and recording notes concerning non-verbal communication and situational details. Eight participants (one adoptive mother, two adoptees, three adoption agents, and two intermediaries) refused to be audio-recorded to further assure their anonymity and privacy. In such cases, extensive written notes of the interview took place, which included dialogues and verbatim quoted talk. After the interview, the researcher audio-recorded a recap, noted further relevant details, and added information on non-verbal communication and situational information. In both cases, the researcher focused on minimising participants' discomfort and supporting their confidence and the relevance of their contribution (Tuckett, 2005).

After the interview, information was noted in a coded sheet structured to include fieldnotes and grant participants anonymity. The sheet gathered five sets of information: a) participant and interview's details; b) interview transcription; c) non-verbal communication and relevant events during the interview; d) asides and commentaries; and e) in-process considerations. Transcriptions were in the original language of the interview, whilst the other information was noted in English.

Archive ethnography

The research included ethnographic research within the archives of the residential childcare centres. The archive has been a source of precious data to grasp background information on the process of abandonment and adoption within orphanages.

Archive ethnography is relevant to this study because the archive is the result of a Western need to preserve information and the expression of a controlling device. This normative tool dissects information and life histories "to testify to and record the contact, the forms of domination, the violence and the power of the racial and cultural superiority of the metropolises over their colonial subjects" (Cunha, 2006, p. 4). Starr (1992) argues that the archive creates distinctions by drawing lines: it categorizes what is considered in compliance with regulations and what is not, defines a/normativity, and how the population fits in it. These lines, far from remaining abstract concepts, are the basis and the corpus of social and political decisions that brought social categories from written words to real life. As Starr points out, "we neither ordinarily think about nor act upon the categories of social life; we act and think within them" (1992, pp. 264-265).

For these reasons, archives reveal insights and practices that fit into social categories and do not. Each taxonomy is a skilful social construction ideated to create specific groups in opposition and continuity with each other. That is why looking at "colonial archives as cross-sections of contested knowledge" (Stoler, 2002, p. 87) highlights "reliable 'sources', what constituted 'enough' evidence and what – in the absence of information – could be filled in to make a credible plot" (Stoler, 2002, p. 103). This exercise is essential to distinguish causal and consequential events and understand reciprocal influences, as "these economies of signs and practices have to be situated in the intimacy of the local contexts that gave them life" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003, p. 161). Archives give back the heterogeneity of narrations, "depictions of living things, of vibrant ritual activities, of expressions of collective affect, effort, effect" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2003, p. 161). During archive collection, children's information is divided and reconstructed to let them fit as much as possible in the category of the 'adoptable child' as receiving countries define it.

An example of how helpful archive research could be in child circulation practices comes from Albini's investigation of the ancient archive of an Italian hospital in Milan (2012). From the data analysis, Albini detects patterns and changes in folder compilation, highlighting how hospitals developed a distinctive institutional and administrative autonomy in dealing with child circulation and abandonment phenomena whilst respecting their traditional role.

During this study, the researcher carried out archive ethnography in one residential childcare institution in Addis Ababa, which granted access to post-adoption reports received in 2018 and 2019. Chapter Six presents an exploration of such documentation. Furthermore, post-adoption reports' extracts display why post-adoption reports are so relevant to this study and the participants involved.

Within this research project, ethnographic archive analysis is subordinate and complementary to the other research methods. It provides heterogeneity behind the classification and reassembling of bullet points and units used to align life with hegemonic narratives that convey experiences. In this mechanism, children's PARs take to the surface silent or counterfeit information and make evident connections between reported information and lived experiences (Beneduce and Taliani, 2013).

The case study

This thesis uses the case study as a tool for representation. Scholars described it as a post-positivist situated method (Stake, 2005) with more similarities than differences from ethnography because of its holistic, primarily interpretative and ground-based nature (Willig, 2001). However, Hammersley (2013), in a long process of re-evaluation of the ethnographic method, describes case studies as a choice of data collection and analysis to investigate atypical or small targets (see also Liamputtong, 2007; Grbich, 2004). In terms of what questions the case study should answer, Willig (2001) and Thomas and Myers (2015) focus more on the reasons and methods of the analysed phenomenon – 'why' and 'how' –, even though they considered it a valuable tool to grasp a holistic interpretation and insights on the chosen topic. Different scholars underline the multiple nature and extent of case studies (Hammersley, 2016; Thomas and Myers, 2015; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gomm et al., 2009) and how they could be adaptable to highly different contexts. This significant difference in positions and opinions surrounding case studies led to a more general definition of small-scale research.

In this thesis, the case study has been deployed as a representational tool in chapter Seven, where it is narrated the adoption story of Samuel. The story, narrated by all the participants involved in Samuel's adoption, represents the tension arising from the accounts of the adoptive triad. In this case, the adoption story's holistic account underlines different participants' perspectives and understandings, which alternate with analysis sections to explore the main themes arising from it.

Data Analysis

Before starting data analysis, data and personal information were securely stored. The transcription process included a coding system for participants in the research to grant anonymity and privacy. To further protect their privacy, names were changed and genders randomly inverted.

Two different data analyses were carried on. The first data analysis focuses on participant observation and interview findings, whilst the second addresses the specific archive ethnography concerning post-adoption reports.

The primary tool used to carry out the first data analysis was the software NVIVO. Findings were uploaded and organised thematically. Interviews' macro themes and analytical memos offered initial guidance to structure horizontal descriptive nodes and sub-nodes. Early-stage descriptive samplings also mirrored the conceptual organisation of the first draft of this thesis. Although the raw data was fairly comparable and triangulable since the beginning because the fieldwork allowed the data to reach a point of saturation, the nature of this research raised a high level of interlinked sub-themes and sub-categories. This preliminary stage of semi-open coding followed a first and second round of focused coding and pile sorting (Emerson et al., 2011), which enabled further elaboration on the theoretical nodes. The analytical approach mainly relied on data triangulation to improve the accuracy and consistency: whilst many themes emerged as relevant and of interest (i.e., child mobility during the Derg regime), the definitive themes and categories were the ones substantiated by participants belonging to different groups (i.e., native family, intermediary, childcare institution staff) and multiple sources (i.e., participant observation, interviews).

The second data analysis was manual. The analysis was carried out with the sole presumption that post-adoption reports (PARs) were crucial for several native families. Therefore, data analysis was exploratory, mainly based on the grounded theory approach of open coding, focus coding and pile sorting (Emerson et al., 2011). In line with the analysis of the first data set, analytical memos were integrated to provide a preliminary structure for the analytical process. This analysis specifically contributes to understand why post-adoption reports emerged as crucially important for native families, and which information they might provide them with. Fragments offered a descriptive insight of the information contained in such documents (see chapter Six).

There was a third level of analysis, which comprises the linkages between nodes and sub-nodes of the first and second data sets. The aim here was to see to what extent PARs were relevant to the participants of this research. Therefore, this analysis was structured on themes such as 'kin tie', 'symbolic bond', 'tool for reconnection', and 'document with clues', which were integrated with the final analytical version of this thesis.

3.4   Practising ethics research: considerations

After introducing the methodology and methods employed in this research, this section aims to bring together a brief guide of ethical principles that steered how to negotiate ethical issues in practice during this research.

Given the interpretative stand of this investigation, this section engages with ethical approaches to address several points a researcher should be aware of in reproducing knowledge and negotiating her interactions with the research participants. Specifically, this section addresses issues related to reflexivity, communication, the ethical implications of in-depth interviews involving children in social research, and the politics and ethics of representation.

Reflexivity: ethical co/implications of the presence of the researcher on the field

One of the most problematic and criticised characteristics of the ethnographic approach is the role of subjectivity in data collection. As explicated by Collier and Collier (1986), the extreme flexibility and 'openness' permitted by socio-constructivism might lead the researcher to face a "distortion on observation" (1986, p. 153) or cultural bias, and allow subjectivity to influence and 'contaminate' outcomes. Nonetheless, human interactions are acknowledged as part of qualitative research because the emic element is crucial to harmonising encounters with diverse knowledges and perspectives. Therefore, elements of subjectivity are unavoidable. The only countermeasure the researcher might take to defend the credibility of her work is the awareness of the existing reciprocal influence between the subjects involved and the social context she investigates (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Knowledge has been discussed as the result of a creative co-construction process involving the researcher's 'self' in a specific context (Liamputtong, 2007). Therefore, reflexivity has been recognised as crucial to

assembling social knowledge (Skovdal and Abebe, 2012) and negotiating the researcher's role in power inequality, positioning, data management and analysis (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). Approaching knowledge as the result of a co-constructive process also contributes to addressing the impact of informants in depicting "the nature of knowledge encounters" (Jovchelovitch, 2002) and the colonial and local implications when conducting international research (Sultana, 2007) from a (post)colonial feminist stand. Abebe and Skovdal present an excellent example of how "ethnicity was experienced" during their fieldwork in Kenya (Skovdal and Abebe, 2012, p. 86). For example:

> As a Caucasian, born, raised and educated in the Global North, Skovdal had
> to enter the field in Kenya with an awareness of his position as 'other' and an
> outsider. As an outsider, he constantly had to negotiate the politics of
> representation, which called for reflexivity and a constant awareness of his
> positioning amongst the children, their guardians and the community as a
> whole. (Skovdal and Abebe, 2012, p. 87)

Whilst Skovdal had to legitimise his presence, and the power imbalance in the research context as an outsider, Abebe, as an Ethiopian person himself, had to negotiate his role as an 'outsider from inside' (Skovdal and Abebe, 2012). Indeed, factors like ethnic and linguistic belonging, institutional or governmental affiliation, and critical questioning could penalise the presence of 'insider-outsider' researchers and limit their access to information (Geleta, 2014). Nonetheless, the reactivity generated by the researcher's presence also produces unexpected outcomes that are a source of information (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Communication and power in linguistic interactions

In terms of linguistic choices, this study, which was conducted in Amharic, English and Italian, required added efforts to recentre power communication. This investigation considers the knowledge of local language(s) crucial when it comes to participant observation and cross-cultural research. The words and linguistic choice that participants make to share their knowledges and experiences are essential to catch the quality of their understanding and perspective (Willig, 2001). According to Piasere (2002), the researcher should apply an "intentional, autonomous extension of experience" (Mach, 2017, p. 202) to grasp cognitive-experiential schemes and co-construct daily-life praxes in unfamiliar settings to generate transversal "ideation of intercultural connections" (Remotti, 1990, p. 169). Mach's theory of

meaning is based upon a notion of dynamic and circular production of knowledge, subjective theories influenced and shaped by empirical outcomes of introjected experiences. This practical interpretation of knowledge elaboration benefits from a certain level of language sensibility, which maintains participants in a preferential condition and gives the researcher a multifaceted understanding of ideas and insights (Watson, 2004). Having a knowledge of the local language also simplifies the access to settings and contexts, and shows the participants the 'efforts' that the researcher is making, thus displaying more seriousness in approaching the field as a long-term activity and engagement (Herzfeld, 2012).

Finally, in more practical terms, it is acknowledged the colonial linguistic impact of English and Italian and that many participants might not speak them. The preparation to this research engaged therefore with three years of study of the Amharic language with the support of grammars, dictionaries, native and fluent speakers, and intensive Amharic classes in Addis Ababa in 2017 and 2018. Nevertheless, given that the researcher's level of understanding does not match her speaking ability, it was looked for support when needed. Likewise, linguistic intermediation was provided when conversations in other Ethiopian languages occurred to avoid misunderstandings. The participants to this study were generally at least bilingual[34]. Whilst there was a preference to speak English or Italian (which, it is assumed, also reflected the researcher's language abilities), when a concept was complex to translate or explain in a foreign language, Ethiopian participants 'switched' to Amharic. During the research, it was possible to operate in Italian and English, whilst the researcher's Amharic is passable.

The Amharic language has been chosen because is the official statutory language of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Amharic is just one of the more than eighty-two languages spoken in Ethiopia. Its formal predominance over other equally worthy Ethiopian-based languages is a reason for debates in the country. Nevertheless, it works as a common language for many, and represents an essential access point for the researcher. Knowing the language and its history proved crucial for communicating more straightforwardly and better understanding the Ethiopian socio-cultural environments and peculiarities.

These matters connect to the theoretical strands of this research, which aim to explicate and define the deconstructivist approach used to create and negotiate inter-subjective and collective categories of knowledge from a (post)colonial feminist perspective.

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[34] Participants to this study might master one or more European languages, one or more Ethiopian languages, or both.

Exploring the ethics of in-depth interviews

Apart from the 'technicalities' related to the ethical concerns that a qualitative researcher must tackle in order to conduct a study, there were other aspects of this fieldwork that interested the researcher's work, more related to the respect, care and sensibility of an (even temporary) relationship that includes the exchange of intimate experiences. This aspect is relevant because self-disclosure and reciprocity were crucial elements of this study.

Transparency was key to making explicit intentions, reasons, methods, and the genuine interest in understanding better a phenomenon that has been observed from 'the other perspective' in the Global North and would not be entirely (or even partially) grasped without participants' knowledge. The interview method interprets such interaction foremost as a time of reciprocation because this research argues that vulnerability (as in the capability of being open about emotions and information that might or had hurt you) cannot be shared if, to the other side, you do not have someone able to receive it. On the other hand, being emotionally available might be exhausting and emotionally draining, particularly after extended fieldwork.

Going back to the field as a mother with a baby was also a game-changer in this research. Having a breastfed baby on the field meant adjusting the schedule according to his needs and disclosing his presence to the participants. This aspect had some interesting side effects. When interviewing women, part of our conversation before or after the interview focused on accommodations, where the father was, and what kind of childcare was available during participant observation and interviews. During an interview one participant, a mother, looked at her clock and offered to interrupt the interview because it was almost lunchtime, and she assumed the researcher had to go home to breastfeed.

Men were more inclined to refer to the researcher's mother's role as a factor that might improve sympathy for the struggle Ethiopian birth mothers experienced when they relinquished their children. Women were instead more focused on explaining the unspoken differences between the researcher and the participant's child-care praxes. All of them felt that the researcher being a mother increased her legitimacy of researching this topic. As these accounts show, interviews were organised and structured to produce data but were also committed to producing as much meaningful interaction for both participants entangled in such encounters: the researcher and the knowledge-holder(s).

Ethic research involving children

The choice of involving children in the research study could be challenged under several aspects, namely ethical implications, data collection, and data analysis. At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge and include children's experiences and involvement in their family organisation. Even though children are often not directly concerned in decisional terms, they represent the *fil rouge* of adoption and carry sensorial practices, memories, and emic perspectives.

In this study, children are vital informants because of their knowledgeable perception of the aspects investigated, such as belongingness, intimate kin geographies, family ties' reconfiguration and re-organisation, power relations, projects and projections.

As underlined in the literature review in chapter Two, the child (and her circulation) plays a role in modelling alliances, relationships, and economic investments, as well as strategies, discourses and logics of child transfer around her. In this dynamic, this study argues that the 'gift child' is both the subject and object of her mobility in the entanglement of adoptive and native families' different objectives. This assumption offers a quest for what lies 'behind and beyond the child'. The child's experience is crucial in deconstructing and analysing from a feminist perspective the effects of power and (post)coloniality on her mobility and adoption as a meaning-making experience. Such considerations include adoptees and adoptees-to-be, or institutionalised children, who wish to be adopted abroad but whose adoption cannot be processed because of the inter-country adoption ban in 2018.

This study claims their subjectivities need to be considered as dynamic narrations instead of passive experiences related to child circulation and praxes. Besides, underage adoptees involved in the research reclaim their agency and negotiate their decisional power within their kin, particularly in post-adoption, as explored in chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

Working with children might also raise ethical issues - for instance, the disclosure of sensitive information, emotional distress or strain, feelings of anxiety and self-doubt. Besides, research that includes minors also needs to be sensible about power balance, informed consent, and the "circumstances of production, circulation and consumption" (Mitchell, 2006, p. 63) of information concerning children.

For this reason, part of the preliminary fieldwork focused on defining the participants' involvement and potential risks' mitigation. Underage institutionalised children and adoptees were involved in interviews when their legal guardians and the child wanted to share her

experience. On such occasions, guardians and children were briefed on the interview's structure and progression. Besides, the interviewees respected their communication needs and pace. A preliminary assessment of potential harm to subjects was conducted in collaboration with children's guardians, who contributed to setting up the best conditions to let children externalise their experiences in a safe environment. Potential risks during participant observation with children were mainly two.

First, children may be unaware of the entire adoption system in legal and economic terms. Second, they may experience emotional strain and distress. To tackle these issues, the focus of children's activities and discourses did not directly address their future experiences or the adoption process *per se*. It addresses their perspectives, involvement, participation and experience of the care and adoption system. Furthermore, the relationship between the researcher and the children was "mindful of the implications of the research encounter for children's lives and the legacy left" (Abebe and Bessell, 2014, p. 130), particularly with minors that had already experienced dislocation, parental loss or abandonment, such as adoptees and institutionalised children. For what concerns the latter category, children were involved in multi-modal recreational activities agreed with agencies and childcare institutions' staff. Besides, activities proposed by the children were encouraged to suit individual competencies, knowledge, and interests (Smith, 2015). However, a balance between protection and involvement was maintained, thus respecting each child's vulnerability and resilience.

Politic(s) and ethic(s) of representation

A key element of this research was the concept of representation, here addressed as a constructed element influenced by all the actors entailed: the subjects involved (including the researcher), the emotions' refraction, and the disclosure.

The core of this research brought participants to share personal accounts and events. At the moment of writing, when encounters turn into data and personal interpretations are made public, relationships in the field can be jeopardised and negatively affected by ethnographic objectification (Mosse, 2006). Writing typifies the power imbalance of the relationship between researcher and participants. This study argues that the problem does not involve only the exotic perspective of 'writing about other cultures' but, more generally, 'writing about others'. Particularly when the 'otherness' should encase and generalise other people's experiences. It appears difficult – if not impossible – to genuinely maintain a condition of

un/biased and collaborative narration whilst translating participant observation and personal interviews from first-hand data to analytic work. At the same time, the researcher must be thoughtful of how participants' experiences translate into data.

This research disagrees with the idea that information we collect during the first encounters has to be definitive, not mutable, and 'more revealing' than others. This point of view is methodologically in line with the prolonged presence of the researcher on the field, and it does not refer only to the way participants shared information, but eventually how the researcher gets used to certain information that, as already anticipated, can be disturbing whilst collecting first hand data from participants. The emotional refraction does not necessarily imply a lack of accountability, but instead the need to be contemplated as a factor: participants can narrate their own experiences with consent and awareness, no matter the emotional reaction these recollections produce – as long as they are not harmful. Of course, it is the researcher's responsibility to respect whether participants share information they would rather keep for themselves. In their study on conducting sensitive research, Liamputtong et al. (2007) tackle the issue of the 'untold stories' that might enter the interview as liberatory acts, as this quotation from their study suggests:

> … so the untold stories are often about being given permission to talk about the topics that you are not really supposed to talk about and being given permission by someone who wants to know, someone who you hope will be a bit impartial and unbiased, will listen and whose job isn't to solve a problem but just to listen. (Liamputtong et al., 2007, p. 338).

Participants might interpret interviews as spaces for free interaction and then regret sharing certain information. The researcher respected such choices or 'changes of the hearth', and the 'untold stories' that made the interviewee feel uncomfortable were not part of the representations of participants' knowledge or experience.

As already stated, this research argues that the socio-cultural researcher role should imply a knowledge re-organisation rather than its production. Because of the researcher's positioning, the representational choices are made clear and explicit to the participants. Furthermore, participants who want to be made aware of the results will have access to any publication released due to the research and offer the option of knowing more about the research findings through informative meetings.

In this study, representation and data gathering are inextricably connected. Their intersection in the researcher's methodological choice establishes a safe space and time to conduct interviews. Participants are made aware of the interviews' engaging rules. For instance, silence is allowed, and the conversation is not tied to a predetermined time - which means the person does not have to feel forced to stay in that talk more than she wants. Participants are free to avoid topics that make them feel uncomfortable. Interviews are open and qualitative. Participants are not restricted to answer to a rigorous set of questions. This approach produced a trustworthy relationship because participants felt involved in a quest for a better understanding of the topic and their knowledge of it more than involved in a data extrapolation process. An introductory meeting or conversation occurred before each interview and was focused on setting an atmosphere that privileged relation-building interactions, made participants sure their boundaries were defined and respected and explained any conflict of interest. To reduce power imbalance, the interview was set to be guided by both subjects when possible. Establishing a safe space also meant treating shared information with respect and therefore avoiding information's dissemination, coding data before being stored, and guaranteeing anonymity. This methodological choice is pertinent to the research's essential questions, which insist on competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

The representational process takes place during the time spent with participants and considers how the researcher presents, represents or discloses other information. Empathic involvement comes with limits and boundaries that concern the risk of disclosure of other elements, such as gatekeepers' disclosure. This concerned in particular agencies, childcare institutions, and their staff. During the preliminary research, adoptive and native families frequently asked for information about the conduct of these organisations. Because of their right to privacy, institutional subjects are considered and treated as the other participants, including informed consent and anonymity. To protect their identity, a significant number of agencies and organisations were involved from the very beginning to ensure none would be immediately recognisable when describing their activities and locations. Organisations could be described in terms of different approaches, main narratives and procedures about the adoptive praxes in Ethiopia, but no data concerning their dimension, importance, geographical collocation and staff is released, nor distinguishable historical events.

3.5   Conclusion

This chapter presented an overview of this research's methodology. It introduced the research paradigm and the **theoretical perspectives of this study in three different sections.**

The first section focused on ontology and epistemology, socio-constructivism, and the ethnographic method, which is presented and described as intended and implemented during the research. The second section, the toolbox, described step-by-step the different methods implemented in this research and their contribution to creating a mixed qualitative-qualitative methods structure (see Table 1). This section also offered indications about the analytical process to sort out the findings.

Table 1: research mixed qualitative-qualitative methods.

TABLE OF METHODS				
METHODS	UNIT	No. OF UNITS	TIME OF DATA COLLECTION	REGION OF DATA COLLECTION
PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION	No. of sites	4	October 2017 – December 2019	• Addis Abeba
INTERVIEWS	No. of participants	56	October 2017 – December 2019	• Addis Abeba • Oromia • SNNPR*
ARCHIVE ETHNOGRAPHY	No. of Post-Adoption Reports	32	September 2019	Aaddis Abeba
CASE STUDY	No. of persons directly involved in the reconnection event	14	August 2019 – December 2019	• Addis Abeba • SNNPR*

* Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region.

The final section explored the ethical standpoints and their implementation during fieldwork and data storage. Furthermore, it illustrates the political and ethical challenges of representation of this work in exploring the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

Chapter 4. Conceptual foundations of the notion of adoption in Ethiopia

4.1 Introduction

Chapters Two and Three introduced the epistemological, ontological and methodological perspectives used in this study to address inter-country adoption and post-adoption in Ethiopia. It is argued that the logics of child transfer and mobility in Ethiopia might be understood only by re-centring the discourse where such praxes occur. Moreover, it is believed that the constructivist perspective is essential to appreciate the different interpretations of inter-country adoption from different socio-cultural, economic, and geo-political contexts.

This chapter takes from such theoretical ground to investigate "the wider logic underlying child relocation and non-parental residence amongst population experiencing poverty" (Boyden, 2013, p. 582). To re-centre child mobility from an Ethio-centred perspective, this chapter offers an overview of the most common practices of Ethiopian informal childcare and mobility. Recent publications tend to interpret inter-country adoption understanding in Ethiopia as an almost direct transposition of the customary practice of child transfer *guddifaachaa* (Bodja and Gleason, 2020). Even though there is a predominant use of *guddifaachaa*, this research argues that in Ethiopia, childcare and relocation thrive from a broader social support system that encompasses alternative childcare and fictive kinship without being limited to this.

This chapter illustrates childcare in Ethiopia as a collective experience, and child circulation is central and commonly experienced in childcaring praxes in the country. Before entering the discourse, two considerations concerning the structure of this chapter are exposed. The first concerns the source of information gathered within this part of the research, and the second concerns how information is exposed.

With regard to the first consideration, the initial intention was to rely uniquely on literature and draw from there the fundamental concepts of this chapter. However, on the one hand, literature on the topic was scarce; on the other, participants contributed to deconstructing central notions related to childcare in Ethiopia. Consequently, this chapter inhabits the liminal area between theoretical and empirical, given that it draws from theoretical and empirical data to produce a representation of alternative childcare and fictive kinship in Ethiopia. The

second consideration is the structure of the chapter. The core idea of this thesis is to tell an already known child mobility practice, such as inter-country adoption, from an Ethiopian-centred perspective. To understand information about inter-country adoption from Ethiopia, it is deemed necessary to become acquainted with the logics underlying child relocation and non-parental residence in Ethiopia. This study suggests that child-care praxes are closely connected to specific socio-cultural notions of individual, relationship, networks and society. This approach asks for a preliminary redefinition of support, reciprocity, and mutual aid to then move on to collective practices of childcare and known praxes of fictive kinship. This process can be described as a theoretical pyramid in which each layer builds on the previous one(s) and where the direction is towards a sustained, rigorous, and comprehensive understanding of child mobility and inter-country adoption in Ethiopia (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: pyramidal prospect of the notion of adoption in Ethiopia.
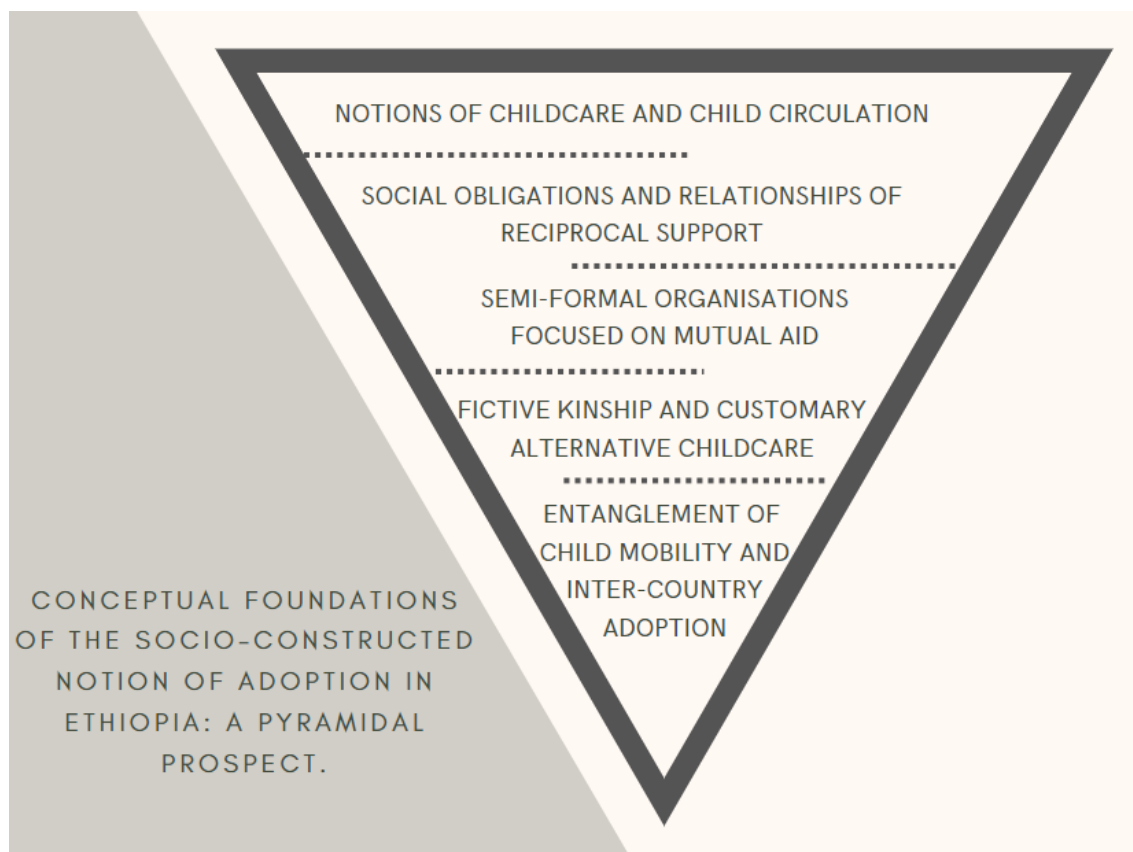
This chapter first offers an introductory overview of child circulation specifics within the Ethiopian context; mainly, it introduces the theoretical choice to rely mostly on geo-located literature. The literature on the topic is replete with studies on child mobility, orphanhood and adoption from a continental perspective. These studies build on evident analogies within Sub-Saharan Africa, where local policies and structures often resemble one another due to the

colonial heritage and similarities in distant ethic practices. Whilst this is undeniable, such broad approaches tend to reduce local stories to a single continental narrative on adoption. The choice for this investigation was instead to privilege a lens with a regional focus, insisting on Ethiopian narratives that might or might not align with the continental ones. Authors were thus selected to abide by this principle, privileging Ethiopian voices, consciously excluding scholars whose voices spoke for the African continent but whose views do not do enough justice to Ethiopian perspective and peculiarities.

Secondly, it outlines the concept of child circulation in Ethiopia, thus focusing on the concept of childcare. This part addresses child circulation as a praxis that might be difficult to catch through the official figure, and explores the elements that different praxes of Ethiopian child mobility might have in common. It mainly focuses on child circulation as a multi-dimensional and intergenerational praxis potentially independent from conditions of hardship and based on assumptions of filial and societal obligations of reciprocity.

Thirdly, it explores child-care dynamics within the social networks, namely social obligations and mutual support within families and communities, that do not envisage a parental right transfer from the family of origin to the fostering one. It introduces concepts like shared parenting and social resilience and sheds light on extended families' ability to provide care for children in temporary or permanent conditions of vulnerability.

The fourth section reviews the most known types of social association and their ability to provide families with social, financial and moral support. This chapter explores the existence of semi-formal organisations whose tasks are based on mutual aid. Such organisations are addressed as relevant in compliance with participants' accounts and participant observation's findings.

The fifth section offers as much as a possible comprehensive overview of fictive kinship and customary alternative childcare. This part deals with the second-hand material built over different empirical experiences and therefore has the double intent to delimit the knowledge on such topic and build some common ground on its interpretation. This work of description introduces the following section, which analyses in more detail the intertwining of local 'customary' understandings of fictive kinship and child mobility with formal inter-country adoption regulations, conceptualisation and implementation in Ethiopia. This part illustrates the distinctive characteristics of inter-country adoption provisions in Ethiopia, their origins and history.

The last and conclusive section intends to retrace the contents of the chapter. It points out interconnections between the different pieces of evidence piled up in the chapter, the legal interpretations of inter-country adoption, and its potential discrepancies with the Global North-oriented application and understanding of such practice. Such considerations are of paramount importance to introducing the next chapter, which focuses on the first stage in adopting children who have extended family, which is the separation between the child and her guardian.

This chapter intends to underline a particular conceptual understanding: kinship, childhood, and social cohesion are categories deeply rooted in their geographical, socio-cultural, and economic context. Within this perspective, notions related to these categories are adapted and shaped by individual and collective experience and influence the conceptions and interpretations of other related experiences. This part intends to extrapolate the 'Ethiopian' multi-dimensional, socio-culturally and geographically positioned interpretation of such categories. It explains why families who perform inter-country adoption might expect social reciprocity and connection, and how such different understandings are generated. This study argues that these considerations lead to the prevailing of a circular narrative of inter-country adoption from native families' perspective.

The chapter focuses on informal child-care strategies and semi-formal mutual aid organisations; therefore, it deliberately avoided an in-depth look at formal alternative childcare – such as formalised fostering and domestic adoption, whose implementation increased during and after the ban on inter-country adoption.

4.2   Child mobility in Ethiopia: figures and theoretical choices

Communities have structured informal and semi-formal customary strategies to preserve children's presence and well-being. This research considers this feature a collective resource in the re-productive functioning of groups. Moreover, appropriate childhood is not necessarily fixed spatially within stable family units. Conversely, long-standing strategies of child mobility within the Ethiopian socio-cultural and economic contexts should be understood as part of a moral economy that does not conflate child circulation, particularly fictive kinship, with an ending of socio-relational ties. Such an exchange system includes mutual aid to support families who may experience hardship, kinship care provided by the extended family, and

alternative and fictive kinship care. However, it is problematic to identify the child transfer trajectories mainly because the majority of the child mobility practices answers to customary, informal agreements. Therefore, movements between households are not officially denounced by the authorities. This point is evident starting from children's living arrangements data. According to official figures from the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS, 2016), one in ten children under 18 is not living with a biological parent. Another issue is related to the ability of the government to localise and monitor Ethiopian's childhood population. For instance, the same study reports that "at the time of the survey, 3% of children under age five were registered with the civil authorities. Two in three of these children have birth certificates"[35] (EDHS, 2016, p. 14). These figures are highly complex to extrapolate because child fostering and data about births are ubiquitous but rarely officially recognised and registered by the authorities. Nonetheless, even though these official figures are not very reliable, they might give an idea of the tip of the iceberg of a broader phenomenon.

These aspects of Ethiopian childcare are essential to this study because they support the initial hypothesis that there is a divergence between the socio-cultural perceptions and reasons that lead Ethiopians to give their children into adoption and those framing the decision by couples in the Global South to adopt. This divergence results in different expectations and consequent misunderstandings that characterise two competing narratives: a circular Ethiopian post-adoption understanding, which entails the search for reconnections with children adopted

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[35] This low birth certificate coverage might be explained by several factors. On the bureaucratic side, the 1960s Ethiopian Civil Code already contained provisions regarding birth registrations. However, it was never implemented (Woldemaryam, 2021; Eshetie, 2020). In 2012 and 2017, the Proclamation on civil registration and national identification was enacted (Proclamation n. 1049/2017; Proclamation n. 760/2012). Federal provisions focused on Registration of Vital Events and National Identity revisited the previous proclamations to simplify the process and make it more accessible to the population (ENA, 2018b). In 2014, the Ethiopian government established the Federal Vital Events Registration Agency (VERA) to oversee this process (Yihdego et al., 2020), and, in 2016, it launched its civil registration and vital statistics, called CRVS (Bhatia et al., 2017). On the practical side, the Ethiopian population struggle to access registration for infrastructural, logistical, political and economic reasons (Yihdego et al., 2020 ; Abay and Gebre-egziabher, 2020). However, socio-cultural factors play a relevant role as well. Whilst Eshetie (2020) argues that, in Ethiopia, "the society does not get the chance to appreciate the importance of civil registration and as a result, there are no norms of that" (Eshetie, 2020, p.186), an Ethiopian study underlines that the "rationales and objectives of civil registration laws in many cases do not reflect current social and cultural realities" because they are "derivatives" of laws and regulations "inherited from the colonial times" (Jibril, 2019, p. 13). In line with these Ethiopian-informed investigations, this research envisages the CRVS as a postcolonial device that answers to Western-centred bureaucratic logics of population control and service supply. Such a device does not provide immediate benefits to the population and is somewhat alien to the organisation and structure of the majority of the Ethiopian population. This fact may explain such low birth certificate coverage and be the cause of many of the abovementioned issues.

abroad; and a normative, prevailing linear imaginary of adoption as intended in the Global North.

This chapter is inspired by Ethiopian participants' cognitive lens about notions, perceptions, interpretations of events and interactions. Given the broad and diverse reality of Ethiopian society and the variations that can be applied to the same practice when adapted to a specific area, data collected from qualitative interviews is corroborated by studies conducted within the Ethiopian socio-cultural context. Concerning kinship and childcare, participants' representation and categorisation stretch from personal experience to national understandings, moving through ethnic traditional or adapted practices. Indeed, this study embraces participants' cognitive choice of using references to the national level as the 'biggest' picture and limits references to authors that address childcare and child circulation in Sub-Saharan Africa. This conceptual choice thrives from the very participants' considerations and references concerning the analogies and differences that characterise the Ethiopian experience about the continent trends.

On the one hand, the colonial hegemony imposed homogenised Western-centred bureaucratic and infrastructural constructions that differed only from the coloniser's predilections rather than the colonised population. For instance, British occupied territories had a predisposition for an infrastructural occupation, whilst the French favoured cultural domination. African post-independentism was affected by neo-colonial SAP implementation, conditioned and humanitarian aid, which protracted the continent's exploitation and applied standard intervention models rather than adapting to countries' specificities. The legacy of such logics was pervasive and marked African countries' economies, politics and policies.

On the other hand, the colonial geographical and national division of the African regions often did not represent the socio-cultural reality of the territory. Continental internal mobility and borderless ethnic groups' specifiers survived to nationalism(s), and many features and philosophies concerning mutual aid, social network and kinship dynamics crosscut several regions and areas in the continent. Nonetheless, African countries and ethnic groups are not culturally homogeneous. Even when cultural practices are allegedly shared between distant groups, specific nuances and variations in meanings appear depending on the contexts. Consequently, uniformising such praxes to the continental, dominant understanding might limit the comprehension of a geographically defined area. Nonetheless, such an approach provides a practical way to address understandings in countries like Ethiopia, which counts

more than eighty-two ethnic groups and a possible likewise amount of, for instance, child-care praxes.

Considering analogies and differences in Sub-Saharan Africa anticipates the risk of over-generalisation and Eurocentric interpretation. However, a continental gaze does not prevent insensitivity to contextual and cultural differences, an attitude that has been disclosed by authors such as Varnis (2001), who complains about the use of certain notions – such as 'community' – as "nebulous" (Varnis, 2001, p.150) and not identified on a local/national level. This chapter engages with Ethiopia-focused literature and studies to respect such perspective and provide a punctual, local understanding of such praxes. Eventually, this approach keeps apart authors relevant to this study (i.e., Foster, 2000; Razy, 2010; Görög-Karady, 1997) and pointedly cited in studies concerning child circulation and Orphan and Vulnerable Children (hereafter, OVC) who mainly refer to continental or other regions' trends and analysis.

4.3   Notions of childcare and mobility in Ethiopia

A finding that arose from many interviews and has been underlined by other studies (Quentin and Schnek, 1987; Gebre, 2007; Abebe and Aase, 2007; Getahun, 2011) is that the Ethiopian welfare system is unable to offer good formal welfare services to extended families caring for OVC. In the first edition of the African Report on Child Wellbeing[36] (2008), Ethiopia ranked 23rd in the index values and ranking for protection of children[37], 40th in the index values and ranking for budgetary commitment in 2004 – 2005[38], and at the bottom of the child-friendliness index values by which African governments were ranked[39]. Abebe and Aase (2007) described the principal aspects that, starting in the 1980s, resulted in weak child protection services provided by the government. These depend heavily on humanitarian aid contributions, including the

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[36] The study published by the African Child Policy Forum (The African Report on Child Wellbeing, 2008) refers to 52 countries (not including the Federal Republic of Somalia, the Republic of South Sudan and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic) that to date (8 May, 2021) were member states of the African Union. This consideration is valid for the following figures referring to the same study.

[37] The index considers governments' performance in configuring legal and policy frameworks to protect children against harm and exploitation.

[38] The index considers governments' expenditure on health, education, vaccines, and military in the proportion of their resources.

[39] Result of a combination of the previous rankings, the child-friendliness of governments is a notion employed by the ACPF to assess governments' accountability to children and set an index of evaluation for future changes (The African Report on Child Wellbeing, 2008).

implementation of childcare institutions as a viable option for offering alternative care to vulnerable families. A sequence of droughts and famines flanked by a lack of economic and material resources to invest in social welfare undermined local child protection.

As a consequence, the government had to rely more and more heavily on charitable NGOs and institutions. However, the aims of Global North-based organisations often do not correspond to the Ethiopian child-care approach, and this limits their range of action – in both space and time. Interventions are often not sustainable. With absent or partial investment, they cannot strengthen the capacity of extended families who rely on kin spatial mobility through social networks and dynamics of mutual support. As a consequence, international actors invested their energies concerning child protection in solutions that did not envisage local child circulation as a viable option for childcare. On the one hand, interventions caused more inequality where they were conducted (Abebe, 2009b). On the other, recent studies revealed that the quality of support families expected from official organisations differed from what was offered, as discussed later in the chapter.

Given all these elements, the rooted child-care practice of relying on child circulation is still the primary source of support for families and children in Ethiopia. Indeed, kinship mobility, with distinctions between the different praxes, is widely practised in the country (Abebe and Aase, 2007; Kassa, 2017). However, there are at least three elements that child circulation applied to childcare has in common in Ethiopia: firstly, kinship mobility is not necessarily dependent on factors of hardship but rather related to mechanisms of collectivism; secondly, both child relocation and childcare rely on inter-generational relationships and are based on assumptions of filial and societal obligations of reciprocity; lastly, they are both multi-dimensional in terms of care.

Collectivism, interdependency and reproduction

Child circulation in Ethiopia is not considered a practice limited to exceptional times of hardship. On the contrary, for the child's socialisation and quality of life, it is considered essential to spend time or live with other family members in conditions of social proximity. Moreover, child circulation can be a means of offering children access to better education and training. Child circulation also allows social reproduction in childless couples and one-member family units. Indeed, local care and fostering are embedded in reproductive dynamics that aim to keep children within a specific spatial and cultural setting to contribute to reproducing the

community and its existence. When asked about local informal childcare in Ethiopia, a participant offered the Ethiopian metaphor of the lion and the spider: "When the spiders' webs unite, they can tie up a lion". The lion does not necessarily represent a danger, a threat; it may be any challenge or achievement that a single person would be unable to reach. A single individual would not be able to trap a lion in a net; it is necessary to be a collective, interact together, and regulate energies and movements in collaboration with others. Working together is the only way to reach a common goal.

This metaphor can be interpreted horizontally or vertically. The horizontal interpretation is that community members are expected and encouraged to act in solidarity. Participants have described this expression of mutual support as part of an 'Ethiopian' moral code. During an in-depth interview, one participant, the local programme director of an NGO focused on alternative childcare in Addis Ababa, also described this attitude as having a good heart, or being *kennewoch*, *ken malet*, *ken leboch*: those who think correctly, who make the right choice. For example:

> You know, it is something that you are willing to share, even if explicitly you
> do not know. (...) When you see, for example, children are on the street, you
> know, and people are not getting enough food, enough shelter, children are
> not going to school, children are not cared for, if you are a good-hearted one,
> you want to contribute with something. You (...) contribute with that, take a
> child or so, you are doing something good to the public. [Child protection
> expert, Addis Ababa, November 2019]

This belief in giving, sharing, helping, in "extending arms beyond" is regarded as a proclivity to sympathise with other persons – not only but firstly to those who are struggling – and reach out to them. Moreover, the ability to give and be involved in a collaborative relationship that values mutual support is not limited to a person's economic capacity or capability but rather encompasses a broader sense of belongingness and togetherness: "'I' can exist only if 'we' is nurtured and sustained" (Estifanos et al., 2020). When in Ethiopia, the idea of individuals sharing and reaching out to other members (of the community, neighbourhood, and extended family) has also emerged during informal discussions around social isolation, community disaggregation, youth loss of values, and neighbours' indifference within the urban context. The social implications of a gradual weakening of cohesion and communal relationships have been identified as being amongst the causes of decreasing informal practices of shared parenting amongst extended families and neighbourhoods.

Thus, each community member is a beneficiary of, and contributor to, the reproduction mechanism, and their perception, shaped through experience and exposure, is that their needs are interdependent.

The intergenerational social contract

The second common element of Ethiopian childcare and mobility is the vertical interpretation of the lion and the spider metaphor, which focuses on intergenerational relations. This study investigates this metaphor as applied to children's role within their fictive or consanguineal kin. Children are socialised and cared for in a system that relies on collaborative behaviour(s) to reach "collective survival and success". As part of the community, they are expected to contribute by completing tasks adequate to their age, energies, gender, and social position (including class, urban/rural context, and ethnic group, to name a few). Indeed, children are involved in daily community activities from early childhood. Participants often reported that with changes according to the economic and social context, the child might be expected to perform simple domestic tasks from age four. Her involvement may vary and encompass domestic chores, small informal jobs to economically support the household or involvement in the agricultural sector[40]. On their behalf, children perceive such expectations in their contribution to reproduction tasks, and that the support of adults – of kin members and neighbours – tends to depend on it (Gebru, 2009). Children are considered a key asset for their families and the wider community, particularly in rural contexts where they are crucial contributors to collective survival and reproduction in material and cultural terms. Indeed, knowledge transmission and deliberate socialisation strategies through daily life practice and observation (Jirata and Kjørholt, 2015) grant the transmission of cultural notions of responsibility that will lead with time to the exchange of roles between care-giver and care-receiver. The commitment that members of communities and extended families have to each other reinforces reciprocity and displays a long-term awareness of caregivers' welfare. A longitudinal study conducted in Ethiopia amongst children born in 1994-95 and their caregivers reveals that intergenerational obligations correspond to caregivers' expectation[41] to receive

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[40] See also : Pankhurst et al., 2016 ; Woldehanna et al., 2008.

[41] Figures show the total of the results concerning the "quite a lot" and "a lot" percentage of the Table "Caregivers' expectations of grown-up children (%)" produced with data collected during the Young Lives Round 2 survey (Tafere, 2013, p. 8).

financial assistance (73,3%), emotional support (79,4%) and care whilst getting old (86.5%) by their will-be grown-up children (Tafere, 2013). The quality of this intergenerational investment might become filial and societal obligations for the collective existence: "it is not a social contract between generations, but a societal norm that is taken for granted" (Tafere, 2013, p. 9). Indeed, the caring investment expects to be inserted into a circular system of obligations that would encourage grown-up children to return that investment. Youth seems aware of this norm and navigate childhood by positioning themselves according to specific social, economic, and spatial contexts concerning adults. During participant observation, the connection between reciprocity, intergenerational relations, participation and the enculturing process was particularly evident when children could not correctly navigate the normative societal expectations concerning their role within their family and community. Confrontations between Dagmawi, a young adoptee, and his Ethiopian stepmother Hiwot revealed that the lack of compliance between Dagmawi's behaviour and the attitude required by his urban, middle-class context took a toll on how he is perceived by his family and entourage, as fieldnotes disclose. For example:

Fieldnote:

Hiwot is the stepmother of Dagmawi.

Dagmawi is 12 years old and has Ethiopian origins but grew up in a European family unit, with European siblings, until the age of 10. Hiwot complains that Dagmawi does not 'behave' like an Ethiopian child even though he has Ethiopian somatic features, Ethiopian origins, and lives in Ethiopia.

Hiwot does not experience in her relationship with Dagmawi the socialisation features implied in reciprocity within a household in terms of significant cooperation in domestic chores – according to his age, gender and social class. She is worried he will never be accepted in Ethiopia because he does not behave as would be expected from an Ethiopian child of his age and gender. Moreover, Hiwot says Dagmawi is failing to participate in basic domestic chores that, according to his age, are doable, and this aspect will have repercussions on his ability to integrate with the Ethiopian social fabric.

Hiwot points to Dagmawi's experience as a child within a 'Western household' as the reason for his misbehaving and accepts with extreme

difficulty his European siblings' visits because they do not participate in any household activity concerning self-care and mutual support.

This element is reinforced by Hiwot's Ethiopian friends with children of Dagmawi's age. Hiwot describes her friends' children's behaviour as 'adequate', 'polite', 'good', 'wise', 'kind', and 'smart' when they are consistently taking part in family co-operation and having good marks at school. Conversely, Dagmawi is described as 'misbehaving', 'problematic', and 'lazy' because he does not comply with his tasks. In the observed discussion between Ethiopian mothers, education does not seem related to children's individual achievement but rather to collective investment. It tells that what children will achieve as workers is related to well-being and general wealth. All the mothers involved in this conversation are from the middle class. They are working as well as their husbands within local or international important organisations and receiving an Ethiopian salary (which is consistently inferior to the international workers' salary). They have young maids at home that live with the family, carry on the majority of domestic chores, and receive economic support in attending training or evening classes. [Fieldnotes, May 2019, Addis Ababa]

In Hiwot's experience as a stepmother of a European-raised Ethiopian child, expectations do not find validation because Dagmawi was not 'adequately socialised' in his early childhood. He has never been taught the 'Ethiopian way' through experience, participation and observation and to behave appropriately for his age. Therefore, Hiwot is worried Dagmawi will not successfully transition to adulthood because she feels he lacks the competence to function proficiently in the socio-cultural context where he lives and the skills he will potentially need in the future to become self-sufficient and a source of support for his family.

Dagmawi is an Ethio-descendent European boy with an Ethiopian body who lives in Addis Ababa and has incorporated a European conception of childhood. The relational difficulties between Hiwot and him echo Poluha's arguments about adults' expectations of children's "understandings of how to behave, to show respect and make priorities in different situations", thus revealing "ideology, norms and discourses that prevail in their society" (Poluha, 2004, p.16) and reproduce themselves through circular interdependence (Abebe, 2008a). Differently from Poluha's study, Dagmawi's introjected behavioural model differs from Hiwot's – and society's – expectations, who struggle to make sense of Dagmawi's experience

and integrate it with her understanding and practices of making and doing family. Hiwot and Dagmawi's experience, which has been considered to highlight norms and expectations connected to intergenerational relations, will be dealt with again in the following chapters when the topic of returnees facing Ethiopian social and societal expectations will be discussed more broadly.

The multi-dimensionality of care

As mentioned earlier, the intergenerational social contract (Punch, 2015) performs and repeats itself in a circular system of moral obligation and interdependent care. In this socio-cultural context, the co-construction and reproduction of the family are based on a mutual care-giving and care-receiving mechanism, with the implicit expectation that children will be cared for to become caregivers for their elders-to-be. In this circular care expectancy, community relationships are more valued than autonomy. Taking children into care is perceived as an investment for the family and collective future, where the energies and resources spent to raise and educate children will be rewarded with multi-dimensional support in times of ageing. The logic behind this is rooted in the optimisation of scarce resources to maintaining the reproduction of the group, but material and social mutual support and actions intertwine with social and emotional benefits. Children's work is framed in terms of welfare assurance but also as a process of socialisation that legitimises members' roles according to specific social and relational networks. Social and biological families' interdependence becomes a multi-dimensional notion that encompasses the material, economic, emotional, social and societal levels entangled with the more comprehensive social network of support.

Ethiopian authors researching child-care praxes and perspectives in the country engaged with this notion of care through a deconstructionist stand, which allows investigating the different nuances that such a concept might entail (Kassa, 2017; Gebru, 2009; Abebe and Aase, 2007). The mentioned studies argued that in Ethiopia, the practice of child-caring grounds on dynamics of reciprocity and might be split into three different dimensions or capacities: the emotional dimension, which concerns the psychological and emotional support; the social dimension, which refers to the adults' capacity to provide children with socio-cultural skills to fit in their societal context; and the economic and material dimension, which refers to guardians' ability to offer resources to children. Similarly, this research recognises childcare as a socially constructed notion that needs to be addressed through a multi-dimensional lens. However, for what concerns this study, descriptions of child mobility and care suggest the

addition of two further distinctions. The first distinction is between the economic and the material dimension; the second is between the interactionist and the functionalist interpretation of human society and socialisation. As a result, five dimensions are deployed to theorise this study's understanding of intergenerational multi-dimensional care in Ethiopia: material, economic, emotional, social, and societal (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: the multidimensionality of care.
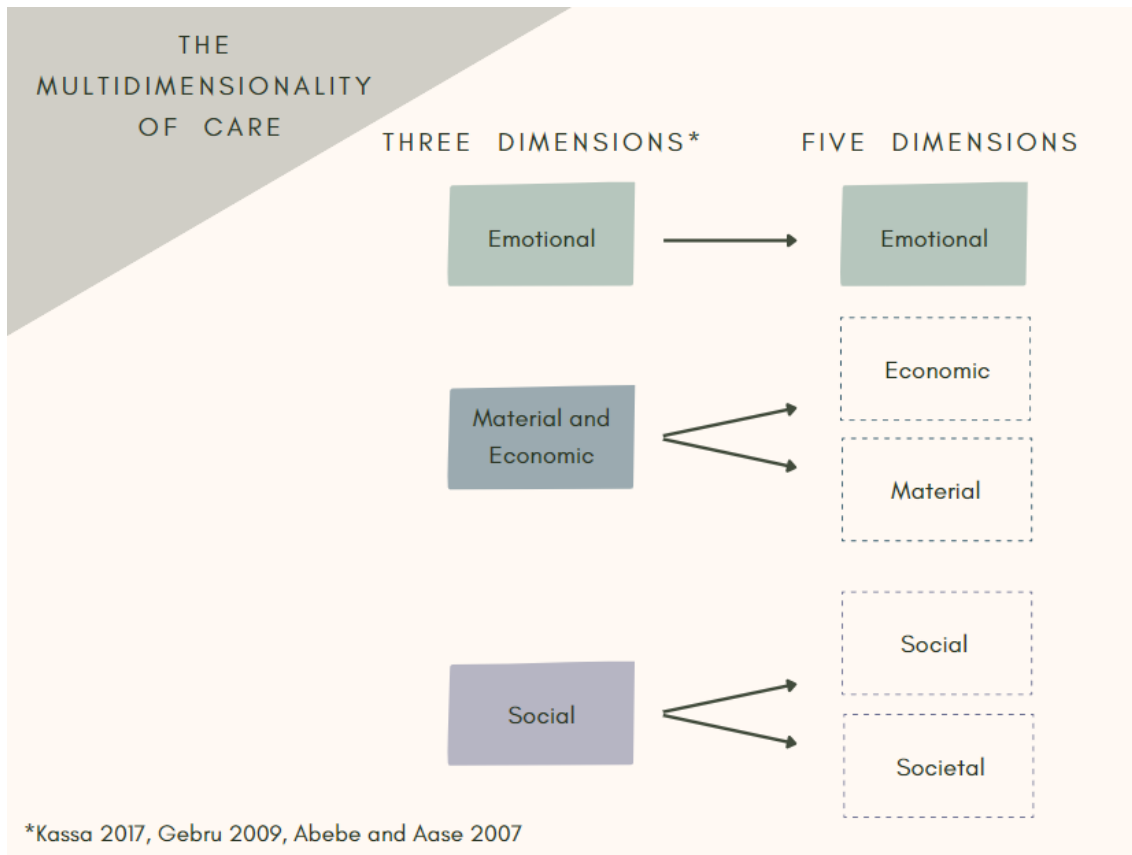
This study identifies the material dimension as the provision of tangible support – clothing, nourishing, sheltering. The economic dimension entails providing direct economic support and/or investment in non-tangible products, i.e., education and training. The emotional dimension refers to verbal and non-verbal comfort, emotional containment and reassurance, moral sustenance, and advice. The social dimension is the role a person is expected to cover within a social group due to a social and relational process. The social dimension develops from the concept that being part of a group is not a static experience but a continuum (Abebe, 2019) of interactional transformation mediated by expectations, obligations, responsibilities and care-giving / care-receiving practices. Finally, this study recognises the societal dimension as the variety of skills one has to acquire to regulate relations amongst people in terms of gender, age, and role; to develop relational competencies needed to perform consensual

expected behaviours and responsibilities. This functionalist interpretation means learning acceptable behaviour by imitation to be part of society.

The societal dimension came to the surface during a conversational interview. Amina, a 23-year-old woman, lived in a childcare institution until she was 16 and described societal abilities as pivotal in the child's development and integration. Whilst she was in the institution, no contact with people outside the structure was allowed[42]. Children could not attend mass in the church and did not know anyone from 'the outside'. Once leaving that space to enter society, she soon realised she knew no social rules: such as verbal and non-verbal communication 'etiquette', sociably acceptable body use, or expectations related to gender. Amina outlines an 'inside' and 'outside' dynamic: if she wants to laugh in the way she learnt to until age 16 or wants to play football, she still goes to the childcare institution. In her current social life outside the compound, she performs and respects the societal rules she has been taught in the past seven years. This behaviour has been found in other (current and former) institutionalised children when talking about their life in the childcare institution and their fear concerning the time they would reach the age limit and be obliged to leave the institute and face life 'outside'. Such findings resonate with other studies on Ethiopian emerging adults transitioning from institutional care to adulthood (Takele and Kotecho, 2020; Pryce et al., 2015). This feeling of alienation from society represents another element of the societal dimension: the ability to navigate society's tangible, symbolic and socio-cultural aspects of spatiality.

The five identified dimensions intertwine in different ways, and children have also acknowledged this entanglement. Research involving children highlights that their positionality and context are crucial to understanding how these dimensions depend on one another and how childhood – and reciprocity – must be performed according to the family's capacity. Gebru's research on resilience amongst children living in impoverished urban areas of Addis Ababa illustrates the value of spatial proximity and the role of neighbourhoods in caring practices. In her study, neighbours' involvement encompasses the material, economic, emotional and social dimensions; however, it results from a relationship of reciprocity shaped by the socio-cultural context. As concluded by Gebru:

> The resilience of poor children in Addis Ababa depended on two processes
> that were shaped by the culture in which the children live. First, the extent to

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[42] In the case of this childcare institution, the compound includes the childcare institution, the school, and the church. A concrete two meters height wall delimits the compound from the neighbourhood.

which children were able to behave and act in culturally acceptable ways (such as being obedient, respectful and patient), and have good relationships with their parents, older siblings, friends, peers and neighbours. Second, the extent to which these categories of people were able to provide these children with material and emotional support when the children behaved and acted in socially acceptable ways (Gebru, 2009. p. 240).

In Gebru's study, it is evident that 'the first move' to ensure such a relationship of reciprocity needs to come from children who are expected to comply with a particular socio-cultural informed idea of a 'good child'. Hence, children are aware of such expectations and rework their interactions with adults by behaving and acting in culturally acceptable ways to comply with the prerequisites that will grant them positive relationships. As Gebru argues, external protective factors depend on children's behaviours and actions in this context. The concept of obedience plays a crucial role, intended as the ability to listen and do what is requested and perform assigned tasks – i.e., running errands and doing domestic work.

Conversely, Kassa's investigation (2017) on family conceptualisations in urban and rural contexts in Ethiopia points out that in middle-class urban families, adults value their emotional relationships more highly, and children are aware of that. Her study shows that adults' satisfaction derives from accomplishing small daily domestic tasks and achieving good education results (Kassa, 2017). In such a context, the frequency and intensity of emotional exchange and personal interaction form and strengthen the family structure - whereas, in a rural socio-spatial setting, the concrete, material quality of interactions are more important in strengthening re-productive relations of interdependence. Indeed, in this context, the emotional dimension is inextricably entangled with the material and economic dimensions, and sharing economic and material support is more valued than verbal affection. Kassa also investigates the notions of togetherness and closeness and argues that under determined conditions in middle-class urban families, social proximity might generate meaningful, family-like relationships in terms of support and reciprocity between housemaids and the family. Her study notes that spatial proximity, meaningful interactions and emotional closeness within family units might blur family boundaries and spring in significant interpersonal links to generate family members-like dynamics. Similarly, the participant observation conducted during this study showed that on several occasions, the relation between the hosting family and the domestic work assistants might develop into more complex relational linkages. Families might support maids by investing on the economic and moral dimension, for instance,

by sponsoring studies or training programs, or reassuring and advising them likewise family members.

When discussing the 'benefits' that could accrue to a foster/adoptive family by hosting a child, the material and economic aspects can be complementary and intertwined with the emotional and social dimensions. The social, emotional and economic/material levels may be present with different intensity according to the child-care option: for the foster family, fostered children, both or none. This element can also be perceived and expected as direct benefits of the presence of a child in a new family unit: for instance, children fostered by couples who could not have biological children, lonely elders, or couples whose offspring have left the house.

It is worth noting that during this research, several interviews pointed to national care options as disproportionately leaning towards the guardians' benefits (childcare institution, extended family, foster/adoptive parents) at the expense of children's needs and development, including those situations where domestic work becomes labour, or exploitation – such as excessive work hours, or heavy labour, to name but a few. In the case of childcare institutions, the main concerns focused on manipulating children's status to benefit from donors, humanitarian aid, and foreign adoptive families. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to engage with the complex issues arising from these discussions of child exploitation. Here, this study focuses on the leading child circulation practices without going into detail on this specific topic that would be worth a more in-depth analysis.

4.4 Kinship, childcare and mutual aid

Kinship and extended family childcare

In Varnis' article on Ethiopian community-based care (2001), it is assumed the kinship care system in Ethiopia does not have the capacity to fulfil OVC needs. According to this study, the Ethiopian community-based care approach suffers limitations concerning: a) an outdated assessment of families' capacity to foster children; b) a dated assessment of traditional care institutions; and c) inadequate protection policies and implementation that result in inconsistent outcomes for OVC. In his view, extended families look with overvaluation, naivety, and subjectivity to their real capacity to provide support and care to vulnerable children. Focusing mainly on arrangements provided to OVC, Varnis' study overlooks a few but important points concerning inter-personal relationship and support. The main and general

aspect that Varnis broadly misinterpreted is the socio-cultural role of intra-group support, which generally does not intend to replace meaningful relations, but to offer instead a multi-attachment mechanism (Abebe, 2019) that also supports families, and ultimately mothers, to face complex stratification of their re-productive role (Medhin et al., 2010).

Meaningful insights have also been offered by Abebe's consideration on mobility and belongingness in Ethiopian kin ties. Abebe (2008b) addresses the entanglements between the concept of extended family and household as fluid notions in continuous evolution.

Irenso et al. (2022) defined the household's composition as members who might be related or unrelated, co-reside and eat at least one meal together. This structure is task-oriented: members of a household share spatiality for practical purposes and their composition can change over time for several reasons (i.e., seasonal migration, collective, domestic labour). Households' distinct fluidity was evident during fieldwork, and characterised by the temporary presence of distant social or biological family members and members of the community who might reside in one household for several reasons. Where participant observation was conducted, the household's members counted a rich network of social and blood ties. Participants moved between households for several reasons, including child-care support, domestic labour, access to education or job opportunities, temporary unemployment, homelessness. This configuration, the enlarged nuclear household, also consisted in the temporal union of different households, in the form described by Abebe. For example:

> Enlarged nuclear households also result from household units temporarily joining to form one unit – in a process known as "joining stoves" – as a way of either coping with the absence of key household members or supporting a weaker household going through a difficult time (Abebe, 2008b, p. 91).

Differently, the members of the extended family are interconnected by meaningful ties. Given the mobility that characterise Ethiopian kin networks, extended family members might be distributed in different interconnected households and support each other in economic and relational terms. This collaborative and dynamic relationship is the backbone of the family collective that identifies the variability and adaptability of such social units in the Ethiopian contexts.

Therefore, there is no "nebulous" community; conversely, several studies focused on underlining specific social family's structure, interactions and functioning.

Another point raised by Varnis' work was children's risk of exploitation, a theme that has been debated by both national and international experts during the fieldwork. Many interviews underlined the efforts made to tackle it, with a particular focus on best practices to diminish the risk of jeopardizing customary practices and improve the benefits of children in community-based care. Nevertheless, the risk of exploitation has been raised as a crucial point by child protection policies' experts also concerning formal adoption practices. Interestingly, Varnis' notion of the Ethiopian resistance against adoption never surfaced during interviews. Instead, critics were focused on the general difficulty to formalise ancient and well consolidated customary adoptive and fostering practices. Besides, remarks were made to international organisations staff's paternalistic approach in explaining to Ethiopian's child-care policy experts what fictive kinship is, as a participant explained. For example:

> In Ethiopia, foster and adoption and kinship, they have been here for thousands of years, but we don't give it a name, there is no registration (...), now the UN [United Nations] comes up with long guidelines, and wants to teach us. (He smiles). [Child protection expert, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Nevertheless, there were acknowledged complications of the Ethiopian government in implementing and spreading awareness about its formal domestic adoption and alternative child-care schemes.

As already mentioned, other studies highlighted the source of support provided by various degrees of shared parenting within families and neighbourhoods, particularly for mothers with numerous offspring (Medhin et al., 2010). Extend family members hold the primary responsibilities of shared parenting, with kinship care been considered as the major child-care sustenance (Seeling and Tesfaye, 1994). Tashome's study (2013) on reciprocity and informal social protection amongst the Aarsi Oromo argues that the social safety net provided by the extended family is so taken for granted that it is not even considered proper assistance. His study argues that individuals belonging to the family members' category "may not be treated as independent but as an integral part of the family", and therefore "the individual's problems may be seen as being the family's problems and vice versa" (Tashome, 2013, p. 20).

Ethiopian extended family members are usually bonded by biological or social ties. Social members' relations are shaped by socially constructed ties, such as friendship, informal adoptive members, and marriages, whilst biological ties imply consanguinity. In both cases, a proximity criterion is applied to determine the quality and nature of their involvement in

childcare because the closest members in terms of geographical and family proximity are more likely involved in shared parenting and childcare (Gibson and Mace, 2005).

The ability of the extended families' network to answer with efficiency and efficacy to vulnerable members' needs depends on the socio-economic capability of kin caregivers. Families' child-care 'capacity' within the African context has been debated over years when reflecting upon child protection policies and humanitarian aid goals. To summarize, this issue has been addressed by two main interpretations. The first sustains that the African overall crisis condition derived from the effects of macrosocial changes, HIV infection and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) on societies and countries' economy deeply affected traditional supports. Families' network resulted weakened and had to either reduce reciprocal child-care support or involve children in heavier tasks and work activities, thus putting them at risk of exploitation (Bailey, 2009). This explanation is called the "social rupture" hypothesis (Drah, 2012), and invites a more accurate reflection around real benefits that local child circulation might provide, theorising a structural inability of communities to cope with poverty and increasing OVC numbers. This position is often sustained by childcare institutions' donors and organizations.

The second position, sustained by Abebe (2009b), has been named "social resilience" (Evans, 2005). It argues traditional care practices and child circulation have a very significant impact despite precarious living conditions that families may experience. Families' network can assure a safe environment to grow up children in a protected and socially interactive setting (Cheney, 2014), and provide the best support for them. Supporters of this explanation argue international and national energies should be focused on addressing "structural causes of poverty and marginality instead of enforcing inequalities by supporting selectively orphan in economically vulnerable communities" (Abebe 2009b, p. 70).

Nonetheless, assessing extended families' child-care capability is complex, particularly when moving from a general interpretation to a more specific context. A qualitative study on extended families in both Ethiopian urban and rural communities (Abebe and Aase 2007) offers a chance to problematize caregivers' capability. In the survey, four categories of caregivers emerged – rupturing, transient, adapting and capable. According to this investigation, families' capability ranges from rupturing, a condition of chronic poverty (which was also identified as the most common caregivers' category in Ethiopia), to the capable, who does not need any external caring support. The aforementioned study sustains that extended families – both in the urban and the rural context – can and do provide psychological and

economic care for OVC. However, it also stresses many do not have access to proper resources to host OVC. The topic of providing caregivers with proper support has been investigated by another quanti-qualitative study, underlying the mismatch between the quality of what organisations and caregivers would define proper assistance (Kassahun, 2015).

Spatial proximity and social cohesion: the role of semi-formal mutual aid association

Another social network support cited by participants to this research is the semi-formal mutual aid association. In Ethiopia, there are several types of social association; they usually work as social security and are accessible through membership. They traditionally exist to 'organise' cooperation amongst their members to provide each other with social, financial and moral support, and they are numerous and various on the Ethiopian territory. Even though all mutual aid associations exist to provide members with support and assistance, they can be different in their nature. In this section, this study intends to provide information about the most known mutual aid associations (semi-formally organised forms of mutual support usually characterised by spatial proximity) and how they play a role in supporting family units and extended families in their child-care role.

Association exists to coordinate and co-operate in solving issues about practical activities that need collaboration – agricultural tasks, building construction. An example is *debbo*, known and practised mainly amongst Gurage, Amhara and Oromo (Mengesha, 2002). Other mutual aid associations focused mainly on socio-economic purposes are *iqub* (or *ikub*), *jigie*, *wonfel* and *gossa*. Each association is socio-culturally and geographically situated, and gathers members with a common objective (i.e. mobilising resources: economic or financial support, reciprocating working time or goods) (Emana, 2009; Begashaw, 1978). These types of association stand on co-operation, and support families when issues are mainly focused on livestock, matters connected to the agricultural sector, or case of investments and business projects.

Associations may also have a more pronounced socio-assistant inclination. They may focus on members' socio-economic support and cultivating relations amongst members, nurture mutual support, and deal with social issues. Begashaw's study (1978) revealed that the most known

are *mahaber*, *sembete*, and *idir*. *Mahaber*[43] and *sembete* are church-related organisations and oriented to charitable or mutual aid purposes. They are not meant to be saving organisations but rather to cultivate relationships between members of such spiritual kinship and provide a smoother functioning of mutual support (Begashaw, 1978). During fieldwork, it emerged that protestant church community members establish analogous informal relations of belongingness, mutual support and family-like ties, at least in the urban context.

The most common and widespread mutual aid association in the Ethiopian territory is the *idir* (or *eder*), which according to Ayele (2004), involves about 87% of the urban population and 70% living in rural areas. Membership to the *idir* is spatial: each is open to members when located in a specific area in the village or neighbourhood. Members have an entrance fee for a common fund for operating expenses for the members. Its primary and more known function is to provide with economic assistance and support the family of a deceased member. However, its intervention can encompass provision for social and economic insurance for members in the event of death, damages to property, assistance in case of illness or unemployment, hardship, weddings, and more. In its economic aspects, it is managed as an insurance program run by the community to meet emergency conditions by organising and redirecting savings. Each *idir* can take certain dispositions or decide to use part of its funds to support specific categories of members. For instance, providing with material assistance and occasional economic support deceased members' kin suffering from hardship or considered more vulnerable; or incorporating HIV/AIDS-related programs into their by-laws to assist OVC (Hebo, 2013; Ejigu, 2006).

According to interviews, associations such as *mahaber* and *idir* have been called out and involved by organisations in improving alternative child-care strategies. Indeed, given a) their peculiar socio-oriented focus; b) the support that, in several situations, they already provide to marginal and vulnerable members; and c) the deep knowledge of relational dynamics within their area of operation, they have been recognised as vital interlocutors to improve formal local services and to strengthen a formal structural response of alternative childcare. Their reciprocal monitoring and control role has also been pivotal in protecting children's well-being and caring about families' dynamics.

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[43] The term *mahaber* is also used to refer to a regional association originally from Gurage that operates to maintain a connection between persons who migrated to other parts of Ethiopia and their home district and elicit their financial support when the home district needs public or collective improvements (Begashaw, 1978).

The residential childcare institution

Participant observation in the urban area of Addis Ababa also underlines a further child-care option that relies on an atypical social network: the residential childcare institution. Even though in the Ethiopian context the neighbourhood is an integral spatial and social unit in terms of mutual support, the residential institution relates to its surroundings as a self-standing system. Indeed, childcare institutions rely on a more volatile and indirect network, consisting primarily of local and international personnel, volunteers, donors and persons involved in adoption processes.

Residential childcare institutions' mission is to contribute to the well-being and proper development of children given to their care. For this reason, they might be also addressed and perceived by the population as viable options to offer permanent or temporary guardianship to children from families who do not intend to keep them or are temporarily unable to provide care for their children. As underlined by a participant during an in-depth interview, the absence of a functioning welfare system in Ethiopia makes residential childcare institutions a potential final resolution for vulnerable or marginal families. In the residential childcare institution, the concept of care envisages keeping children in good health and providing them with access to public education, whilst a specific structure of time and space promotes peer relationships and does not encourage privacy and individuality. The concept of sharing, which is central in institutionalised children's socialisation, does not envisage any private space and emphasises the primacy of the institution's property: what children receive from visitors and guests is expected to convey to the admin, who redistributed according to the institution's priorities.

Because of its organisation and resources, the residential childcare institution often offers institutionalised children better off conditions in terms of nutrition, education and health care than their original families. This happens because most children come from vulnerable families, which have in common the element of poverty and encompass global narratives of marginalisation, un/desirability, social exclusion, behavioural deviance, and psychological inadequacy (Abebe, 2009b; Bailey, 2009), which have already been explored in the literature review in chapter Two.

As mentioned above, the residential childcare institution is an organisation whose facilities and services might be differently approached and 'used'. Participants underlined that the orphanage often represents a symbolic 'space-in-between' the definitive renunciation of parental connection and the temporary cession of responsibility and care duties.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews highlight that families may seek from residential childcare institutions a short-term, medium-term, or medium/long-lasting support.

The short-term solution considers taking the child to the childcare institution for temporary custody because families are going through challenging vicissitudes that might affect the child's quality of care. Challenging situations listed by families of origin included the sudden parent(s)' death, unemployment, homelessness, and unforeseen child custody. Some participants reported the lack of a supportive social network and their exclusion from family collectives and community support. Enlisted reasons for exclusion are mainly social and might be connected to convention-related stigmas (i.e., children out of wedlock or from unapproved weddings) and health-related stigma (i.e., HIV, tuberculosis, epilepsy, schizophrenia). In urban contexts, migration and gentrification processes were also enumerated as weakening factors of kin networks and community mutual aid.

Participant observation and interviews underlined that when families choose the short-term option, the child is expected to reside in the residential institution from a couple of months to a maximum of a couple of years. This time would allow the family of origin to adjust their circumstances and have back the child. Usually, families who envisage the short-term solution visit the facility as regularly as possible and request updates from the childcare institutions' staff. Participants explained that this 'use' of the residential childcare institution services had been accepted and advised within communities until around 2010. When child relinquishment directly to orphanages turned out to be illegal, the number of families choosing the residential childcare institution as a child-care option dropped, as stated by the childcare institutions and adoption agencies' staff. However, participant observation highlighted that this practice is still performed and partially supported by childcare institutions.

Findings suggested that the medium-term solution envisages the cession of the child's care responsibility until she reaches the age of 16 to 18 when, according to childcare institutions' guidelines, she is compelled to leave the facility. Children who come back to families of origin are not involved in any care leaving policy process, which is implemented in some facilities for institutionalised children who are also total orphans. This situation happens when the family of origin cannot grant the child primary care and support, and it believes the orphanage would give a better service in terms of health care, regular alimentation, and education. In these cases, in several childcare institutions, the staff allow contact between the child and the family of origin and encourage parents to come and visit or take the child back during holidays. However, in one childcare institution, the staff explained that families should not endure

contact with the child, who might suffer from these encounters and become more challenging to manage in the orphanage. Usually, families are kept updated about children's behaviour, mainly when their conduct is not favourable. Such findings on contact between institutionalised children and their families of origin concern the residential childcare institutions involved in the research, which were mainly based in Addis Ababa; native families involved in this study reported a different experience with countryside childcare institutions. In line with a study conducted in Ethiopia in Wolaita Sodo town on institutionalised children (Liranso and Zewude, 2021), participants from the Oromo Region and the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region reported a lack of care and neglection concerning contacts between the child and the family of origin.

The medium/long-lasting solution envisages children who were left by their families because there was the intention of giving them out for adoption. Data collected during fieldwork highlights that adoption might also occur when the native family does not comply with such a decision. In such cases, families of origin aimed to transfer the child's guardianship temporarily; instead, they were persuaded to give the child out for adoption or were not informed nor consulted before adopting the child. Given the scarcity of data that would allow the detection of the frequency and magnitude of these cases, it would be problematic to assume the potential number of children given into intercountry adoption without explicit consent or knowledge of the native families. This group does not include native families who agreed to give their child out for adoption without entirely understanding their choice's repercussions. This emerged because participants distinguished a procedural difference in terms of repercussion and decisional role between families who were neither consulted nor informed about children's future and families who interpreted the adoption process differently.

Customary child adoption and foster in Ethiopia

Informal customary practices of fictive kinship include adoption and fostering. The latter is frequently not formalised, and it may envisage extended families' support when they temporarily take home a child to be raised. The former may be formalised according to the customary system, which means it is still invisible to the authorities' eye but is recognised within the community, in the eyes of the family of origin, the adopters, and the members covering traditional roles of unofficial authority – i.e., the elders. Fictive kinship in Ethiopia plays a role on three different levels: the private domain, which concerns the practice of

supporting, nurturing, and caring; the public domain, which encompasses the substance of the relation that entangles the adoptive triad in front of themselves and their community; and the official domain, which involves official institutions. The relation between these three domains changes according to the kind of kin relation is established, its relevance to the main actors' change of role and status amongst the community, and their adherence to institutional adoption and alternative child-care schemes. To the extent of this research, the interpretative key focuses on evaluating connections within the adoptive triad and between them and their community.

An in-depth analysis of six Ethiopian customary fictive kinship practices (see Appendix D) underlined that they differ substantially from inter-country adoption. Table 2 lists the six praxes (*yeguddifaachaa lij*, *ergifata*, *yemadego lij*, *yemar lij* or *yetut lij*, *yekiristina lij*, and *qenja*) and briefly summarises and compares the dynamics of interactions and belongingness. Furthermore, it makes explicit whether any child or parental transfer takes place. As displayed, this exploration underlines that the fictive kinship always includes within its aims the tie strengthening between the family of origin and the foster family, and the native family keeps the possibility to interact with the child no matter the new conformation of their kin tie. The fictive kinship practice favours relationships with the community of origin or the native family's extended network. Child relocation might happen differently, whilst the transfer of parental rights is never irreversible. These considerations corroborate the understanding that for native families in the Ethiopian context it prevails the idea that inter-country adoption is intended to strengthen ties between birth and adoptive families.

Table 2: comparison of six Ethiopian fictive kinship praxes.

FICTIVE KINSHIP PRAXES IN ETHIOPIA: A COMPARISON

Custumary fictive kinship practices	Native family and the child	Native family and foster family	The child and the community of origin	Relocation of the child	Parental rights trasnfer
Yeguddifaachaa Lij	Interactions are possible; the kin tie is altered but remains	The bond is strenghtened	The child remains within the native family's extended network	Definitive, but not necessarily irreversible	Definitive, but not necessarily irreversible
Ergifata	The child retains the original kin tie; interactions are possible	The bond is strenghtened	The child remains within the native family's extended network	Yes, temporary	No, only parental care
Yetut Lij Yemar Lij	Interactions are possible; the kin tie is altered but remains	The bond is strenghtened	Interactions are possible, the kin tie with the native family's network remains	Yes, definitive or temporary	Yes, but not universally irreversible
Yekiristina Lij	Interactions are possible, the kin tie remains	The bond is strenghtened	The child does not necessarily move from her community	Not expected	Only in cases of needs
Qenja	Interactions are possible, the kin tie remains	The bond is strenghtened; collaborative behaviours	The child retains his bond with the community of origin	Yes, temporary	No, only parental care

4.5   Convergencies and divergencies between formal and customary child mobility

Information collected until this point helps to reflect on entanglements between Ethiopian juridical interpretation of adoption – precisely, inter-country adoption – and local and customary notions of relatedness, belongingness, tie strengthening and mutual support within the local practices of mutual aid, customary fostering and adoption. This section focuses on the genesis and main elements of the first Ethiopian Civil Code (which entered into use in 1960, G.C.), and its similarities and differences to the customary practices. Similarly, it outlines the main articles referring to inter-country adoption in the Revised Family Code (2000, G.C.), with particular reference to the parts already contained in the 1960's Civil Code.

The origins of the 1960's Civil Code

In 'Les sources du code civil éthiopien' (1962), René David describes his involvement together with other two law experts on a draft of the first Ethiopian Civil Code under the request of his Majesty Haile Selassie in 1954, emperor of Ethiopia. Before the Civil Code, the Fetha Nagast was the leading civil and ecclesiastic code (Strauss, 2009). In his accounts, David laments a general lack of description concerning local customary practices; moreover, he bemoans the high instability in family customary practices, with no effort to "fix them". Starting from his understanding of Ethiopian's perception of Fetha Nagast, he explains that he sees an ungluing between the ideal and moral perception of the law and the daily life practice. Therefore, the primary goal of the Civil Code is not to be accurate concerning customary practices but to support Ethiopians in renewing them. To David, legislation must transform society and be progressive instead of sanctioning and crystallising mediocre customs. To meet the sovereign's purposes, making a civil code on the exclusive basis of the Ethiopian customs was not enough; it was necessary to resort to the "foreign science" to determine appropriate rules and models to insert into the Ethiopian Civil Code, thus creating a code with a progressive nature but able to lead practices, without hurting Ethiopian population's feelings.

Beckstrom understood the involvement of foreign experts as intended to create requisites for a legally valid adoption that did not exist in the customary forms and because Western countries had "longer experience in the handling of such children" (Beckstrom, 1972, p. 149). Conversely to David's accounts of acknowledging culture and customary differences, Beckstrom states the expert did not have access to the primary source of information about customary family practices, as the document, The Ethopian Old Judgements Book, was written in Amharic. Moreover, in another article cited by Beckstrom, David wrote that the "insufficient knowledge of the customs has often embarrassed and might frequently have misled us"[44]. According to Beckstrom, the Civil Code draft was significantly altered by an Ethiopian commission and the Parliament after its redaction.

 Amongst the similarities between informal and formal adoption, Beckstrom listed the creation of a fictive blood bond and the integration of the child with the same heir's legal rights as a natural-born heir. To what concerns the relation between adoptive and biological families, consent needed to be given – and it was often requested in person, as the practice showed –.

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[44] See David (1967) in Beckstrom (1972).

Moreover, the contract between the prospective and biological parents existed before the adoption. It was set off through a) the agreement to the adoption request and b) the physical passage of the child from the families of origin to the prospective parents, and it sets forth the child transfer from one family unit to the other and the renouncement to their parental rights over the child.

Aside from the legal aspect (the Ethiopian Civil Code did not recognise customary ceremonies as sufficient to confirm adoption and asked adoption contracts to be approved by the court), differences between formal and information adoption entailed the relationship between the child and the biological family. It consists mainly of four differences. The first is that ties with natural relatives shall be maintained, and the adopted child may inherit from both the adoptive and biological relatives. Secondly, the child is entitled to maintenance from his biological family if the adoptive one fails to provide adequate care. The child must reciprocate in case biological relatives find themselves in a condition of need and cannot claim maintenance from other members of their family of origin. Thirdly, adoptions are not revocable. Lastly, art. 805 states adoption should take place for good reasons, including the child's benefits.

For what concerns the child's information about her Ethiopian descendants and right to gain back their Ethiopian nationality, the Haile Selassie I Foundation (the public childcare institution at that time) "require[s] foreign adoptive parents to sign a pledge to the effect that they will inform the child upon reaching the age of eighteen that he has the right to regain his Ethiopian nationality if it has been lost" (Beckstrom, 1972, p. 166).

The Renewed 2000's Family Code

In 2000, after forty years, a revision of the Civil Code took place. The section concerning intercountry adoption was incorporated in the Revised Family Code, with specific provisions concerning MOWCYA work. The articles that differentiate the Ethiopian legal representation of adoption from the Hague Convention's provisions have been analysed with a particular focus on Art. 183 and Art. 212 (Costa, 2013), which offer further insights on the idea of not interrupting the bonds between the child and the family of origin. Indeed, Art. 183, "relationship of the adopted child with the family of origin" states the child is entitled to retain her bonds with the family of origin and pass it to her spouse and descendants. The nature of this bond and how it applies remains unclear. Participants interpreted it in various ways.

On the one hand, explanations focused on the type of tie or connection the child keeps with her origins. In this case, mentions range from a 'basic' blood relation – a notion that, as discussed in chapter Six, brings within it elements of belongingness and identity – and unbroken continuity (with consequent rights and duties) with the ancestors of origin; to the relation with biological family members or, more in general, with the country of origin. On the other hand, the bond was framed in terms of rights that the biological relatives may enforce, such as the right to ask for contacts, access children's post-adoptive reports, keep a connection, receiving support. A third option encompasses the child's rights: having back rights and duties of being a full member of the family of origin once the child returns to Ethiopia and renounces the foreign nationality. During an interview, an Ethiopian lawyer explains that the only limit of the notion of 'bond' is entering into conflict with the parental rights of the adoptive parents, which always prevail:

> (…) The Ethiopian law obliges you to give the relationship and the bond. The bond means that [it is] not in contradiction to the right of the [adoptive] family because when there is a contradiction, even the law says to give priority to that [adoptive] family. (…) [the notion of bond] is open to interpretations. [inter-country adoption lawyer, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

Nonetheless, the understanding of this notion becomes more complex when addressing the "obligation to supply maintenance". Art. 212 states that the adopted child and her family may claim for maintenance from the family of origin if the adoptive family is unable to provide it; conversely, the child is bound to supply maintenance to the family of origin "unless the latter cannot claim maintenance from another member of their family". The first part of Art. 212 can harmonise with Art. 195 and 196 that state adoption can be revoked only in case of proven abuse or mistreatment of the child. The inability of the family to provide for the child's well-being may be a ground for the child to contact the family of origin for support, and it may activate a revocation of adoptive family's parental rights. The latter part presents itself in a more critical light because it goes back to the notion of bond and what it may represent. In this case, the bond refers to a legal obligation that the child may have in case of the absence of alternatives from the family of origin. A similar condition of uncertainty and space for interpretations is dedicated to the notion of a child's best interest. Even though it has been cited within this and other official documents, "the problems that need to be addressed in

relation to international instruments relate to the lack of clarity regarding the elements that constitute the notion of the best interest of the child" (Degol and Dinku, 2011, p. 336).

For what concerns child's right to gain back their Ethiopian nationality, there is no mention of this point in the Revised Family Code. However, the same expert who questioned the notion of bond explicates it. For example:

> There is a presumption the child reaching a majority age holds the right to decide and must be given information about where he comes from. They [adoptive parents] must show him his status of history and talk [about it with him]. Then, according to that, it is up to him to decide. [Inter-country adoption lawyer, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

Therefore, even if not expressly mentioned in the Revised Family Code, the lawyer underlines that there is the explicit expectation that the adoptive family will give the child all the relevant information to decide whether she would like to re-join her country of origin or not once she becomes of age.

4.6   Conclusion: joining the dots

This chapter has underlined that child circulation and sharing care practices are long-standing common practices within the Ethiopian social fabric. Besides, mechanisms of mutual support and mutual aid have been structured and practised to communally preserve the presence of children within their community and socio-cultural milieu. Various fictive kinship and fostering praxes are traditionally practised in various geographical and socio-cultural areas. They intertwine with other informal alternative child-care strategies, which may not have a specific nomenclature but are encompassed by an existing care-sharing system. These practices have proved their flexibility in transforming and adapting to different socio-historical and geographical contexts, keeping the concepts and modifying the form. These care relationships illustrate that uttermost strategic and relational importance is allocated to tie strengthening amongst biological and adoptive families for the reciprocal and child's benefits. In this context, these relationships amongst adults represent a consolidation or transformation of relationships already established, and they are key assets as much as the human resources relocation of the child transfer. The adoption interaction is based on the adoptive triad, and this traditional praxes' structure has been transferred within the Civil Code of 1960 and the Revised Family Code of 2000. It is argued that within these codes, agreements and provisions

that regulate relations amongst participants in the process aim to respect the holistic characteristics (Dida, 2017, p.11) and connections of metaphorical and practical relational proximity.

On the one hand, this choice gives the relationship between the child and her community of origin the possibility to remain intact. On the other hand, the relationship between adults related to the child may also be existent and durable. The realm of potentiality encounters limits and constraints dictated by geographical, socio-cultural, and power-imbalance dynamics.

Nonetheless, these aspects play an important role in the Ethiopian fictive kinship frame. This topic is further dealt with in the following chapters to demonstrate how this issue, here tackled from a socio-legal point of view (Schiff, 1976), is reframed in inter-country post-adoption practices and experiences. It is worth mentioning that all the participants in this study – excluding the legal experts – at the time of the fieldwork were unaware of the legal contents highlighted in the last section of this chapter.

In socio-legal terms, the importance of tie strengthening and mutual support does not show continuity with the international notion of inter-country adoption. Conversely, the centrality of relations amongst families is entirely absent in the international understanding of inter-country adoption. This understanding has been conventionally positioned within the general provisions of the Hague Convention on the protection of children and cooperation in respect of inter-country adoption (concluded in 1993 and entered into force in 1995). Indeed, the Hague Convention's art. 27 states that "where an adoption granted in the State of origin does not have the effect of terminating a pre-existing legal parent-child relationship, it may, in the receiving State which recognises the adoption under the Convention, be converted into an adoption having such an effect". If the Hague Convention conditions are not satisfied, an alignment between the two legal regimes is needed, and the Global North interpretation of adoption prevails on the Ethiopian circular understanding. This assertion acknowledges the potential and existent gap amongst different interpretations of formal fictive kinship practices. The practical consequences of this gap will be further analysed in the coming chapters.

An associated important theme that emerged in this chapter and connects to the previous considerations is the matter of reciprocation and welfare. As already mentioned, reciprocation may develop on a practical, social, and emotional level. Indeed, a relationship based on reciprocity and connection does not necessarily involve the satisfaction of material needs but extends to the emotional and affective presence and directly connects to socialisation. This need encompasses children as well as parents and underlines its bidirectional nature.

Consequently, what could be interpreted as a "clean break" (Duncan, 1993), represents a cession of the parental right but does not necessarily involve an interruption of visits, contacts, or connections. The overlap of the cession of parental rights as the cession of relationships and contacts is a concept that could be interpreted from a Eurocentric perspective as 'universal'. However, it represents a precise way of theorising and looking at relationships. An example cited in this chapter is one of the informal fictive kinship practices of *guddifaachaa*. The potential congruence between *guddifaachaa* and inter-country adoption is relevant because authors (Bodja and Gleason, 2020) and adoption agencies argue that praxes and understandings of *guddifaachaa* kin tie interruption mirror the interruption of relations practised by the inter-country adoption. Instead, this study argues that the absence of the element of reciprocation and continuity distances these notions of interruption. This study agrees with Bodja and Gleason's point concerning the need for a better understanding of the existence, quality and frequency of *guddifaachaa* amongst the not-Oromo, Ethiopian population. However, information collected through fieldwork and literature review underlines substantial differences, as mentioned in the dedicated section.

Chapter 5. Separation, abandonment, and what is left behind

5.1   Introduction

The previous chapter addresses the family collectives and the concept of *mahiberawi nuro* (literally, "collective life"), the collaborative relationship that would grant social security and care to the community. Such relation builds upon tight social ties and collective actions[45]. It involves the geographical, spatial, and cultural community that, for a family, usually comprises relatives, the neighbourhood, and the religious and socio-cultural community. Solid reciprocal relationships and obligations do not automatically mean cohesive or homogeneous groups. They rather consist of delicate power balances central to activities such as resources redistribution, decision-making processes, individual and collective interests and needs, as emerged from this research's fieldwork.

As argued in chapter Four, the entanglement of kinship and mobility makes households and families controversial terms that do not necessarily interchange in the Ethiopian context. Households might be fluid, cyclical and multi-faceted in their composition and structure, as child circulation suggests.

The flexibility of Ethiopian family collectives increased in the last decades. The external socio-economic factors that interested Sub-Saharan Africa resulted in the weakening of the social support network and the spreading a more individualistic approach. The literature review presented in chapters Two and Four shows that extended families and households had been addressed as either resilient and therefore able to cope with such challenges or 'fractured' in their ability to integrate additional members. In both interpretations, there was a point where residential childcare institutions and inter-country adoption were conceded as viable alternatives for childcare.

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[45] Participants refer that in some areas of Addis Ababa the gentrification process weakened long-standing neighbourhoods' communities and resulted in social and material issues. For instance, elders' loneliness, youth's lack of guidance and support, household isolation and struggle to perform activities of collective care (of spaces, children) and socialisation.

This chapter addresses the preliminary stages of inter-country adoption. It explores the rationale behind the choice of making children with living social or biological caregivers available for adoption. It further points out what factors encourage native families to prefer inter-country adoption over customary or domestic adoption. This is the first of four data analysis chapters and draws from the previous chapter's conclusions to investigate the circumstances that drive adults to opt for inter-country adoption. Data analysed in this chapter was collected using two of the four methods deployed in this research: in-depth interviews and participant observation.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first emphasises the concepts of abandonment and orphanhood in the Ethiopian context. It resonates with the different interpretations of orphanhood and separation and how participants articulate the difference between the two. The second focuses on participants' descriptions of separation as a notion that might envisage a certain degree of care. It then explores this concept through its multidimensionality. This section explains how participants consider the emotional, spatial and interactional dimensions are considered pivotal to discerning abandonhood from separation.

The last section explores what choices and decisional processes native families undergo to select the suitable child to place for inter-country adoption and the tension emerging from the Ethiopian and Global North divergent narratives.

5.2 Notions of abandonment and orphanhood in Ethiopia

The international adoption system tends to refer to the abandoned child as an 'unconnected' subject, with neither kin attachments nor networks. This consideration largely depends on the assumption that such children are "deserted, unwanted and permanently left" (Panter-Brick, 2000, p.22) and usually refers also to the notion of orphans involved into adoption. This Global North-centred universal definition of abandonment implicitly assumes conditions and experiences of child vulnerabilities. Indeed, definitions of the action of abandoning include "to leave a (…) person, usually for ever"[46] (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022), "to give up with the intent of never again claiming a right or interest in"[47] (Merriam-Webster, 2022), to "leave somebody,

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[46] Also, "to leave a person, place, or thing that needs you to care for them" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

[47] Also, "to give up to the control or influence of another person or agent" and "to withdraw protection, support, or help" (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

especially somebody you are responsible for, with no intention of returning"[48] (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022). However, such definitions and interpretations might mismatch with the locally derived understandings and experiences of abandoning and fictive kinship praxes. The inter-country adoption narrative links tightly to a homogenous interpretation of notions of care, abandonment, and orphanhood, whilst such concepts are highly nuanced. For instance, qualitative research underlined that orphanhood, as intended in Ethiopia, does not necessarily generate negative impacts on children regarding their care and opportunities (Crivello and Chut, 2012). The universalized idea of the orphan, abandoned child, corroborates a Global North interpretation of adoption that worryingly hides the fact that material poverty resulting from (post)colonial disparities does play a significant role in households in a structural position of vulnerability. This structural positioning emerged by interviews as the main pushing factor of the intercountry adoption system in Ethiopia. For example:

> For instance, if you talk to them, I believe in many cases they were really forced [by extreme conditions of poverty] to give the child away because they are compelled by the living conditions of the countryside, where there is nothing to eat, you do not have anything to give [to your children]. Therefore, instead of watching their child die [they give them into adoption]. At least they know they gave them a life. To me, I do not think there are many cases of families who really wanted to give their child [into adoption]. Maybe biological parents might be helped. I mean, it would take a lot of projects, education, infrastructure, a lor of … It would take years, but to me it would be fine for the biological parents to raise their children if they have given better living conditions than now. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

> Sometimes there are parents [alive], sometimes is just one parent or the other, and therefore they cannot make it economically. [Intermediary, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

> Because of the [living] circumstances [we have to endure] in our country, we cannot afford [to keep our children with us], and as humans we feel for our kids. We cannot look after them. But we are trying to give them a better life, and that is why [we give them into adoption]. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

Conversely, material contingencies are reworked as a social and moral inability of the social network to care about 'their' children, as feared with the institutionalization of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia (see chapter One). (Post)colonial disparities are therefore addressed as 'inalienable' and as a justification for inter-country adoption. Similarly, as argued in other

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[48] Also, "to stop supporting or helping someone ; to stop believing in something" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, 2022).

geopolitical areas, heterogeneous parenting styles, caring choices, and strategies are deployed to describe defective child-care logics and models (Högbacka, 2016; Penn, 2009), including child mobility and family collectives. Following this unidirectional, postcolonial discourse, 'otherness' is what is 'left behind' from the Global North-oriented, saviour, ethnocentric narrative. However, as already stated elsewhere, one of the theoretical choices of this study is to deploy a (post)colonial feminist perspective to address inter-country adoption and discuss notions central to the adoption process from an Ethiopian perspective to offer some cross-cultural insights.

Abandonment is a crucial concept for adopting children with living caregivers and envisages the existence of a previous link between one or more persons and the child. In its universalized understanding, the act of abandoning entails a hierarchical relation of dependence: the person covering the role of caregiver decides to end such relationship of care permanently. In the same way, the broad concept of orphanhood envisages an interruption. In this case, the interruption of a primary biological link tie. The definitions are unanimous in considering an orphan "a child deprived by death of one or usually both parents" (Merriam-Webster, 2022), but more often "a child whose parents are dead" (Oxford dictionary and Cambridge dictionary). As already underlined in the literature review in chapter Two, the reality in Ethiopia is not this straightforward. In a context where it has been argued that biological and social orphanhood are "a significant structural feature of Ethiopian society" (Abebe and Aase, 2007, p.205), orphaned children are encased in mechanisms of kin networks that entail dynamics of interdependence and intergenerational debt. Ideally, the community[49] members would look after their children, and the children will look after their community. The practice of caregiving is, in this sense, considered from a broad, multidimensional perspective – from worrying about the child to providing material support or even annexing the child into a family through fictive kinship. As such, it has been argued that to experience abandonment as it is described from a Global North-oriented perspective does not suffice to fall beyond the family collective's safety net: the caregiver should experience situations of social stigma, exclusion, isolation, a socio-economic and material vulnerability that would lead to abandoning children "due to compelling circumstances created by their own society" (Tadele, 2000, p.306).

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[49] The term community is used to define a dense social context of people who 1) reside in a condition of geographical proximity; 2) share socio-cultural values; 3) are entangled together by common relations and responsibilities to each other and the material and symbolic spaces they inhabit; therefore, they 4) develop an inner sense of belongingness and 5) have the perception and awareness of boundaries that delimit their group, even within the same ethnic group.

The issue for a cross-cultural understanding of abandonment and orphanhood is that in some cases, the difference in meanings is not a matter of nuances but substantial divergences between English implicit meanings and Ethiopian practical experiences.

As such, the label of "abandoned child" might depend on several factors. For instance, in relatively recent times, the conditions that would allow Ethiopian families to relinquish their children were tightened, and the number of children declared abandoned increased (Rotabi, 2010). Other research has also picked up the peculiarity of using the universalized category of abandoned children and orphans in Ethiopia. Miller et al. (2008) notes that most Ethio-descendant adoptees differ from other adoptees because they did not show severe developmental delays and significant behavioural problems at arrival, features that might be found in children that experienced short time in residential childcare and long periods with relatives prior to institutionalization. The point is that the term 'orphan' does not suffice to represent the whole spectrum of the experiences of orphanhood and abandonhood that are socially processed and performed by the collectivity in Ethiopia. Such peculiarity has been picked up from a relational perspective also by research focused on Ethio-descendant adoptees in the post-adoption stage in the Global North and their references to families of origin, which underlines the concept of relying on broad kin setting and intergenerational support, as pointed out by De Graeve (2015) and further explored in the following chapters.

During the research, many Amharic terms came up to describe the condition of orphanhood that might equally refer to conditions of economic and social hardships (see Table 3) and call the family collective to act upon sympathy, belongingness and responsibility, as pointed out by a participant.

Table 3: Amharic terms related to orphanhood.

Transliteration of the Amharic term	Meaning	Translation
Welaj alba	Lone child	Orphan
Yemut lij	Child of someone no longer alive	Orphan
Tekelaitekech	Abandoned (female) child	Orphan
Tekeluiteke	Abandoned (male) child	Orphan
Yemut lijoch yemiredbet drjt	Hospice of an organization for children with parents no longer alive	Residential childcare institution

ORPHANHOOD IN THE AMHARIC LANGUAGE

For instance, in a country that, broadly speaking[50], relies predominantly on patrilinear lineage, *yemut lij* ("a child of someone no longer alive") usually refers to a child who has lost his/her father. Children whose family and community are not able to care for and do not have any living parent are called in Amharic *welaj alba* (literally "lone child"), which is also used by the inter-country adoption department of the MOWCYA and refers to the more general category of OVC. However, participants in the research argue that this term is characterized by a strong negative connotation, and in their context, it was not of everyday use. Most of them refuse the association between this term and the experience of most of the children given into adoption. Furthermore, they stress the care that the family collectives have for children. Another term translated as 'orphan' during the research that would refer more to social orphanhood is *tekelaitekech* (fem.), or *tekeluiteke* (mas.).

The problematization of language meanings and hierarchy was also evident in participants' accounts in urban and rural contexts. Conversations about adoption often questioned or eluded the use of the English term "abandon", which is clearly understood and incorporated in

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[50] Ethiopia is composed of over eighty-two officially recognized ethnic groups.

the vocabulary concerning adoption in Ethiopia with a strong negative connotation. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> He says that if you find in the documents the name of the child, and the name of the family, it means they had to give the child away, but this is not abandoning, and the government knows the difference. He repeats this information several times, saying he does not know how it is called, but it is not abandoning, the family is not abandoning the child (…) Mothers have several reasons to give a child away. For example, poorness, illness, father's death, too many children, or the intention to give a child a better life. [Intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

This term fails to catch the variety of practices and intentions that the persons met during the fieldwork described[51], which predominantly entail acts of separation or child mobility that were not negatively connotated.

Abandonment is also addressed as one practice of separating the child from the parents in The Criminal Code of The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia[52]. Art. 659, "Failure to bring up"[53], defines the abandonment as a criminal practice when performed in a "grossly" negligent way with no care or attention, or when the child is given to the care of "a person, an organization or an institution with whom or where he knows or could have foreseen, that it will be reduced to physical or moral destitution, or will be physically or psychologically endangered"[54]. Such criteria have been used to set a parameter and create two different levels

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[51] This research focuses on children who were taken to the residential childcare institution a) older than one year, b) with at least a parent/relative alive, and c) with no apparent psychological or physical disability.

[52] Proclamation No 414/2004.

[53] "Article 659.- Failure to Bring up. (1) A parent or other person exercising the authority of guardian or tutor, who, for gain or in dereliction of his duty; a) grossly neglects the children under his charge and abandons them without due care and attention or to moral or physical danger; or b) entrusts a child for a long time to a person, an organization or an institution with whom or where he knows or could have foreseen, that it will be reduced to physical or moral destitution, or will be physically or psychologically endangered, is punishable with simple imprisonment or fine. In grave cases, the Court may, in addition, deprive the criminal of his family rights. (2) Where the child has suffered injury, whether foreseen or calculated, whether by abuse of the right to administer chastisement or through ill-treatment, the relevant provision in this Code shall apply concurrently (Art. 63)". A second article, "Art. 574 – Exposure or Abandonment of Another" also indirectly refers to abandon of an infant (aged less than one year) as exposing or abandoning her in a situation of "imminent danger of life or heath".

[54] The separation between a parent/relative and their kin is labelled and criminalized as abandonment depending on a) the mode in which it is performed and b) the circumstances. Both elements had been largely explained by participants in this research (who also said they were unaware of the details of Art. 659).

of parenting practice and 'legitimacy of the abandonment'. This difference emerged from several interviews and might be epitomized by the following interview run with the public relations specialist of a residential childcare institution. The participant explains the organization's procedures whenever Ethio-descendant adoptees visit the institution in search of their native family. He refers to two options: in the first case, the relatives directly relinquish the child to the facility; in the second case, the personnel cannot retrace the family of origin. For example:

> Some children have no parents but family and relatives. If they [the adoptees] come here [in Ethiopia, after the completion of the adoption process], we [the personnel of the institution] connect them with their family [of origin] because we record everything. We record who took them here, and we even write down relatives [' names], some contacts, like that (...) For abandoned children, it is totally impossible to find their family (...) We picked them from the garbage, the street, from someone who found them. [Residential childcare institution staff member, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

In the following part of such interview, the public relations specialist further explains that when someone brings the child to the orphanage, the staff collect information even if the person does not claim to be a relative. A further option that he mentions envisages the relatives coming afterwards the child's arrival to the institution to declare their relationship with the child and leave information about themselves.

Such discrepancies on a legal and socio-cultural ground between the universalized and the Ethiopian understanding of abandonment lead the study to refer to such experience as a separation, which determines the temporary or permanent interruption of a multidimensional care relationship between a child and her caregiver(s).

5.3 Departure and care: the multi-dimensionality of the concept of separation

The previous section illustrates that exploring the pre-adoption dynamics between the child and her native family might generate meaningful insights into how a child becomes available for adoption and how this data informs the adoption process. It also illustrates that in the

adoption system, the concept of abandon, or separation, is directly linked with the notion of care. The Global North-driven understanding tends to imagine care in the Global South as mono-dimensional: where there is 'proper' care (meaning where the quality of care is assessed following Global North standards), the child-care practice is acceptable. However, when the 'appropriate care' is lacking, the child appears as in need of a 'more functional' family setting that usually equals Global North family units and envisages a definitive and irrevocable break with the previous care relations and providers. The Global North interpretation demands the separation to break the links between the child and her caregiver(s).

Figure 9: dimensions of care in separation.
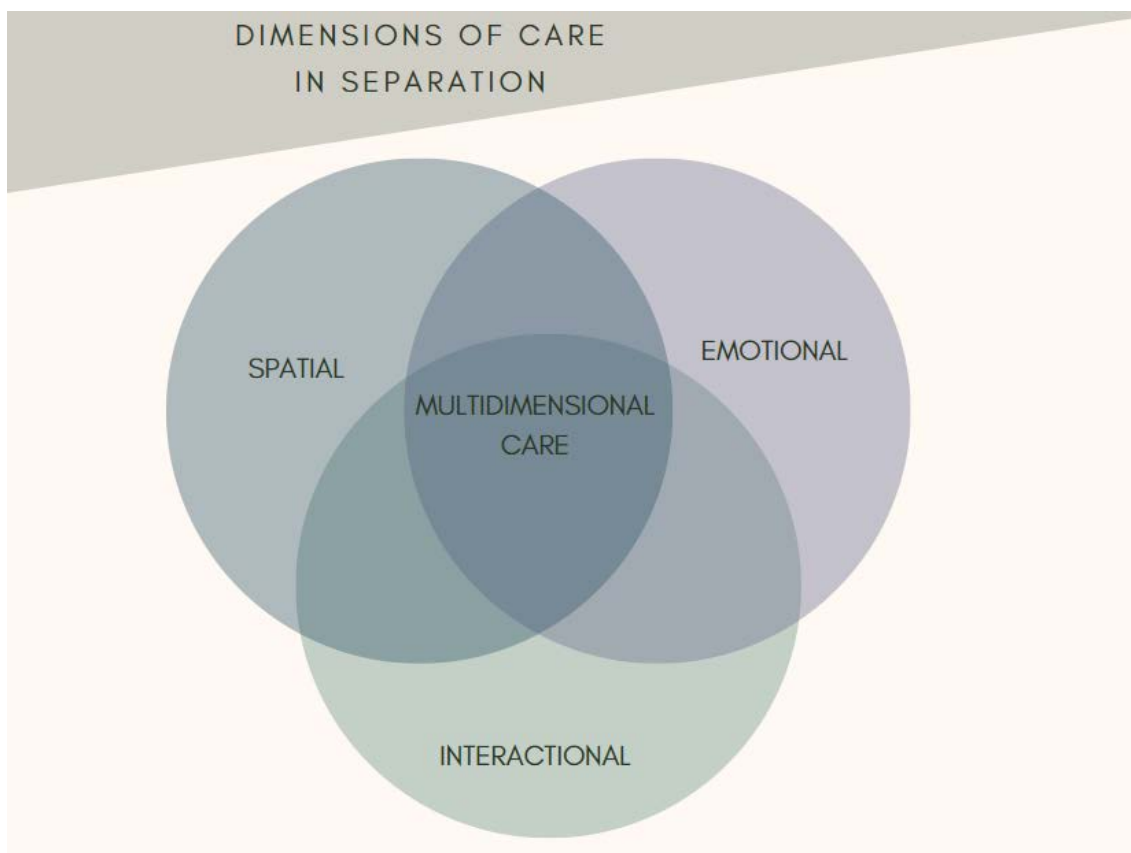
This study argues that notions of separation and care are socially constructed categories that largely depend on their comprehensive material and social context and dialogue in nuanced and subtle ways. This feature emerges from participants' accounts and participant observation as a multidimensional perspective on care.

When discussing the separation between the child and her caregiver(s), participants mention how it is performed as relevant to the moral and social value of the act *per se*. In other words, all participants mentioned three elements that might discern a 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' act

of separation: the emotional, spatial, and interactional dimensions (see Figure 9). These three aspects are treated in resonance with the post-adoption re-actions of the families of origin. Such dimensions were deployed by participants to 'open' a semantic space of dialogue between competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

The emotional dimension

The first element is the emotional dimension. Some authors have specifically engaged their research with mothers who separated from children who were not longer newborns (Alelign, 2011; Brittingham, 2010). Mothers' reasons for inter-country adoption were harsh material circumstances on top of weakened social networks, unemployment, and in some cases, extreme health conditions. Such studies interpreted mothers' experiences mainly through the emotional stress and trauma they endured during separation and the post-adoption sorrow and grief. Participants in this study also tend to refer to mothers, as further discussed later in the chapter. In their accounts, mothers' emotional response is split into two phases: the separation stage, or pre-adoption, and post-adoption. This section addresses the former whilst the latter is discussed in chapters Seven and Eight.

The emotional dimension of the pre-adoption stage is described with feelings of overwhelm. The framework usually illustrated does not envisage the undesirability of the child but rather underlines the unbearable living conditions that families of origin must undergo and the lack of suitable alternatives or opportunities to grasp. For example:

> When I brought her to the orphanage I was very, very, very, very, very, very, very sad, in deep sorrow … If there were other options, I would not have done differently. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

> She always cried. She has always cried when she received her [daughter's] news, when she sees her pictures. She is a mother who was sorry for having given up her baby [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

For rural contexts, particular stress was given to the absence of support and assistance, which is directly connected to a) the quick changes that family settings might experience due to unforeseen events that negatively impact the family organisation; and b) the lack of members in their social network with material means (willing) to support the family or care for the child. For example:

> Because people thought [the child's parents] died from HIV. The family, the extended family from the mother side and father side (…) told that they [the

child's parents] died of HIV. They even told that the child had HIV in her blood. So, they isolated her. They said that HIV [may spread] from her to them, so they did not want to accept [her in their households]. They did not want to take the risk, so they ignored her, totally. Also, because sometimes she had nosebleeds. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

His family did not have anything to offer him at that time because no one among their sons was working, yet. He was the youngest, and … Instead, things started going better because his brothers moved to South Africa, the two sisters got married, the brothers started sending money here [in Ethiopia] from South Africa, they improved their situation … As a matter of fact, before they lived in a tukul, and the brothers who are in South Africa managed to send them some money, they settled down if they have not been regularized, yet. [Adoptive father, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

This aspect was also evident from interviews with the birth families. In urban contexts, mothers were often depicted as persons with fractured social networks who try to juggle occasional support and assistance but encounter many structural obstacles. Given the lack of community support and its relevance in the Ethiopian context, several participants depicted these mothers' life as disorganised and mainly based on occasional help and working opportunities jeopardised by the presence of their children.

However, participants reported that, in some cases, the difficulty of separating from children also comes with emotions of relief, contentment, and 'happiness'. Such reactions are, again, associated with the emotional dimension of care. Indeed, positive feelings are linked to the belief and certainty that their children would be better off in the Global North, which is mainly understood as 'America'. According to participants, such assumptions persuaded families, also those in less difficult material conditions, to relinquish their children for inter-country adoption and 'use' it as a strategy to navigate potential future family scenarios and support.

Consequently, the adoption decision has been described through two angles that might remain separate or intertwine: a forced or a planned choice.

On the one hand, there is the forced choice. Mothers (and families) are described as deprived of any other chance; such choice is arguably illusional because it does not carry real alternative options. Continuous material help, as well as other medium or long-term support and assistance that might allow mothers to consider keeping the children with them, was not available when the decision was taken. For example:

I did not have my own house, and I used to live in someone's compound. I had a goat, I looked after the compound, and at the same time I was living in one room. So, after our brother died, I was not allowed to stay, I did not have anywhere to live. (…) I also had to pay the house rent. Moreover, I came from a rural area (…) I had two jobs. No one was there to [help me to] keep that

child (…) when I had to go to work. Who would have kept that child when I had to go to work? No one was there to keep her. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

Again, participants described such alternatives in terms of emotional and material support, employability, and child-care assistance, usually provided by a functional social environment with the capacities and the interest to help. In the case of lone mothers, social stigma (due, for instance, to having children out of wedlock, or health conditions) might ostracise them from their community. For example:

Since she was a single mother, and perhaps she was even scared. You know, she thought she had HIV, she thought she would have slept [a lot], suffer [physically], et cetera. She chose to give the child away because she did not want her son to witness her suffering, to see her die. Seeing her die: this was how she prefigured her condition, and maybe also what it was told her by different doctors. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

In other cases, mothers (and their families) might have recently migrated from the countryside and therefore lack a social network.

Interestingly, almost all participants emphasise the pivotal role of the social net, whilst only one mentions the absence of the governmental, centralised welfare in providing such services. For example:

Everything starts from the government because my government is responsible for me. To live a nice life, to have water, to haver power [electricity], and this and that (…) I know my government, they are trying their better et cetera et cetera, but it is much better for me to go there [in a Global North country] and, you know, live a normal life. Here [in Ethiopia], even my basic necessities are not fulfilled! (he claps his hands) [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

In this scenario, participants' descriptions almost echoe Högbacka's study on adoption in South Africa, which argues that "if they [birth mothers] could not afford to raise their child themselves, the only alternative offered to them was adoption" (Högbacka, 2019, p. 273), and therefore there was "a discernible narrative of blocked decision-making" (Högbacka, 2019, p. 274). For example:

Mothers who had to give their child away are really not making a choice, I would not even call it "choice". [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

On the other hand, there is the planned choice. In this case, it might seem that the rhetoric of choice, which is the 'free will' basis for any inter-country adoption process, might find some ground. However, as it will be better explored in this and the following chapters, all the Ethiopian participants in this study were unanimous in stating that most of the time, the

arbitrariness of such choice was connected to peculiar understandings of inter-country adoption that do not envisage a 'clean break' between the child and the family of origin. One participant who asked not to be audio recorded but was not speaking off the records epitomised this point by recounting her experience. When she was working as a social worker in a residential childcare institution in Addis Ababa, two mothers with a stable family and other children at home relinquished their toddlers to have them internationally adopted. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> The participant says [birth] mothers gave them [their children] into inter-country adoption "because of the [*ferenji* skin] colour". However, [birth] mothers told the participant their children have always been in their heart, in their thoughts, and that their sons are always their sons (the participant reported that birth mothers usually said, "my kids are always in my heart"). As an example, the participant recalls when two birth families took two children to the orphanage to have them adopted internationally. One of the mothers was crying, and the other mother was telling her, "Do not cry, your baby is always your baby", that this thing will never change. [Interview with an intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

In the case of 'forced' or 'planned' choice, particular attention was given by participants to the presumed arbitrariness that should ideally surround such a decision. There was unanimity in listing material poverty and disparities resulting from (post)colonial unequal access to resources and services as the most common motives to have children adopted internationally. As argued by participants, such an initial condition of uneven resource distribution makes it impossible to claim absolute arbitrariness in the first place. To explain this concept, participants often report descriptions of the Global North as some idyllic place. Such idea is also decoded by children's understanding of their future destination after adoption, as a participant who worked in a residential childcare institution pointed out during an interview. For example:

> (...) We [the personnel] explained to them [the children] that there are no diamonds or gold because many children arrived here informed as the other side of the world was heaven (…) by [birth] families, or maybe by the local organisation that was giving them away. It depends. By everyone, really!

[Residential childcare institution staff member, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

Participants similarly sympathised with the emotional condition of mothers (and families) of origin because their 'choice' made visible their feelings of entrapment and the necessity to secure the necessities of life. Empathy was also demanded from the researcher about parents who opted for inter-country adoption because they found themselves in desperate circumstances with no access to the essential means of survival. Ethiopian participants expressed these emotions using the "heart-breaking" expression. Mothers' corporeal representation of emotional strife worked as a further proof of attachment to validate their relationship.

Regarding 'validating' mothers' actions, their signs of distress became of uppermost relevance. Participants indirectly considered the grief and embodied affective disturbance experienced by families of origin an indicator of their intentions. For example:

> Among the people who gave their child, many are from the villages [in the countryside], because they are desperate. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

According to the symbolic analysis of the participants, mothers' emotional sufferance and investment – framed as verbal/non-verbal expressions of personal sacrifice – played a central role in differentiating the notion of separation performed by birth families from the notion of abandonment. As such, the use of the 'technical' word "abandon" often generated an (adverse) reaction in interlocutors, who reported different interpretations. To them, the abandonment implies a reduced emotional investment in the child and the act *per se* generates an 'untying' of the relation. Therefore, this oversimplification hides the entanglement of complex kinship strategies in the narrative of the "global orphan" (Abebe, 2009b). The separation process – when told by whom did not perform it – is recounted in detail to motivate the act of detachment as the final resolution of the caregiver. The goal is to make explicit that there is no intention or knowledge to practice an objective, absolute detachment from the child. It, therefore, becomes proof, the material evidence of the relationship quality between the mother and the child.

The rhetoric based on what families were ready to sacrifice to give their children a chance to improve their life is of paramount importance because personnel involved in the inter-country

adoption process deployed it to validate their choice of authorising and proceeding with the adoption of children that in facts were not suitable for adoption. For example:

> To me it was very important [to give them into adoption] because leaving [children] with their parents in such conditions [of poverty], in many cases, means that children would have died (…) The most important thing is that these children will be fine. That they will have the chance of a better life. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

According to participants' accounts, they felt they were doing something extremely positive. In some cases, removing children from conditions of severe poverty or malnutrition was depicted as the accomplishment of an act of social justice because it eases families' burden and gives the child tools to live a life that goes beyond survival conditions.

The spatial dimension

The second element that participants described amongst the care factors in performing separation is where children are left. The 'spaces' of relinquishment that were understood as and connected to conscious acts of care were places with a role in the inter-country adoption process, such as residential childcare institutions, *kebele*, sometimes police offices, hospitals; or other crowded or central locations in the city where parents were sure the child was quickly going to be noticed and taken care of. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> He says in Ethiopia abandon means relinquishing a child in the street: the child is relinquished, the police found him/her, there are no witnesses to testify what happened, the family is impossible to identify, or find. In those cases, in his opinion you have to go to jail because you are leaving a child in danger, there is no humanity in that act. But, he adds, leaving a child at the orphanage is different. If a mother of a father goes to give the child to the orphanage, or to adoption, that is not illegal. [Interview with an intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Participants' feedback on this topic resonates with a study published in 2000 on child abandonment in Addis Ababa, which explored the phenomenon of child abandonment in the seven districts (*woreda*) where children were most frequently abandoned. Qualitative interviews involved the police officers, who pinpointed the specific sites where children mainly were abandoned in the vicinity of bus stations, hospitals, churches, charity organisations, and residential areas where "many wealthy people and Diplomatic Community members reside (…), and mothers think that these people would take their abandoned children" (Tadele, 2000,

p. 305). Police officers from different districts agreed that mothers had the tendency to choose places that would grant them a) a great chance to have their lone children seen and picked up; and b) the capacity to leave their children without being detected.

As it might be observed, the chosen locations were within a particular facility or in the surroundings where mothers (and other family members) might not be spotted. Such details are of uppermost importance because, as the personnel of the childcare institution made clear, the guideline concerning child abandonment and adoption have tightened up during the last two decades. Several protocols have been emanated and implemented afterwards to ensure more rigorous control of the adoption process. Until 2009, parents were allowed to take children directly to the orphanage. There, they could fill the staff with all the relevant information, including the reason for the separation. From 2009 to 2014, native relatives leaving the child in the orphanage became increasingly penalised from a legal point of view. Eventually, it became illegal. From 2014 until the ban of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia, children had to be taken to the residential childcare institutions by the police. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> Nowadays, abandoning is a felony; therefore, in the last period there has been a change of trend related to the age of the children given into adoption. Before children were older, now they are newborns because it is simpler to abandon them. [Interview with an intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]
>
> Until ten years ago, children were taken [to the orphanage] from their mothers. But them, children started being taken by the police. Actually, at a certain point, particularly in the last five years, they became very strict, and children had to stay in an active federal orphanage, to then move to a private one. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

Therefore, mothers (and families) of origin had to adapt and change the separation sites. They needed to leave the child in an area where the child would have been more 'rescuable', but mothers would not be recognised. Participants have interpreted this change of praxes as a way of protecting the native relative and child. For this reason, such practice is not interpreted as an act of abandonment and does not fall in the same category as the cases described by Tadele (2000) concerning children left in isolated or risky areas.

The tightening of the abandonment provisions raised some questions concerning the interpretation that the Ethiopian government might have of the space of the childcare institution. As already mentioned in a previous section, abandonment is addressed in The Criminal Code by Art. 659, which defines it as a criminal practice when performed with "grossly negligence" or the child is given to "a person, an organisation or an institution" that would

reduce the child to a condition of "physical or moral destitution". Making illegal the relinquishment of children for purposes of institutionalisation might be an attempt to limit the strategic use of inter-country adoption, as it is further explored in the following chapters. However, the likeness in the provisions' implementation between residential childcare institutions and the description of institutions that would reduce children in conditions of destitution might raise some analogies between the two. Integrating legal theory with participants' practical experience and narration, the impression is that childcare institutions have been increasingly considered inadequate by the Ethiopian government to assure children's physical and psychological development. Indeed, the government has progressively addressed residential childcare institutions as the final resolution for children who lack an extended social network. This shift seems to have been made in light of evidence that childcare institutions might provide essential support to children's growth but do not suffice to grant them full emotional and social development[55] (Disassa and Lamessa, 2021; Sebsibe et al., 2014).

The interactional dimension

The third and last aspect of the act of separation that participants mentioned as relevant to make it morally and socially 'legitimate' is the interactional dimension. This dimension differs from the previous two because its existence marks a continuity between the separation and what comes next. The interactional dimension and its analytical implications are at the core of this research. It is a multi-layered concept that builds over time during the different stages of adoption and starts with the very act of separation. Participants' perspective focuses on separation as the result of a relationship between two or more subjects connected by relations of (inter)dependence. This standpoint offers a different interpretation of separation from the mono-dimensional interruption of all relationships, a narrative antithetic to the rhetoric of the clean break. Such narrative is described in this study as circular and becomes an analytical tool to draw connections from pre-adoption to post-adoption.

The interactional dimension emerges from participants' accounts within the broader framework of inter-country adoption. To the extent of this study, the term 'interaction' refers

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[55] However, there are studies (Whetten et al., 2009) arguing that, in under-resourced societies, the child's psycho-social well-being "may heavily depend on the quality of care provided within a setting rather than the care setting itself" (Huynh et al., 2019, p. 8).

to physical, emotional, material and verbal exchanges that native mothers (and families) use to keep a relationship of care or (inter)dependence with the child. As explored in this thesis, such interactions have the triple goals of keeping a pre-existent relationship with the child, establishing a new fictive kin tie with the adoptive family, and creating the ground to satisfy the criteria of filial obligations in the long-term future.

Discussions focused on interactions during three moments: 1) when the separation is planned and performed; 2) when the child resides with the temporary guardian who bridges between the native and the adoptive family; 3) when, in the pre-adoption process, the mother (or family) of origin prospect(s) future interactions with the child (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: interactional dimension of care in separation.
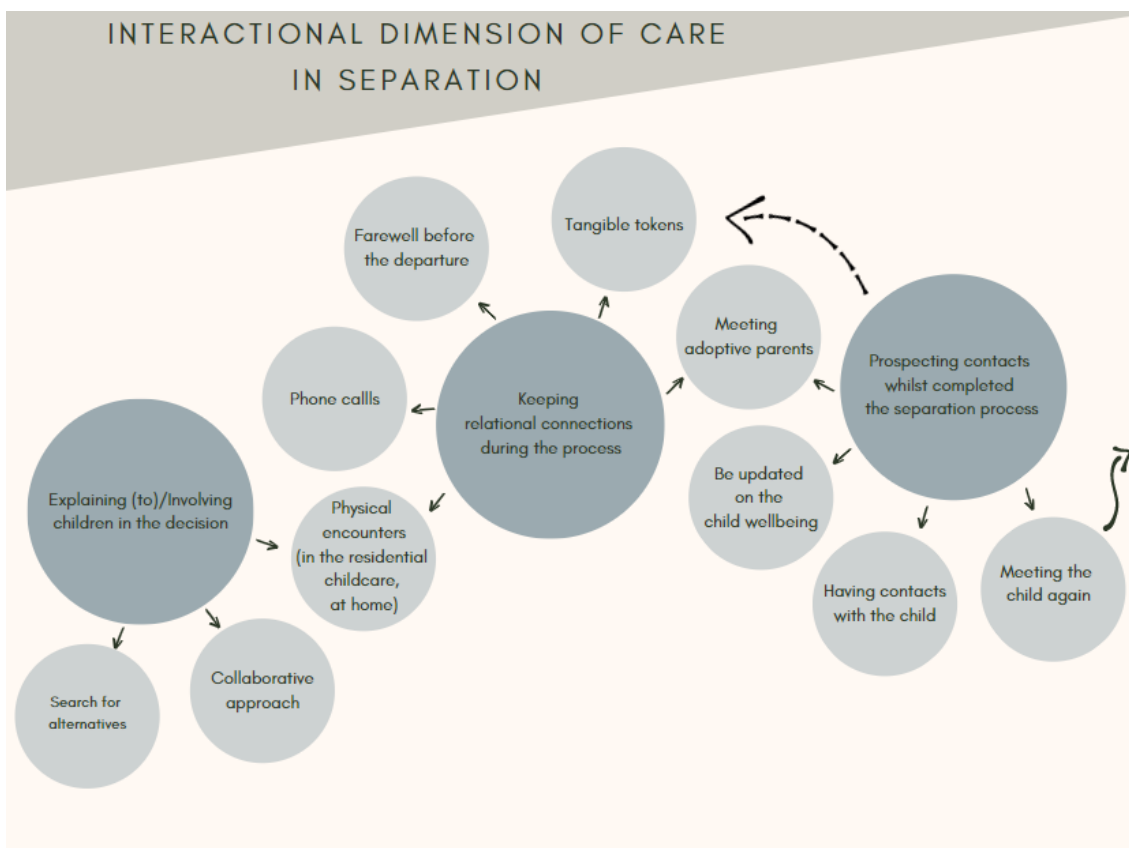
For what concerns the first moment, participants reported that the child(ren) of the family might be involved in such a decision when they are considered 'old enough' to understand what is happening. Some interviews roughly estimated such age as starting from 3,4 years old. Reasons to involve the child were mainly connected to the need to make her comply with the caregiver's decision and have a unanimous version of the reasons for the separation. Children were instructed to observe their families' requests in forms that resonate with the notions of filial obligations and intergenerational dependence, as one Ethiopian intermediary stressed

whilst explaining the level of involvement of children in the choice of separation to be internationally adopted. For example:

> It depends on how the child has been prepared. If his parents promised him that he would grow, not keep in contact, and come back, clearly, this child lives a life … a double life. Maybe he is fine there [in the Global North], but at the same time, he is not fine because there is a promise that he should maintain, anyway. (…) Because a 10-year-old Ethiopian child and a 10-year-old child who lived in an Italian family, I assure you they had very different needs. In my country, a 10-year-old child is an adult already. He already knows many things. Maybe he already helped the family to provide daily food, to give you an example. Many [children suitable for adoption] come from the countryside. There, a 4-year-old child already begins to help the family by collecting woods, for instance. It depends on where they come from, these children, from the city or the countryside. [Inter-country] Adoption is a vast topic because each story is different, each life is different, and each child has a different story. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

This perspective is common to other participants. However, a robust and intergenerational relationship does not necessarily mean that all family members have common goals and equal power in the decision-making process, as is better explained in the section on mothers' real and imaginative role. In the case of children, their age establishes their capacity to be informed about the family strategies but also undermines their authority in decisions connected to separation. Their role is therefore often limited to a condition of acknowledgement of choices that directly interest them.

The second moment of interaction is when the child is in the 'in-between' guardianship. This time often interests the presence of the child in residential childcare, even though in a few cases, participants report it was declared that children were in the orphanage but were instead with their living caregivers. Explanations of this latter option entail either a) allowing the child to spend all the remaining time in Ethiopia with the family of origin; b) saving the child the experience of the childcare institution; or c) countryside childcare institutions that existed only nominally and therefore could not host the child.

This section addresses the interaction between the family of origin and the child whilst the latter is under the guardianship of the residential childcare institution.

During this time, contacts are mediated by the residential childcare institution personnel, who might limit interactional options with the child. For instance, one orphanage did not let relatives have multiple meetings with the child whilst another had a monthly day for visits. For example:

> She stayed, the child stayed there for a year, for one year, before being adopted. I had a plan to visit her regularly, but they [the orphanage's staff] were not willing to show her to me. The orphanage was not willing to show the child to me. I could meet her only two times. One, after sometimes, and one when the family was there. They used to tell me that it is not good for the child, to see me, because she missed me, and like that (…) so I went there again and again and again and again, and I could visit the child only two times in a year. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

In a third place, families were encouraged to visit the children and take the children home during holidays. For example:

> In my orphanage, the families can come and visit, and - even we encourage! And during holidays, someone is, if someone wants to … receive the child [take the child home], there is a paperwork, they signed, then they receive, and they bring back, they bring back. [Residential childcare institution staff, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

Visiting the orphanage has been underlined as very demanding for families residing in the countryside because of costs, transport, time, family organisation and logistics. Participants also mentioned phone calls as a way for the family to be updated on children's conditions. The last aspect is the tangible tokens that families of origin might leave to the child. Participants agree with the consideration that the child who satisfies all the criteria and results suitable for adoption would spend in the residential childcare institution from three to six months before being relocated within the adoptive family.

The third moment of interaction is focused on the prospective future contacts, which might be of two kinds. The first consists of the native family's visit to the child before the legal conclusion of the adoption process. For example:

> The family went to say goodbye the evening before [we arrived]. [Adoptive father, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Participants reported that visits occur when the family has the means as a farewell to the child. This visit might occur in the peripheral residential childcare institution in the countryside or at the institution in the city where the child last resides before her transfer. The second type consists of the meeting the native family might obtain with the adoptive family. Both visits have been described by participants as typical when the native family have the means to

move. For the Ethiopian kin, such meetings have the token role of confirming the beginning of a new relationship that should establish further expected interactions in the future. This consideration emerges as one of the crucial moments in the creation of competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. In a circular understanding of inter-country adoption, native families expect enduring ties.

Participants explained that expected future interactions envisaged receiving a regular update about the child's health situation, education progress, behaviour and development abroad. The urgency of direct contact increases as the child grows nearer to the age of 18, which is the limit that makes the child legally free to make her own choice, as explained in chapter Four, and potentially search for her native family.

This expectation connects to the notion of ethnic and cultural authenticity, as further explored in the following chapters on reconnection. To briefly introduce it, the experience of children in the Global North is often described as an opportunity but also as a cultural and belongingness' 'misplacement'. According to the main descriptions, children pursue the search for their homeland and native family as a natural consequence of feeling "out of place". It is a spontaneous act because they feel they belong somewhere else. During interviews, adoptees' roots were framed in terms of belongingness to a family and a nationality. Notions of dual belongingness (Ferrari et al., 2015) never appeared in conversations. In other words, adoptees are never referred to as Ethio-Europeans, but always as Ethiopians. It underlines the 'Ethiopianness' inscribed in their bodies beyond their citizenship, the techniques of the body cited by Mauss (1936), such as embodied habits, or habitus, on eating methods, taste appreciation, mouth's ability to reproduce the Amharic language sounds. These aspects are further investigated in the following chapters.

5.4 Performing separation: the kin selection for the adoption

This section connects to the previous considerations on separation and addresses the reasons behind the choice of giving children into adoption. Many participants talked about a discernible narrative of actual 'child selection' carried by native families to find the most suitable child for adoption. This perspective is explored through the examination of three pivotal elements, namely the 'desirability' of the child, the 'investment' that adoption

represents for the native family, and the decisional process that leads to the choice of the child adoption. Then, these factors are analysed in conjunction with previous findings on separation.

"The most desirable" child

The first factor that participants underlined was the child's 'desirability'. The concept of desirability has been described through three indicators: age, aspect, and intelligence. Participants highlighted the hierarchy of such indicators according to their influence on the completion of the adoption procedure.

The child's age is considered a pivotal aspect in the selection for adoption because it was also the adoption agency's selective criteria. Younger children were more likely to be adopted, whereas older children did not satisfy the requirements and therefore had less chance. For example:

> The older brothers wanted to go [into adoption] (…) but they were too old and they already knew that no one would have adopted them; therefore, they tried to convince their mother to give him [into adoption], who was the youngest one. [Adoptive father, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Previous studies based on ethnographic, archival analysis and in-depth interviews with adoption agencies' personnel and adoptive families hypothesised that the 'most desirable' child for the adoption agency is under 6 (Costa, 2013).

Participants in this study informed that the age criterion is so crucial to the adoption that, in the presence of older children, it was not unusual to forge the documentation reporting the child's official age to make it conform for adoption. The child's age is a matter that involves native families but is of concern for adoption agencies. It is directly connected to national and private dynamics of inclusion of the adoptee in the Global North family unit and her differentiation from the other international migrants in the Global North, as further discussed in chapter Eight.

Younger children are more desirable, in opposition to children older than 6, whose adoption has been proven more complicated. The documented age of the child is also frequently at the centre of several debates connected to her potential and actual age. This happens because children come with a birth certificate produced when the separation starts. When the birth family leaves the children at the orphanage, the *kebele* produces the documentation. Alternatively, data were collected and 'certified' together with the orphanage staff. Whenever it was impossible to know for sure the child's age, the date of birth was estimated from the

knowledge of the family (such as the concurrency of other private or public events that took place during that time) or by looking at the child's body type. Starting from the information collected by police, orphanages staff and adoption agencies, children were usually 'aged' by rounding down their hypothetical age. As such, documents usually declared children younger than they were in real life. It could happen that a child was declared younger than her actual age on purpose, aiming to make her look younger than 6. Several adoptive families declared they eventually discovered their child was 1 to 3 years older than the document stated (Costa, 2013). The age issue has been so relevant in the past that a few adoption agencies decided to do an 'age test' to children, consisting of an X-ray of the left wrist (De Sanctis et al., 2014). However, the test did not prove to be valid: the test results were set up on the physical structure of a standard European child, with a different structure and hardly ever exposed to experiences of deterioration and malnutrition, which were not uncommon for Ethiopian OVC bodies. Together with the age aspect, another element that has been considered essential concerns the 'qualities' of the child. It emerged from qualitative interviews with native families. For example:

> As the child was beautiful and very, very smart since he was an infant, we chose him because he has been the smartest child ever since. We saw an added talent: he was gifted with his particularly active intelligence. He was very active, so we thought it was better for him to go [to the Global North] and succeed. And once he had succeeded, he would have helped us. This is the reason why we chose him. [Native father, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

Many birth parents defined the child(ren) given into adoption as the most gifted. Beautiful physical appearance, extreme intelligence, and outstanding smartness have been listed amongst the elements that push families to opt for one child instead of another. There is a clear investment to improve the child's probability of success in being adopted and reaching higher standards of living in the Global North. From an analytical perspective, this investment seems self-intuitive for native families as much as it is unacknowledged (even unthinkable) for Global North adoptive parents. A child considered 'fit for adoption' by her family in Ethiopia might thus be mistakenly perceived as an outcast, doomed, abandoned child coming from a negligent or non-existent family. Cases vary substantially from one child to another, but by and large, this discrepancy in interpretations fits in the large gap between Global North and Global South looks of adoption, adoptability, and human investment, as illustrated in the following section.

Children and human capital

Beyond the satisfaction of adoptive criteria, the selection of adoptable children concerns a variety of material reasons that are of uttermost importance for the continuity of life within the birth family routine. Children's social positioning within their extended family must be contextualised in both its diverse material and cultural conditions – socio-economic situation, geographical location, ethnic group, beliefs' community – and its individual peculiarities – age in relation to gender, birth order and sibling composition, and capability.

Considered competent actors with a changing social and economic value, their participation in the (re)productive activities is vitally interdependent to social reproduction and subsistence economies. Children's contribution is an integral part of daily tasks and family livelihood. The nature of their participation is pondered as appropriate to their age and gradually changing into activities that move them closer to adults' activities as they develop their competencies and explore their opportunities. However, children's involvement depends on material needs, and global political-economic events might generate diverse investment trajectories or ask families for further sacrifices.

As such, children's involvement patterns must adapt to the exposition of peculiar contexts and consider translocal trajectories. Adoption represents a potential trajectory that families desire to pursue. The choice of whom to keep home is heavily influenced by the domestic support that children offer to women when chores need to be shared. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> Native families really need to keep someone with them, it is a need to keep the girls with them, to take care of the other children that are there already and need to be raised. [Interview with an intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]
>
> A child older than five, six, seven years old, starts already helping with small chores, helps the family [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

The gender and intergenerational labour division are the main reasons behind the selection of the chosen child for adoption. Girls are involved in domestic work and care, such as chores, and look after their siblings and other children of the extended family (according to their age, kin composition and other characteristics). When ageing, girls grant material care to their parents and elders in a context where welfare is absent. Boys are majorly involved in activities that would indirectly support the family, such as granting a constant income flow to their household of origin. Family organisation is essential to guarantee the survival of the family

group. As such, this selection also considers the role that family members cover logistically. Those able to bring about substantial benefits with their presence in the extended family and others with the duty of social reproduction have more chances to be kept closer to the household. Those with fewer responsibilities to economic production will be directed to navigate other options to contribute to the welfare of their households, thus satisfying their social and economic obligations to their families. From this recount, it can be observed how children represent a human capital for several rural Ethiopian families, and while their birth represents the original investment as it has been for centuries in several parts of the world, the directions such investment can take vary, depending on the resources of the families, the duties of the children and the contribution to the household. A family that gave a child out for adoption might have been at the centre of a multiplicity of glocal trajectories influencing their well-being. There is a management plan to reduce the risks and maximise the benefits in action when such a group decides it is better to invest their 'capital' in yet another direction, namely inter-country adoption. Once again, each situation is hardly comparable to another in terms of family size, geography, resources, environment, position in the community and other variables. As such, adoption tends to be an investment situated in a vast space between the last option available and a rational, thoughtful investment plan.

Either way, it results from a complex decisional process requiring careful consideration and evident emotional implications. As underlined in the above paragraph, maximising the child's role in economic production is often crucial to the family of origin, a multi-layered process tightly intertwined with relational, social, and structural aspects of being a family. Similarly, her role in the dynamics of social reproduction and family care undergoes decisional processes that interest the native family's private and public arenas, as underlined in the following sections.

"No space for fathers": the mothers' real and imaginative role

According to participants, several actors influence the choice of adopting a child out for inter-country adoption. In mono-parental families, the main choice is usually made by the parent still alive. When both parents are alive, the gender dimension and the public domain intersect. Family relations in Ethiopia are generally (with a few exceptions) patrilinear and patriarchal. Men hold the public power and the representational role of the family in the community and are responsible for making choices that would influence families' human resource investment. Conversely, women are depicted as subordinate and supportive, mainly responsible for

'invisible' activities related to domestic work, family care, and household chores, which are shared with or delegated to children. For example:

> In the countryside (...) women do everything. Taking care of the house, of the children, of the daily food, keep everything under control (...) Sometimes, women also take part in harvesting, removing weeds. Women are everywhere, here in Ethiopia. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

However, women are also considered solely responsible for child-caring duties and equipped with a peculiar instrumental and emotional competence and connection to their children.

In the adoptive process, the public uniqueness of the male-centricity evaporates. Indeed, men in the space of the childcare institution have been described as bodies out of place. Many adoption agencies and orphanage staff describe their presence as disturbing, referring to feelings of doubt and suspicion. When asked why men were depicted as carriers of misplaced bodies and intentions, personnel respond that fathers usually do not provide any care to children. As such, a father/man who takes the child to the childcare institution immediately raises the *mogzitoch* (nannies, in Amharic) suspect: "Who is this person? Why is he here? Where is the mother?". In this familiar framework, separation is described as an integral part of the care responsibilities. As such, it is entirely devolved to mothers, who are expected to be actively involved above and beyond fathers.

Moreover, the pivotal role of mothers has been underlined at hearings. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> She says that when they go to the hearing to confirm the child's abandon, sometime there are both parents. The judge asks the father how old he is, how many children they have, if he is her husband, but, usually, the judge's eyes are on the mother, and the judge asks only to her if she is sure, if she really wants to do that. [Intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The insistence of the judge in remarking eye contact with the mother has been interpreted as a prolonged assessment of the mother's will and intention and has been underlined as particularly important when performed in court. The focus on the mother in a public space, even in the father's presence, highlights the power inversion when concerning children care issues. The role of the mother in the court shows that adoption is encompassed by the collective gender-oriented socio-construction of the family (re)productive power. Even in the public arena, there is "no space for fathers" in the Ethiopian adoptive narrative. Mothers' protagonism in the adoption process is a constituted recognition and confirmation of their social reproductive capacity, social embodiment, and construction of gender roles. However, in

the familiar organisation, decisions concerning human and social capital are still unbalanced to the patrilinear side. As such, participants argue the father has the last word on these issues.

As mentioned before, adoption might be considered an opportunity to improve children's human capital and the extended family's social capital on a long-term basis. The relevance of this choice in terms of family and community potential outcomes encourages other members of the family group to pressure the parent(s) to take this decision. Older siblings that would not be a suitable fit for such a migrative trajectory also pressure their parent(s) to start the process and give the younger(s) out for adoption. As observed, siblings' main arguments encompass the belief that a *ferenji* family might offer better education, quality of life, and future incomes in the child's life, with a cascade effect of potential future benefits for the family. The probable return of this social investment also pushes the community to pressure the family with positive and advantageous descriptions of the adoption process, with examples of financial and social returns for the family (and, overall, the community) in the long run. Given the interrelation and intersection of individual and collective choices, matters like this tend to be often discussed in the neighbourhood. Reciprocal social obligations often encourage the family to ask neighbours for support the process with oral and written testimonies that would corroborate that the child is the fittest for adoptive purposes (See also Costa, 2013). On their behalf, neighbours would be encouraged to support families' requests for testimony to avoid disagreements and consequential relational fractures. According to the Ethiopian standard legal procedure, three witnesses are needed to confirm an assumption, which becomes then a fact that can be reported on official documents. When the child does not present the necessary requisites, neighbours' collaboration may consist in producing documents that would adapt the reality and make the child fit the criteria for adoption, also by omitting, altering, or falsifying information. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> In the end, she [the social worker] went to the mother and asked, "What have you done?" (...) and the mother answered, "You see how clever I have been. I told them I was dead, so the children went for adoption". [Social worker, September 2019, Ethiopia]
>
> There are some data that perhaps you could not always know, but the parents' age, whether the parents are married or not, where they live, how many children they have — these are all indications that actually allow you to understand if the adoption was conducted in a correct way or not. She says that in recent times there was a lot of corruption and many, many false statements. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

In conclusion, the desirability of the child, the human investment and the the decision-making illustrate how complex, stratified and often non-linear the pre-adoption stage is. The native family plays an active role in all the stages leading up to adoption. From a Global North perspective, the role of the native family in the adoptive process is often unrecognised or highly undervalued. This study argues that native families might take the road to adoption, gathering and using all their knowledge and resources. Nevertheless, their painstakingly pondered human investment is likely to fail due to the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. The native families are, in short, the only ones perceiving adoption as a continuation in a system in which this is rather interpreted as a rupture.

5.5   Conclusion

This chapter explores notions of separation as a multidimensional concept and addresses the collective effort in crafting particular childhoods that would converge with the legal production of a child eligible for adoption. It focuses on the multiple keeps together the multiple expectations and purposes linked to it.

This chapter illustrates that concepts of abandonment and adoption as imported by international law and child rights does not fit well the complexity of the adoption process because it an individual, linear narrative. In the Ethiopian context, they have been often, if not always, framed as a 'collective', circular experience. Not just because of different community involvement, but also concerning the person/s separating from the child.

Considerations that emerged in this chapter entangled with elements such as the right to mobility, the intergenerational debt, children's rights promotion, social justice, and (post)colonial iniquity addressed from a feminist stand. Such aspects are further investigated in the next chapter, which focuses on the (un)expected consequences that result from these preconditions and explores what strategies native families enact to keep in contact with their children and implement their expectation concerning children's return in Ethiopia.

Chapter 6. Performing parenthood in the child's absence

6.1   Introduction

Chapter Five introduced the idea that inter-country adoption is a cross-cultural territory where diverging or different notions on abandonhood and orphanhood might occur. It also argued that the theoretical intersection of such notions is prevented by the Global North dominant narrative on adoption, which tends to give visibility only to Western-centred assumptions on the relation between child mobility and care. Therefore, the previous chapter focused on multi-dimensionality to make visible local knowledge on separation and investigate the legal ground that surrounds it. Such analysis also aimed to move beyond the compassionate and sympathetic interpretation of native mothers' longing and sorrow. Instead, it made visible that abandonment and separation are multi-layered relational performances, contextually situated, whose connotations and meanings might drastically change according to determined criteria. The previous chapter also began to explore a concept at the core of this study, namely the idea of a circular narrative on inter-country adoption. The circular narrative diverges from the linear, clean break narrative and instead argues that, in some instances, the adoption of children abroad is an event planned by the family to strategically cope with material poverty and disparities resulting from a (post)colonial, unequal access to resources and services (see Figure 11).

Chapter Six grounds on such premises, focuses on the pre and post-adoption phases and further explores the entanglements between child mobility, kinship, and space in inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. This chapter counts six sections and is divided into three parts. The first part, which consists of three sections, focuses on native families' strategies to get in contact with their children adopted abroad. Post adoptive reports represent a central point. Post adoptive reports (hereafter PARs) are documents provided by adoption agencies for the Ministry of Women, Youth and Children Affairs (MOWCYA) to assess the child's well-being and development after the adoption.

Figure 11: *circular narrative versus linear narrative.*
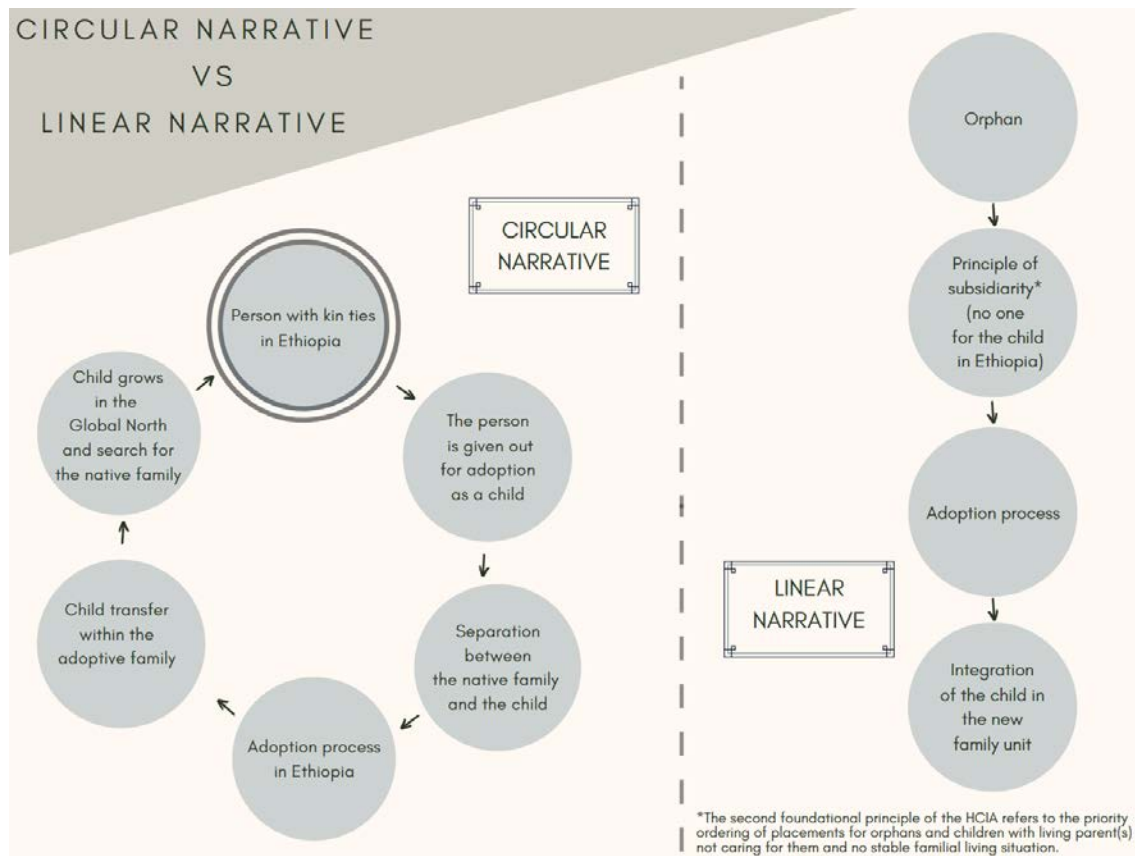
This chapter argues that the production and fruition of PARs play a strategic role in maintaining such connection. The first section begins by exploring the structure, contents and goals of PARs. This part of the study origins from: a) in-depth interviews conducted with first-hand experts on PARs (personnel from adoption agencies, residential childcare institutions and MOWCYA personnel); and b) an archival ethnography conducted in September 2019 on 32 PARs randomly selected in a renowned residential childcare institution of Addis Ababa, which granted access to PARs received in 2018 and 2019. This section presents a qualitative exploration of such documentation to explain why PARs are so relevant to this study and the participants involved.

The second section offers an overview of the organisations that possess such documentation and continues to explore PAR's relevance and potential when studying inter-country adoption. Data explored in this section was collected with in-depth interviews and participant observation. It begins with a discussion on data storage, access and circulation in facilities that possess the documentation, namely residential childcare institutions, adoption agencies and the MOWCYA. This section analyses such places from three perspectives: their meaning and accessibility for families of origin; their availability and capacity to provide support to families

of origin's needs; and their personnel's standpoint concerning native families' search for support and information on their children adopted abroad. The third section analyses the link between information contained in PARs and native families' positioning during the post-adoption stage. Notably, it addresses the Ethiopian family's interests in PARs, which is argued to be interpreted as a tool to retain contacts and specific kin ties in conditions of international child relocation. This section also displays how families navigate resources to reach out to their children adopted abroad and access such documents, which constraints they encounter, and the strategies they put in place to overcome them.

The second part of this chapter moves along the discourse of the circular narrative and the native families' search for their children adopted abroad and centres on the perceptions of the bond that persists between the adopted child and her native family. It explores the expectations concerning adoptees' return and what elements would 'push' them to search for their native families. It points out that sharing a blood connection indicates ongoing physical and emotional ties and lists elements that participants pointed out as 'clues' or "material vectors of immaterial relatedness". The last section notionally positions the finding of the chapter. As anticipated in the literature review in chapter Two, it borrows Scheper-Hughes and Lock's theoretical concept of the three bodies (1987) to offer a new perspective on child mobility and kin ties in inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. A more comprehensive, theoretical explanation is followed by punctual references to the Ethiopian contexts and to data collected during the fieldwork through in-depth interviews and participant observation to produce a comprehensive construal of Ethiopian's connection between inter-country adoption and filial obligations.

Information gathered in this chapter mainly result from participant observation and in-depth conversations that took place with international staff in childcare institutions and adoption agencies' offices. Topics connected to native families as an uncomfortable presence was also underlined by Ethiopian intermediaries who had pluriannual living experience in the Global North. As such, they are the result of fieldnotes and data collected during participant observation.

6.2 Post-adoption reports: their relevance in Ethiopia and to this study

Intercountry adoption exists within a complex web of international legal and political frameworks that seek to balance the interests of children, birth families, and receiving families while ensuring the protection of human rights. The evolving landscape of intercountry adoption is shaped by various international conventions, treaties, and guidelines that aim to establish ethical standards and safeguard the well-being of children. One of the key instruments in this domain is the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993). The Hague Convention sets out principles and standards to govern intercountry adoption, emphasizing the child's best interests, preserving the child's identity, and preventing improper financial gain. Countries that are parties to the Convention commit to establishing a central authority responsible for overseeing adoptions and ensuring compliance with the Convention's provisions.

Article 1 of the Guide to Good Practice for The Implementation and Operation of the 1993 Hague Intercountry Adoption Convention (HCCH, 2008) states that, once completed the inter-country adoption process, receiving countries must draw up and send post-adoption reports (PARs) when the law in the state of origin of the child requires it (Chapter 9, Section 3, Art. 592). Art. 592 further states that it is up to the country of origin to determine for how long PARs must be redacted, that "these legal requirements should be respected by the prospective adoptive parents and the authorities in the receiving State", and that the provision of post-adoption reports "cannot merely be regarded as a moral obligation" (HCCH, 2008, pp. 127-128). PARs shall convey to countries of origin information about the general well-being of the adopted child. According to participants, the MOWCYA requires the receiving country to send one report every three months during the first year after adoption, one report every six months for the following five years, and then one report per year until the child turns 18. Post-adoption reports should be delivered to the MOWCYA, where the inter-country adoption department staff may use such documentation to confirm that the child is appropriately raised to then store them securely[56]. The Alternative Childcare Guidelines (2009) state that PARs

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[56] Residential childcare institutions may provide further intermediation between the adoptive families and the MOWCYA. Indeed, participant observation revealed that in several cases, adoptive families or agencies would send PARs directly to the orphanages. When this happens, residential childcare institutions should send the documentation to the MOWCYA to allow the inter-country adoption office to keep records of each child given into adoption. This system worked in Ethiopia until the inter-country

have the general purpose of focusing on health conditions, nutritional status and physical development.

As chapter Two remarks, Ethiopia has not ratified the Hague Convention. Nonetheless, it is amongst the countries that require from receiving countries regular post-adoption reports to assess the child's correct psychophysical and social development. Interviews underlined that from the drafting to the submission, PARs are not considered just formal, bureaucratic papers.

PARs are relevant because they are an integral part of the adoption procedure and the actual cooperation arrangements between the two countries performing the adoption[57]. However, in the eyes of the native families, they are more than a 'mere' report to assure Ethiopian authorities that children placed within foreign families outside Ethiopia are receiving proper care and protection.

The archival ethnography revealed that PARs contain broad and detailed information concerning adoptees' lives abroad, which might be valuable for the MOWCYA and native families. PARs contain pictures and potentially detailed accounts, and this peculiarity allows native families who look to keep some connection with their children adopted abroad to gather information. PARs epitomise the substantial and multifaceted interest a sending country might maintain in the adopted child, which does not cease with a citizenship shift.

This understanding and 'use' of PARs resonate by some means with the Hague Convention implementation and operation guide to good practice (HCCH, 2008), which states that "where

adoption ban in January 2018. Subsequently, almost all the adoption agencies interrupted their work in the country, and some childcare institutions closed. As explained by a child protection officer working at the MOWCYA, once dedicated to inter-country adoption procedures, their department converted its activities to post inter-country adoption relations and procedures. Currently, their main tasks focus on a) managing data gathering on Ethiopian children adopted abroad and b) providing customer support to adoptees and native and adoptive families.

[57] Notwithstanding the ban, adoptive families must still provide the MOWCYA with follow-up reports. Nonetheless, since the beginning of 2018, the number of post-adoption reports received by the MOWCYA has sharply decreased. When the post-adoption service providers – namely adoption agencies – stopped working in Ethiopia and redirected their personnel to other branches, no one took their place in encouraging the PARs' timely submission, even though the Alternative Childcare Guidelines state that adoption agencies "shall have the responsibility to arrange for the transfer of documents and records to the relevant authority and to other accredited governmental organization/s" (2009, p. 46) even in case of closure. As a result, the observance of PARs' requirements depended entirely on adoptive families' willingness. The invitation to adoptive families to provide self-reports through countries' embassies had a negligible impact. To improve the situation, the MOWCYA implemented a communication system that involves the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and allows it to reach the receiving countries through the Ethiopian Embassies. This action partially improved the situation; however, it is still registered a significant deficiency of post-adoption assessments.

appropriate and permitted, there could be a sharing of information and contacts between the family of origin and the adoptive family"[58] (HCCH, 2008, p. 126). This research argues that native families' use of PARs in Ethiopia is consistent with the perspective of cultivating links with the country of adoption because, in this context, the PAR is interpreted as a tool designed to unilaterally share information, keep contacts, and retain kin and relational ties of the triad. Such understanding is in line with the exploration of other local fictive kinship practices (see Appendix D), and the socio-cultural contextualisation of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia mentioned in chapter Four. This argument also resonates with participants' considerations about separation, who disclosed that Ethiopian relatives of origin who involve children older than 3 years old in inter-country adoption do not expect relations to be interrupted (see chapter Five).

This section presents insights into the post-adoption reports' structure and provides descriptive extracts of the archive ethnography to contextualise this part of the study. The goal is to corroborate the explanation based on post-adoption reports' analysis. Data and text extracts were collected from 32 PARs consulted in September 2019 in Addis Ababa. For this study, PARs are analytically deconstructed in three parts: written content, visual content, and annexes.

Post Adoption reports' structure and content

PARs are follow-up reports with the objective of assuring Ethiopian authorities that children placed within foreign families outside Ethiopia are receiving proper care and protection. PARs are highly diversified, and their content may significantly vary from one report to another and encompass different topics, such as family dynamics, sociality, and peculiar interests (i.e., hobbies, sports, clothing), to name a few. To avoid disseminating sensitive data, PARs should not contain personal details such as phone numbers and addresses. The documentation is usually written in English, and there is no translation in Amharic.

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[58] This point might be also found in Art. 8 of the CRC, which addresses the preservation of identity and underscores the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including family relations (CRC, 1989). This is crucial in intercountry adoption because it might be argued that it is a child's right to maintain a connection to their cultural and familial roots, even as they become part of a new family in a different country.

Written section

As already mentioned, PARs are produced to assess the well-being of Ethiopian children adopted abroad. There are no specific Ethiopian guidelines regarding how PARs should be drawn up, and the communication of such information depends on who writes the document. Generally, PARs follow a pattern covering the child's health condition, education, and development. When written by social workers, PARs are usually divided into three thematic sections. The health section may cover nutrition, oral hygiene, vaccination, physical details and concerns. The section reserved for education might pay particular attention to learning issues, extra-curricular activities, and socialisation. The final section focuses on the child's behaviour, relational dynamics, and emotional development. However, when adoptive families write PARs, information may vary significantly in length and level of detail and cover mainly the educational and relational dimensions. It is not uncommon to find references to a child's Christian community and rituals.

Post-adoption reports result in various styles that cover the dimensions noted above with a variable quantity and quality of data. Information may be conveyed with a concise style, for example:

> Gabriel is healthy.

> Mental and Physical development: no changes.

> Getachew's immunisation are all up to date. Getachew's teeth and eyesight are checked regularly, and no problems were found. (…) Getachew is developing at an appropriate pace for her age. She is reaching all developmental milestones.

Conversely, other PARs are rich in detail and explain children's attitudes, hobbies, difficulties, behaviour, and psycho-physical condition. For example:

> Habtamu is a pasta lover since he enjoys eating pasta with different sauces. He especially likes pasta carbonara. In fact, he stated that pasta is his favourite food. He also enjoys eating broccoli soup.

> Biruk has joined a theatre group with children (…). He was playing one of the sons, one of the roles with most to speak. During representation, he was a

> little bit nervous, playing in front of the parents attending, but he was also concentrated and certain in the text.

> Hirut is not allowed to go out on her own yet. (…) This issue also stems from the fact that Hirut had betrayed her parents' trust on a number of occasions, especially when Hirut was caught smoking cigarettes. (…) later on, she was caught at school with a vape device.

In several cases, PARs report children's awareness of their adoptive history and native family. Follow-up reports might also flag potential curiosity or requests concerning the family and country of origin and the un/availability of adoptive families to support them, for example:

> Daniel does not like to talk about his adoption. His family is his present, and he has no interest in knowing his past or talking about it.

> The older he is going to be, the more he is talking about Ethiopia (several subjects currently). He never forgets his Ethiopian family and is still proud to be from there. He likes his country and wishes to visit it later.

> At this point, Addise said that he has an interest in visiting Ethiopia and would also like to have more information about his biological family.

The integration and inclusion dimensions also emerged from discourses related to socialisation, relational dynamics and identification, such as hairdressing preferences and skin colour perception, to name but a few. For example:

> She now proudly wears her hair naturally curly (…) as a way to identify herself in a country where she is seen differently. In 2018, She continued her pride with her natural hair by getting cornrow braids which she has not done since living in Ethiopia.

> A huge point is his hair. We cannot count the time he is spending in front of the mirror bending his hair from the left to the right side or inventing new haircuts. (…) we are sensitively observing his development and the value is taking from being different from the other children around.

> He made some bad experience, that he was discriminated by the colour.

Visual section

PARs include at least one full photographic shot of the child, intended to show her entire figure. Sometimes, instead of the full shot, there is a medium close-up or a close-up shot, where only the upper part of the body is displayed. Several PARs are accompanied by only one picture of the child, which is positioned at the document's beginning or end. Conversely, most of them have numerous pictures within the body text or at its end. In these cases, PARs are organised to give visual contents a central role and alternate accounts (even the most concise) with pictures. Images appear as an ensemble of representations and display children's recurrent or occasional community daily life and events – depicting family, friends, hobbies, beliefs, and souvenirs, to name but a few. Photo captions are frequently present to accompany and explain images. They supply pictures with additional details about contexts and persons or suggest meaningful reasons for taking that shot. For example:

Photo captions from Kidane's last required PAR

Kidane, trying out graduation gowns".

Kidane with his friends at school".

[Kidane] Trying a new look" (two pictures).

Kidane in Riga" (two pictures, one alone, one with the mother).

Kidane with his school friends".

Kidane, having a time out at the mall with the school friends".

Photo captions from Zenab's annual PAR

Zenab, her confirmation".

Zenab with her two twin brothers".

Parents and Zenab".

Aunt, Uncle and Zenab".

<u>Photo captions from Samuel's annual PAR</u>

month, year (Samuel's annual garden party).

month, year (Playing with a friend).

Annual visit to an international music festival with campsite.

Samuel and his football team.

Samuel's first school day – with family and his godmother's family (from right: mother, godmother, Samuel, father, brother, grandmother, godmother's husband and her daughter).

Adoptive parents and adoptees may purposely choose and explain pictures to the Ethiopian post-adoption staff or native families. Whereas it was impossible to collect this information concerning these specific PARs, during previous research (Costa 2013), both Italian adoptive families and adoption agencies' post-adoption staff pointed out that in many cases, the pictures used in PARs were intentionally chosen to be shared with native families. For instance, an adoption agency psychologist interviewed in 2012 in Italy explained that a child might choose to send a picture of her Christian communion because she has a religious grandmother in Ethiopia. Even though this is not the primary topic of the research presented in this thesis, it would be interesting to investigate further the reasons behind the choice of pictures.

Annexes

Annexes may or may not be included in PARs, as they are not required. However, they may be attached to PARs to explain better particular situations, complement PARs' information, or share certificates. Annexes may concern biographical information (i.e., the re-dating of the child's date of birth[59]), medical and health records (i.e., sports medical records, diagnoses), educational titles or licences (i.e., school certifications). Since annexes usually contain sensitive information, it is not possible to report any piece of data in this context. In most cases, annexes are written in the receiving country's mother tongue, with no translation available.

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[59] See chapter Five for further information regarding the child's age.

Native families' access to post-adoption reports

Interviews with adoption agencies and the MOWCYA showed that adoption agencies were responsible for PARs' production and delivery before the ban on inter-country adoption and kept copies of the follow-up reports. Since the ban on inter-country adoption, intermediation between Ethiopia and receiving countries became more widespread and therefore needed the involvement of more actors: Ethiopian embassies, childcare institutions, and adoptive parents replaced adoption agencies' roles in the post-adoption stage. This trend made PARs scarce and difficult to obtain, particularly for families of origin, which is the focus of this section.

The access of native families to post-adoption reports and documentation has been a reason of concern and debate for participants in this research. This aspect is worth to be deepened because, when inquired about the legal framework concerning native families' access to PARs, no one among the participants seemed to know how the Ethiopian revised Alternative Care Guidelines frame this matter. The section "Effects of adoption" states that "Adoption does not terminate filial bond of lineage (relationship)" and that "Biological parents, members of the extended family and/or guardians of the child have the right to ask the accredited organization/s information as to the growth and development of the adopted child" (2009, p. 47). Such statements give some legal background to relatives of origin and childcare institution staff to require and receive information from organisations involved in the inter-country adoption process, even though this research showed that both groups are unaware of that. The intertwining of these two elements makes the information provided in PARs theoretically available to any actor involved in the inter-country adoption process.

Therefore, relatives of origin theoretically have several options when they start searching for contact with their children adopted abroad. However, in practice, the access to PARs is often not as homogeneous and linear as it should be, and childcare institutions, adoption agencies and the MOWCYA do not always provide smooth access to such information.

This section aims to explore this theme and provide thick data and analysis of interactions between such physical and bureaucratic 'spaces' (the childcare institution, the adoption agency, and the MOWCYA) and families of origin. It aims to show the entanglement between personnel's perception of native families, facilities' access, and native families' quest for information. It is worth noting that no one of the organisations involved in the research keeps track of how many relatives of origin come to ask for information about their children adopted abroad. Additionally, participants unanimously confirmed that whereas native families'

information is retained for their search, specific data on this category have never been systematically gathered thus far.

Childcare institutions

Participants explained that childcare institutions are the first places native families head to when looking for information. In Ethiopia, childcare institutions significantly vary in their organisation, management, and localisation. Overall, in Ethiopia, there are three types of childcare institutions. For example:

> There are three types of orphanages. One is the government one. Then, there are the orphanages run by private people. They own [orphanages) because of their experience, and of their connection oversea, like in the United States, Canada, Germany, just to name a few. And then there are the catholic one, which are funded by Catholics, and are licensed to give children into adoption to different countries. (…) for example, the chances of the governmental orphanages to give children into adoption oversea is 10%. The private one, they have, like, 99% chances; the catholic one, it is, like, 80%. The reason is that the catholic ones work through connections and, also, the people who want to adopt are very religious people (…) Because of the connection they have with the catholic religion, they will come here [in Ethiopia] and decide to adopt (…) The private one … you know, maybe they are coming from the United States, they are Ethiopians, they come from the United States, and they open their own orphanage. Because of that connection, they will just try to advertise oversea, so lots of people want to adopt from them. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

The State leads the governmental childcare institutions. Private international childcare institutions are led by international personnel and survive thanks to international funds and donors. The private local childcare institutions are entirely managed by local staff and may receive international economic support. As noted above, childcare institutions are scattered around the country and multiplied when inter-country adoption in Ethiopia reached its peak between 2009 and 2010.

All the childcare institutions visited in Addis Ababa used to work with one or more equivalent institution located in the countryside and other regions. Participants explained that the usual agreement was that children would live in the countryside's childcare institution until the adoptive documentation was ready and then transferred to a childcare institution in Addis Ababa to complete the adoption process. However, interviews showed disparities between childcare institutions' procedures and results, as well as in archive storage and accessibility to information. Moreover, the economic benefit that might result from managing a childcare

institution involved in inter-country adoption practices also encouraged the existence of organisations or structures that processed illicit adoptions[60], as emerged from this and other investigations (Steenrod, 2021; Hailu, 2017).

This uneven framework emerged as a factor of complication during the search of native families for their adopted kin and impacts their opportunity to access documentation, together with interactions with the facilities personnel. Native families reported that childcare institutions might refuse to provide PARs or information on the child adopted abroad. In some cases, there is no clear communication between the residential childcare institutions and the family of origin, making it difficult for birth families to access the information and understand the bureaucratic and practical limitations that childcare institutions might face. For instance, a relative of origin recounted that when his child was first adopted, the orphanage staff told him that birth families were not entitled to collect information about the children adopted abroad. For example:

> He [the relative of origin] received [information about the child adopted abroad] only twice. Then, for some years, he went there every two months to collect pictures and documents. But they said no. No documents. Then he asked them again, [and they said again] no documents. Then, he gave up, and he started to go there ... every three months, and every year, like that. And they said [there were] no [documents]. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

After a few years, the orphanage went through a change of management. The new staff had a different perspective on birth families' access to the child's information; however, at that point, the personnel lamented another limitation, namely the compliance of the adoptive family to provide the annual PAR, as recalled by the native relative. For example:

> They said: 'We are not responsible for giving you [any document] ... There is no ... If there is a document, we can give it to you. But if not, we are not

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[60] During fieldwork, many participants reported illegal practices: gathering children without voluntarily giving parents the correct information or nominally founding a childcare institution that would not correspond to a physical space, to name a few. Instead, children were directly sent to Addis Ababa to complete the adoption process, as this participant involved in the inter-country adoption explained: "(...) birth families do not know in which countries the children went into adoption. Sometimes they thought children would live in an orphanage in Addis Ababa, but they were unaware they were being adopted abroad" [Intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa].

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obliged to collect things from them [the adoptive family] and send them to you', they said. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

This management attitude mentioned by this participant has been listed, together with the lack of transparency, amongst the issues that might make it difficult for native families to reach out to the staff in charge of the adoption and give them further information. For example:

Researcher: Have you tried to ask for information at the orphanage?

Native relative: No, no. Even because when we went there to ask, it was closed. By the way, no one told us anything, nothing, no one gave us any information. [Native relative, December 2019, SNNPR]

When childcare institutions are reachable and willing to collaborate, an additional problem may occur, namely incorrect or inefficient documentation storage. Several participants reported that a change in the administrative staff or unsuitable storage process might resolve losing documentation – both original adoption folders and PARs. Moreover, native families and intermediaries are not always sure to find such documentation or proof of regular adoption processes, particularly in the countryside childcare institutions.

The issues described in the above fragments of interviews also have relevant repercussions on adoptees' research. For instance, one of the childcare institutions of the participant observation lacked seven years of documentation because the former admin took away all the files when he ended his working relationship with the orphanage.

From an analytical point of view, such limits that interpose between the native family and the PAR bring a double issue. On the one hand, an interruption of the 'contacts' as intended in this context, hence a barrier for the circular narrative perspective that sees the child's mobility as an extension and strengthening process of these inter-country kin ties' relations. On the other hand, this absence of news can also be transposed as an interruption of the 'monitoring' of the child's well-being, which does not allow the native family to flag whether the adoptive family might have negligent or abusive behaviours towards the child. This relates to the capacity of inter-country adoption as legally and socially intended in Ethiopia to be potentially revoked whenever such agreement of child mobility does not satisfy the requirements of at least a 'reciprocal benefit' for the adopted child and the adoptive family. As such, these factual limitations related to information storage and transparency do not comply with the main guidelines on inter-country adoption agreements and interactions.

When the childcare institution is reachable and documentation accessible, native families must deal with the childcare institutions' personnel, who may be available to collaborate or refuse to do so. During the research, the personnel of six active and two closed residential childcare institutions confirmed that they are, or had been, engaged in relations with families of origin in the pre and post-adoption stages. Two of them reported that during the stay of children in the orphanage, native relatives were encouraged to take children home during holidays or regularly visit. Three of them reported that the staff actively encouraged families of origin to visit the orphanage and meet their children. For example:

> Residential childcare staff member: We have an open day every month. The fourth Sunday of the Ethiopian month is open for relatives to come and visit. If they [the children] have parents, they [the parents] can visit. We try even a day for parents, if possible, to take them [the children] for the weekend but it is not possible.
>
> Researcher: For legal reasons?
>
> Residential childcare staff member: No, for them [the children] to keep the connection of the family, no? We like that they keep the connection as much as possible so that when they grow up, they will not say, "No, I do not know, no, I do not know". Like that, they will remain in contact when it is possible. [Residential childcare institution staff member, October 2017, Addis Ababa]

Participants' organisation of the post-adoption stage envisaged meetings with relatives of origin. During the fieldwork, regular visits from relatives of origin were considered normal. As a non-standardised procedure, relatives introduced themselves as family members interested in knowing about the well-being of their children. They usually asked for information about their child's condition, addresses or phone contacts. Visits might also be intended to be a space to share their concerns. Participants from the group of childcare institutions explained that their modus operandi consists in showing pictures and reading out PARs contents. Some reported that they would skip reading what they consider sensible or irrelevant information. All of them would collect relatives' phone numbers to be able to contact them in case of news.

Participants also confirmed fieldwork evidence that when a connection between the native family and the adoptee or adoptive family is already established, the staff might work as an intermediary. When the connection between native and adoptive family envisages economic support and money transfer, the childcare institution staff may be in charge of receiving

money from the adoptive family and giving it to relatives of origin. Moreover, they may take note of the monthly or occasional economic support the adoptive family offers and provide the native family with informal counselling about their relationship with the adoptive family.

The personnel of the childcare institutions unanimously agreed about relatives' rights to access information concerning their adopted children. Their concerns on this theme focused mainly on relatives' psychophysical well-being and the adoptees' right to know more about their relatives if they would ever visit Ethiopia and search for their native family. As mentioned, all the participants reported that they offer counsel and support to families of origin who need it.

Participants' position on native relatives' right to contact adoptees and adoptive families was similar in theory but different in practice because data showed great difficulty in managing high emotional situations with grieving relatives. This aspect is relevant because it seems that, whilst native families can theoretically count on a certain degree of support when they reach the childcare institution, such support is limited to the preliminary steps of their search. In other words, as long as families of origin ask the centre to provide them with the information it already possesses, they generally encounter sympathy and availability. However, when their requests to move from a 'passive' ("What information did you receive?") to an 'active' mode ("What information can we get?"), personnel behaviours change. Their kind of responses and support can be analytically described into three categories: delayed contacts, multiple uses of former PARs, or sharing adoptees' information.

The first approach is based on delayed contact and consists of collecting native families' details in case the adoptee or the adoptive families intend to come to visit. The purpose is to reassure the family of origin and find a reasonable answer to their requests for contact. This technique mainly focuses on 'silencing' native families' requests and reducing their visits to the centre to reinforce a 'passive' search from the native families. This understanding is further corroborated by the fact that participants also framed it as a possible service for adoptees and adoptive families who may visit the childcare institution in search of their relatives of origin. From this data, it may be argued that native families' requests are kept subordinate to the adoptee and the adoptive family. The support service that native families receive is intended to benefit potential Global North visitors directly and benefit families of origin only indirectly.

The second approach envisages providing native families with recent PARs. Like in the previous approach, the staff collects relatives' details. Moreover, the personnel offer to read out the documentation they possess. However, if the personnel consider this information unsatisfactory for relatives' needs, they contact the adoption agency asking for more

documentation – for instance, pictures or further information. This scenario suggests that the personnel keep a 'mixed tactic', thus offering to provide the information they already have and, in some cases, contact the organisation responsible for mediation and defer to their decision.

The third approach includes all the solutions mentioned above and adds the sharing of the adoptees' personal information when the child turns 18. According to this perspective, the coming of age is considered the moment when the child has the right to be informed by her relatives about their existence and their potential interest in reconnecting. Such participants consider the 18th birthday the legal milestone that would give the adoptee the liberty to make 'spatial choices' concerning her future: living in the Global North, moving 'back' to the Global South, or living in a 'third space' (Hübinette, 2004), 'between' the two countries. In these cases, the childcare staff proactively participate in the adoptee's search and share sensitive information such as addresses, changes of names, and the name of the adoptive families. From this perspective, the personnel consider themselves entitled to provide native families with the information they look for and do not involve the adoption agency in their decisional process. Compared to the first approach, this technique subordinates the adoptee and the adoptive families' interests to the native families', who directly benefit from what is understood as their full rights.

Adoption agencies

According to interviews, relatives of origin reach out for adoption agencies through two different channels: the childcare institution and the MOWCYA. This happens because the MOWCYA and the childcare institution staff may inform relatives about the adoption agency that processed their child's adoption[61] and provide them with the information to reach their headquarters in Ethiopia.

As discussed above, several adoption agencies ended their activities in Ethiopia with the inter-country adoption ban, which resulted in a decrease in the numbers of headquarters in Addis Ababa. With the official ban on inter-country adoption, organisations accredited as adoption agencies were given the option to change their status and keep operating in the country as

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[61] Unlike childcare institutions, adoption agencies involved in the research have a standardised system to collect and store information. Access to documentation is straightforward, and all children's PARs are electronically and physically stored.

NGOs. Those who decided to become NGOs are now re-oriented towards humanitarian aid interventions. However, their legal status change does not undermine their importance in native families' trajectories in the quest for their children because, as former adoption agencies, they have the obligation with the MOWCYA to provide PARs. Former adoption agencies involved in this research reported that their primary activity concerning the post-adoption stage is to support families of origin who regularly come to ask for information about their children adopted abroad. These organisations have a small team responsible for managing interactions with native families. All the adoption agencies involved in the research provided relatives with a standard service consisting of a reading of PARs.

Furthermore, families of origin could see the pictures enclosed in the PAR. All the points mentioned above have been recounted by a foreign participant who asked not to be audio recorded. The following note from the fieldwork narrates the participant's first-hand experience, who was the manager of an adoption agency based in Addis Ababa.

> Interview note:
>
> Families are still coming to ask about their children. They expect them to return (we should understand why) because they have understood inter-country adoption as a limited time the children spend abroad to return. They did not think taking children to the orphanage meant no longer seeing them. This matter is our leading issue at the moment (…). We usually ask relatives to sit down and show them the last PAR (in theory, we would not be allowed to do so, but we decided to do it anyway). [Former adoption agency manager, April 2018, Addis Ababa]

As for some of the childcare institutions' personnel, adoption agencies' staff reported that they were willing to go the extra mile in rare, specific cases and ask the adoption agency headquarters in the receiving country to contact the adoptive families. Their active involvement in native families' search could envisage requests for recent information or pictures of the children to prove their well-being. In some rare cases, they might ask the headquarters about the potential leeway for the adoption agency to contact the adoptive family and inform them about native families' strong desire for reconnection. Different adoption agencies recounted that they managed to have their requests approved by the headquarters. Appeals to adoptive families to provide the adoption agency with recent

information or pictures usually ended positively because such requests were contextualised in the formal PARs procedure, with which adoptive families are already familiar.

Conversely, participants reported that adoptive families consider communicating native families' interest in reconnection unacceptable. According to participants, the adoptive families interpreted the passing on of this information as an invasion of their space and privacy, an infringement of their parental rights, and a moral violation of their agreement with the adoption agency.

It might be argued that requesting information for the post-adoption reports is considered acceptable until this request does not explicitly suggest a direct involvement of interest of the native family. Further food for thought is generated by the fact that participants explicated that native families are called into question only when the adoption agency staff is sure they will not demand any legal right on the child. Moreover, such requests are intended to preserve the mental health and well-being of meticulously selected native relatives who seem to experience extreme distress or emotional strain, as shown by fieldnotes from a meeting with a former adoption agency manager. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> For instance: a father, a good man. Not a poor guy, a decent man, well dressed. He comes every month for years to have information about his child. (…) He says he misses the child [the participant adds it would be interesting to understand what he means by this]. He comes once every month throughout the years to ask about him. After all this time, the adoption agency decides to act and send a solicitation to the adoptive family to inform them about the situation. The adoptive family was very annoyed by this. [Former adoption agency manager, April 2018, Addis Ababa]

Indeed, this study shows that some factors may push the adoption agencies' staff to go the extra mile and communicate birth families' requests to their headquarters. Such factors are mainly based on the adoption agency's assessment of relatives of origin's intentions and goodwill.

This perspective implies that sharing information is considered acceptable as far as it does not disturb a Global North-centred linear narrative of inter-country child mobility, which sees the legal citizen's shift as the definitive break of any linkage. Therefore, even a general interest in the adoptee's conditions from the native family is considered alarming and misplaced, whilst

seen from an Ethiopian perspective this is more nuanced as it does not imply such an integral and complete clean 'break'. As already explained in chapter Five, legal, relational, social, emotional, and filial linkages are not necessarily intertwined from an Ethiopian perspective of child mobility.

Their accounts and descriptions of how they navigate 'in-between' highly different notions of kin tie conformations might epitomise what is cross-culturally 'lost in translation' in the making of relatedness through inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. Because of their role of intermediation, managers of different adoption agencies also pointed out that, in the Global North, adoption agencies are usually considered responsible for the eventual incorrect use of personal data, including sharing sensitive information with relatives of origin. Fieldnotes from the meeting with a manager from an adoption agency show the same concept. For example:

> Interview note:
>
> Conversely, some childcare institutions give families of origin the address of adoptive families. The families of origin write a letter ("Dear beloved child, how are you? I am your mother, I miss you") to their child adopted abroad, thus causing problems because the adoptive families are convinced that the adoption agency gives the address, and they get angry at us. They do not know the address has been given by the childcare institution – that used to give it, and it is probably still doing so. [Former adoption agency manager, April 2018, Addis Ababa]

During interviews, meetings and informal conversations, participants shared examples and accounts that express their specific commitments to certain categories of birth families. The main standard features of these categories are three. Firstly, the quality of interactions with the adoption agency, where politeness, medium emotional expression and the lack of economic references have been listed as positive elements. Secondly, the continuous interest in their relationship with the child, which is described as the frequency and perseverance of the relative's visits and the constant and exclusive interest in having a relationship with the child. Lastly, their appearance: appearing as a neat person nicely clothed has been considered an element of trust. Combining these three features puts the personnel in a positive frame of mind. It encourages them to support claims of families of origin that they identify as trusted and self-controlled.

From a (post)colonial feminist perspective, such interactions show that although native families tend to cover a subordinate role in the post-adoption narrative in terms of colonial, bureaucratic and structural power, the fact that there are a few 'voices' echoing in the Global North does not necessarily mean there is no unrest. If anything, native families who search for their children adopted abroad are actively involved and challenging notions and ideas of kin ties imposed by the Global North. Whilst this has already shown from their agency around local and international organisations that worked in the inter-country adoption sector, it becomes even more evident when analysing the MOWCYA involvement, as the following part intends to do.

Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs

As explained in the first part of this chapter, the MOWCYA department, once largely dedicated to inter-country adoption, underwent significant changes after the ban on inter-country adoption in January 2018. Current tasks include data gathering about children and relations involving adoptees and native and adoptive families[62]. All the child protection officers are entitled to welcome families of origin and support them in their requests. The procedure provides for a personal meeting with an officer. As a participant recounts, the preliminary part of the meeting focuses on collecting relatives' details[63]. At this point, participants explained that the office might provide three kinds of support: information, PARs request, and reconnection.

The first service, information, is provided when native families have never seen PARs. In this case, the officer recovers the existent PARs, reads them out to the family, and shows the visual material incorporated in the document. When the document is not in the MOWCYA's possession, its personnel refer the family to the (former) adoption agency that processed the

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[62] Apart from the issue of PARs collection, the department's primary job currently concerns supporting relatives of origin. The department consists of one room with approximately twenty workstations with a laptop in terms of space organisation.

[63] The officer invites the native relative to sit down, asking questions to gather the information that might help the officer in her search. The list includes the Ethiopian name of the child, sex, place of origin (sub-city, *katama*, *woreda*), if the child has special needs, biological parents' name, the orphanage where the child was placed, the adoption agency that processed her adoption, and the country of adoption. Through this preliminary information, the officer should find the adoptive document, who and when signed it, names and information concerning the adoptive parents, if the child's name has been changed, and PARs – if any are available.

adoption, as reported in the fieldnotes of a meeting with a disapproving adoption agency manager. For example:

Interview note:

The adoption agency sends PARs [sent annually until the child's eighteenth birthday] to the MOWCYA and the childcare institution that hosts the child. As the MOWCYA is often disorganised in storing information, officers give the adoption agency address to native families. [Former adoption agency manager, April 2018, Addis Ababa]

However, the increasing closure of adoption agency headquarters in Ethiopia made it challenging to trace information that is not in MOWCYA's possession.

The second service, the PARs request, is a collateral effect of the adoption agencies' closure since, after the ban on inter-country adoption, PARs' provision almost came to an end. Consequently, families collecting PARs from the childcare institution or the adoption agencies were redirected to the MOWCYA to ask for PARs and explanations concerning their interruption[64]. The department requests the provision of PARs from the receiving countries to simultaneously face this increasing appeal for information and the unsuccessful attempts to ask that adoptive families respect the post-adoption agreements. When native families come asking for more information about their children, child officers write the specific requests of that child's PARs. Given the length of this procedure, the officers collect native families' information to contact them in case of updates[65].

The third service, reconnection, is the step that the MOWCYA officers might take in certain circumstances to support native families in maintaining their bond with their child adopted abroad, as explained by an officer. For example:

Of course, they [the native families] ask [if the child will come back], but that is not our mandate. We connect children and biological parents, so we can help by doing this (…). After they turn 18, they can reach them. Below 18 years old, we cannot give that information. Because the children ... it is not ...

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[64] This number of families includes those already collecting regular information from the department and the families whose needs were not met during their first visit for the reasons mentioned above.

[65] This information includes the relative's name, the relationship to the child, their address and phone number.

it is prohibited (...), we cannot give the permission. However, after [the child

turns] 18 years old, they can. (…) We, our work, are focused on humanity. So,

when they cry, we can give them [the information if] the child exits (sic.) 18,

we know that we can give them the data. [MOWCYA staff member, October

2019, Addis Ababa]

As clearly pointed out by this participant, the MOWCYA proactively engages with other Ethiopian ministries and private and public Global North actors to collect PARs. Whilst their main goal in terms of bilateral and international agreements on child protection is to assess the child's well-being, in practical terms, their mandate also requires providing native families with support to the best of their ability. In this participant's accounts, the fact that inter-country adoption from Ethiopia has ceased does not clash with native families' willingness to make and keep contact with their children adopted abroad. This interpretation and understanding of the inter-country adoption agreement also informs and suggests the notion of a circular narrative of adoption, which sees the child's mobility not as a tie cut but instead as one more reason to search for connection and seek for contact.

6.3   Strategies when children do not seem to be reachable

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, relatives of origin should be entitled to view PARs and have a variety of organisations from which to request such information. The previous section also described such organisations' limits, which may make access to data more difficult, if not impossible. Challenges might also come from the native families' logistic limitations, such as having the means to travel to the main Ethiopian cities. Visiting MOWCYA's headquarter, childcare institutions and adoption agencies in Addis Ababa requires an essential investment in terms of costs, time, and family organisation.

This section investigates the information relatives of origin want to collect and summarises the findings of interviews and participant observations concerning the quality of information families look for. Furthermore, it points out native families' strategies to maximise their efforts in searching for their children adopted abroad, which include different approaches than contacting organisations described in the previous section and alternatives such as private intermediaries and non-profit organisations.

Information sought by families of origin

Native families who request information about their child adopted abroad may ask for information that ranges from proof of life to evidence about their child's future return to Ethiopia. To the extent of this thesis, native families' requests have been classified into three groups: evidence about the child's well-being; elements to establish a contact; or proof that the child will eventually return to Ethiopia.

Evidence about the child's well-being

Concerns over children's condition abroad have been described as the main reason for native families to collect information about their well-being, as explained during an in-depth interview by the director of a residential childcare institution. For example:

> Most biological families of the child adopted abroad come here first of all to know the status of the children, that is maybe the introduction for me, to get contact, to have some relation first. (…) [most native families come to ask for] the status of the care support. (…) After the living conditions get a bit better, maybe they might not be changed. Still, as they stay longer and longer without any connection with their child, they feel awful (...) [They wonder] whether their child survived or not, they become (sic.) this feeling of a guilty conscience. Some of them even explain themselves as they were, they are, criminals. [Because they feel] As they had committed a crime, they should not have given that child. They had to live the life that the family was experiencing. [Residential childcare institution's director, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

The three elements that arose from this interview – information as the first step, fears about the child's well-being, and guilty conscience – have been described by other participants as pivotal characteristics of communication between native families and workers. During in-depth interviews, native families underlined these aspects as part of their emotional and practical experience when forced to endure an extended interval with no news about the child's conditions, as recalled during an interview by one native relative. For example:

> We were very desperate because we hoped they would come back and we would receive their news one day, but we never received any news. So we

were, the mum was crying, the dad the same, also the other women who gave their children into adoption, we were all desperate. [Native relative, December 2019, SNNPR]

As clearly expressed by both participants, PARs' first objective is to provide evidence of the children's state of well-being and are vectors of 'passive contacts' when native families manage to view them. Post-adoption reports also represent the first step towards a symbolic route to open a connection door. In that case, the door means the phase of active communication, when the native family manages to communicate with its child adopted abroad or the adoptive family. The reconnection represents a further passage. In these cases – as the next chapter will explore – intermediaries and means of creating that direct exchange have been metaphorically described as 'bridges'. By and large, the travel metaphor is pertinent to participants' description of reconnection, which also relates to the circular narrative of adoption: several steps that need to be followed depend on many variables and that are not always viable. The second step for families who intend to follow this path is collecting sensitive information about the child's current living situation.

Clues to make contact

These can be sensitive information includes the child's country of adoption, address, parents' names, and telephone numbers. In short, any detail that may help native families contact the child or the adoptive family. As explained by participants, even little fragments may be enough to establish the first contact for those who have access to social media. A document with the family name, or the new surname, might be sufficient to reach the child and her adoptive family, as it happened to a native relative who found the adoptee on social media as soon as he discovered the adoptive parents had changed the adoptee's name. For example:

> I tried to find her on social media, Facebook, by her old name, but I could not find [her], and before two months [two months ago], just like that, I got an old … [the older brother hands on a document he collected from the childcare institution]. Look, he gave me this … (…) I found her just two months ago, you [the researcher] saw my [FB message] last time [in a previous interview]. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

The person speaking in the quotation above is the younger uncle, Abebe, of a girl who was given to the care of a childcare institution by her older uncle, Kidane, when she was 3 years

old. The childcare institution gave her into adoption at the age of 4 and denied Kidane access to the child's PAR or any other information about her until August 2019. Then, after fourteen years, the childcare institution underwent a management change and agreed to give Kidane access to the child's information[66]. Documentation did not include many PARs, but some medical exams were amongst the files. From those documents (and months of research and attempts), Abebe was eventually able to find their niece on Facebook (FB).

To use the travel metaphor again, this example epitomises how PARs are not only information but also 'means' to activate a time-consuming and challenging search mechanism and bridge the gap between connection and reconnection. After the (re)connection, the last remaining step to conclude a utopic circular movement of the child's mobility would be to transfer (even temporally) the child back to Ethiopia. This is also the third piece of information that native families seek.

The child's contact (and return)

The subsequent, or parallel, step in looking for details about the child is to collect information about the child's contacts or her return to Ethiopia. Most families expect children to keep in touch and visit them, even when they consider the adoption process a clean break of their parental rights to the child, as explained by a MOWCYA staff member during an in-depth interview. For example:

> I do not know how they think like this, but they say when the children turn 18, they will come back and visit us. This is what they say. And this is based on the children's decision and their adoptive parents. So, we cannot assure this. [MOWCYA staff member, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

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[66] When Kidane and Abebe were asked what changed the personnel's minds, they voiced their fears to ask. During the interview, participants became aware that the child turned 18 a few months before the childcare institution agreed to hand over the documentation to Kidane. In this case, whether the choice to share that information resulted from the child's primary age or management change was unclear. As explored in the previous section of this chapter, access to these details depends on several factors. One decisive element is the position taken by the personnel about the question of native families' right to possess that information. Their perception of native families' rights significantly influences families' access. Personnel's availability is difficult to foretell, as well as potential management or internal policy changes concerning the specific topic.

Childcare institutions, adoption agencies and the MOWCYA reported that native families usually ask for their child's information once she reaches the age of majority. As explored in the previous section, organisations may decide to give the native family sensitive information once the child comes of age. However, none of the participants working in the organisations involved in this study reported that they had proactively facilitated contacts between relatives of origin and children or their adoptive families when the request came from native families. Instead, native families were provided with sensitive information and left alone to deal with it. In only a few exceptional cases, the adoption agencies decided to go the extra mile and contact the adoptive family to flag the native family's interest and insistence on producing a real connection.

After reaching this point, what follows is probably the most complex part for relatives of origin because, like Kidane and Abebe, this unquantified and officially unrepresented category of relatives searching for their children adopted abroad have to invent their own strategies and tools to reach the adoptee, or the adoptive family, in the Global North. As explained in the preliminary chapters of this thesis, the Global North epitomises power relation dynamics based on global inequalities and social injustice, which in this context translates as inequalities in accessing resources, living standards, as much as mobility and communication disadvantages. Nonetheless, native families have several strategies to put in place to increase their chances of getting information concerning their children adopted abroad.

Reaching the Global North in a context of global inequalities: native families' strategies

The story of Abebe and Kidane indicates that timing is crucial for native families to obtain the necessary information to ensure their child's well-being. The shutting down of organisations, the change in management, the arrival of PARs, the eventual solicitation from personnel who is working on the post-adoption process, the age of the child, the adoptee or adoptive family's choice to visit the country of origin – several aspects are continuously changing, thus modifying the general situation. In this always mutating situation, relatives of origin may find a margin of manoeuvre to improve their accessibility to the adoptee and the adoptive families.

Indeed, increasing their level of accessibility has a positive impact on their level of access to what they are interested in. In other words, making themselves easily reachable by organisations that may have changed personnel and structure during the time offers the

adoptee the chance to reach them as well. The following two sections outline the main strategies applied by native families to improve their accessibility and access over time.

Periodic visits

Periodic visits to accredited organisations are one of the practised options. The frequency of native families' visits to organisations may vary according to logistical, economic, and organisational factors. Participants tend not to refer to the absence of care or to emotional investment but rather to material limits. Indeed, for prolific families living in the countryside travelling to Addis Ababa can pose many challenges in terms of transportation, accommodation costs, and household's domestic organisation. Such travels might be highly demanding and time-consuming, as an adoptive father living in Ethiopia explains. For example:

> Literally, you come here to the MOWCYA to see the pictures, etcetera. But if
> you live 700, 800 kilometres from here, it is not that you decide one day to
> go [check for news] in Addis. [Adoptive father, November 2017, Addis Ababa]

The MOWCYA refers families to visit the department approximately every six months because they know there is a chance to receive recent PARs; however, relatives of origin come to the department daily. Childcare institutions personnel reported that the time-lapse between visits to their facilities might vary between three months and one year, depending on native families. Birth families reported a similar time-lapse. For example:

> For some years, he went there every two months to collect pics and docs (…).
> He started to go there ... every three months, and every year, like that.
> [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia region]

When periodic visits are not feasible, leaving personal information to the organisations is the other option. The organisations visited during fieldwork had a list of native families' names and sensitive data. This sensitive information undergoes an informal agreement that ties the organisations' personnel to employ it whenever any native families' requests are satisfied. As such, native families are contacted when a new PAR is received, and adoptive families or adoptees reveal an interest in getting in touch or related reasons connected to the reunion, elaborated in the next chapter.

Intermediaries and organisations: profit and non-profit

When none of the previous options is successful, the last possibility is the engagement of private intermediaries to support families' research of contacts and connections. The private intermediaries may be individuals or non-profit organisations.

Some of the intermediaries might own or work for travel agencies – for instance, intermediaries' travel agencies – that directly or indirectly have a background on inter-country adoption process. Their experience is grounded on first-hand knowledge of specific domains, such as geographical areas, ministries, organisations, and procedures. Because of their expertise, connections, and parallel jobs – such as tour guides – they are likely to get in contact with adoptive families and adoptees. Previous working activities in the latter category may range from childcare institutions or adoption agency staff to personnel employed in welcoming or lodging adoptive parents or sponsorship programs.

Given these features, individuals engaged as private intermediaries are a valid option to get in contact with adoptive families and adoptees. When they work for free, they are usually interested in taking care of native families' cases, collecting their details, and supporting them in understanding more about their child's adoption. Conversely, when private intermediaries ask for compensation for their work, the requests of native families are more often declined. However, most of the time, their details are collected and kept in case those specific adoptive families later seek relatives of origin.

In these cases, native families' needs are often subordinated to adoptive families' desires, even though participants explained the main reason relates to the economic power that adoptive families hold when compared to native families that, as suggested in previous chapters, often share conditions of structural vulnerability and economic disparity within dynamics of glocal inequality.

Native families may ask for support also to non-profit organisations (NGOs). The most known non-profit organisation active in this field in Ethiopia is an American-based organisation called Beteseb Felega. This organisation is work-oriented toward helping native families, and its services focus mainly on visibility. Its online web-based archive offers a platform where adoptees, native, and adoptive families may list all the information they possess concerning an adoption process and search for matches. The bilingual website (English-Amharic) allows both parties to look for potential reconnections. Moreover, Beteseb Felega uses the visual material available on its bilingual website on social media, where pictures are shared to give more

visual information to recognise children. Its structure, which potentially allows the same access to adoptees, adoptive and native families, is an illustrative example of how access and accessibility might be in the search and (re)connection processes.

6.4 Connections and reciprocity

The previous section focused on how native families search for their children abroad. In opposition, this section intends to clarify how native families expect their children to find their way 'back home'. The main elements emerging from interviews, focus groups, and participant observation will be exposed and presented in their context. This part considers two different moments of the adoption process: when the child is given to the childcare institution by the native family; and those occasions in which the native family manages to meet the adoptive family before they leave for the Global North with the child.

Pockets, tokens, and coffee: building a new tie to maintaining an older one

The first group of actions that make children reachable by native families is sharing practical information. Adoption agencies and childcare institutions' personnel reports that it is not unusual for native families to give phone numbers to children, for instance, leaving them on pieces of paper in their clothes' pocket. Native families might provide phone numbers, pictures, or even letters to adoptive families during in-person meetings. A social worker of a residential childcare institution explained in detail how these exchanges take place at the orphanage where she worked, as taken from the notes from the in-depth interview.

> Interview note:
>
> Families know when children are given into adoption, and often, apart from two adoptive families, all the other times when the process was closed (…). Usually, someone from the orphanage comes and tells the social worker that the mother is waiting outside (…) Then she takes the adoptive family somewhere else. She asks them if they would be interested in meeting the biological mother saying: "she would like to talk to you", and almost all the adoptive parents said yes, and then (…) there is the coffee ceremony [described below], and the families meet (…). The orphanage had the adoption agency's rule that was no exchange of money, phone numbers, or

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personal information, even because often, on those occasions, biological families asked to get the address of the adoptive family. When the social worker told them it was not possible, some biological families reacted by saying she was mean because they knew other families had contact with adoptive families (…). In theory, adoptive families should not give money to native families. Still, she says that if adoptive families are interested in exchanging information or giving some money, she would pretend not to see it, she would "look away". Biological families are informed by someone in the orphanage about the time when the adoptive families are coming, and they meet them. And they try to exchange contacts, even if it was not allowed.
[Social worker, September 2019, Ethiopia]

As explained by this participant, when native families ask for a meeting, adoptive families usually answer affirmatively. Generally, the meeting takes place during a coffee ceremony[67]. It is usually a domestic ceremony performed as a sign of hospitality to guests and to gather the family or proximal neighbours. It is structured through a socio-spatial series of actions, which delimitate a time and space to perform certain social activities. As an Ethiopian adopted child shared during the fieldwork of a study on inter-country adoption in Italy (Costa 2013): "The coffee is drinking altogether, all the members of the family, and stay together until the ceremony ends". The coffee ceremony represents a time of union and continuity in his memories of such an event. In the case of inter-country adoption, the coffee ceremony has been described as the delimitation of a time when native and adoptive families may become physically and emotionally closer and begin to create relational proximity. From an analytical perspective, it delimits a reduction of geographical and symbolic distance between the two families and offers a space to commit to important family matters. Families meet and relationally engage as (adoptive and native) parents/relatives. In a context set for high proximity they confront each other about expectations and requests. Often adoptive families are not adequately informed about the significance of such encounter and the relevance and intimacy of this event are lost in (a cross-cultural) translation: the adoptive parents suppose they are taking part in a definitive farewell, the relatives of origin believe they are forging a

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[67] The coffee ceremony is an Ethiopian ritual performed by women. It consists in preparing coffee starting from the coffee berries that are roasted, ground, brewed, and put in the *jebena* (which is a traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean coffee pot made of pottery) with boiling water and then served three times. The ritual envisages specific objects – palm leaves, small tables, stoves, *cini* and *jebena*.

bond that might strengthen over time. Similar disparities of interpretation came to light in a study on inter-country adoption in Italy (Costa 2013) and from other interviews during the fieldwork for this research.

The organisation of this coffee ritual's meeting has been described as a standard procedure. It comprises an initial formal part reserved for wishes of good health and prosperity, expressions of gratitude for giving children this opportunity, and communication about the importance of remembering ancestors as signs of good luck. Only afterwards native families may ask for adoptive families' sensitive information or, in some cases, economic support. Moreover, native families may express requests concerning the child's future, or needs, as reported by an adoptive mother interviewed for a study on inter-country adoption in Italy (Costa 2013):

> She [the native mother] asked us whether our home had the floor and a roof,
> if we could baptise him [the child], and if we could allow his child to study.
> [Adoptive mother, May 2012, Italy]

This time may also be used for the native families to enforce the beginning of their relational tie with the adoptive family by giving gifts. As a relative of origin pointed out, the importance of this action is rooted in the Ethiopian symbolic meaning of the act of gifting:

> Every gift is for a reason. For a reason someone gives me a pair of glasses,
> necklace, wardrobe ... [each gift] it has its own meaning (…). You wear a
> *gabi*[68] when you feel cold, so it is a sign of care, you know? Leaving a *gabi* to
> someone is a sign of caring. [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZFS, Oromia
> region]

As other participants underlined, the coffee ceremony and the gifts (scarves or *gabi*) are elements of specific practices oriented to progressive social closeness and co-construction of relational proximity.

In this perspective, gifts represent gestures of affection, transversal objects charged with relational meaning and expectations of potential tie strengthening, reciprocity and connection. The mechanism of the gifts, consisting of social and economic cycles of exchanges that overlap with the ultimate aim of generating and strengthening relationships, shows the dynamics of reciprocity and mutual aid that emerge from the implementation of this circular narrative.

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[68] Traditional Ethiopian four-layered cloth worn mainly over the shoulders.

Indeed, the anthropological understanding of the notion of gift, already introduced in the first chapter, is a useful analytical tool to take a further look at the connections between kin ties and the circulation of children, goods, and tokens in a multi-layered perspective. From a comparative point of view, linear versus circular narrative offers new insight into the concept of 'gift' and the idea that a circular flow of information, support and kin produces a strengthening of relations that might survive only through reciprocation. As such, giving gifts and tokens to adoptive families and children goes beyond the immediate meaning of the present in a moment of separation that might be interpreted from a Global North perspective as an act of gratitude and become a sign of expectation for future tangible and relational reciprocation.

Blood is thicker than water

Many participants use the Amharic language to explain the attractive force that would eventually take the child back to the native family, "blood is thicker than water", or "blood sticks more than water". This proverb has been interpreted and explained during interviews in two main ways further explored in the following paragraphs. According to the first, the blood tie is more potent than any other social relation. In the second interpretation, water represents the estrangement the child would feel in the new family.

The strong blood connection

During fieldwork, participants explained that the blood connection is more attractive than the fictive kinship relation. In this case, blood is pictured as a dense liquid that would keep the child stuck to her native family despite the distance. Therefore, this biological link could beckon the child and eventually push her to look for her relatives of origin. For example:

> The child will eventually feel the blood relation. [Social worker, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

This symbolic and biological connection is intended to oppose the strongness of the blood's material and figurative quality of stickiness to the fluid and tenuous texture of water. Participants also shared another version of the proverb, "*zer kalegome sebar*", translated as "blood possesses a stronger force than bridles". In Amharic, *zer* means offspring, or sperm, and has a direct reference to biological and genealogical ties. *Sebar* is a personal or social

separation but also expresses a fragmentation, a break. In short, there is an attractive force expressed in terms of emotional and immaterial ties that eventually gain momentum to reconnect members of the same family even when separated by miles and years. This interpretation emerged during in-depth interviews. For example:

> There is an emotional connection, not written or something; they cannot define it; there is like an emotional thing that you can find. For example, the boy who found his family has [a tattoo shaped] like a cross here [he shows me the inner side of the wrist], which is like the Ethiopian cross. His sister has the same cross here. Then he came here, so he found his driver, and the driver, he asked him, "You cannot speak our language, so how come you just have this cross?" and he said, "Oh, I was adopted, and this and this and this", and he [the driver] told him "Someone has the same as you". And through that, he found her [the sister]. Sometimes, it is meant to be. Do you know? Like, you never knew, but it happened. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

This invisible force keeps adoptees entwined with their biological relatives and works thanks to the family lineage attraction. The parental right may or may not be terminated in legal terms, but the blood connection persists.

A feeling of strangeness

While the first interpretation is mainly based on the reconnective characteristics of the blood relation, the second reading focuses primarily on the contraposition between the child and her adoptive community, thus invoking a sense of strangeness.

Skin colour, which many participants cited during their interviews, is viewed as the main feature of this sensation. According to them, the different skin tone is the leading factor that would make the child feel unease in her new family. She would not possibly feel 'at home'.

> I met a child in the aeroplane, the one has been embraced by the White, but his colour is black. And the child was crying too much. (…) A Black child, you can imagine the one who has been embraced by the White, with the colour of Black. (…) He adopts something that is coming from his [biological] mother. [Child protection expert, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The child will remember his birth family, and everything, because of the one thing that any other Ethiopians [have], because of our colour, they go there, everything, [but] you know, the people who adopted us, they would be like … White, and he will be Black so, because of my colour, I have some connection, back to Africa or somewhere. Then they [the adoptees] will try to find [the native family], they will dig, and then dig. [Intermediate, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

It is worth noting that participants perceive adopted children invariably as transracially adopted. According to them, this feature would characterise their experience abroad and generate confusion and ambivalence about their belongingness. Participants describe adoptive families not focussing on their ability to care for the child or their relational and affective ties with the child. If anything, adoptive families are often pictured as inclusive, caring, and interested in the child's development. During interviews, no reference was made concerning racism, xenophobic attitudes, or marginalisation.

Conversely, the focus is on the child's experience of estrangement, seen as an expected and yet inevitable consequence of her skin tone. The child's blackness is described as a feature that would push her to question her presence in that community, even in a welcoming and open-minded environment. This superficial difference, whilst undeniable and inescapable, is the first 'natural clue' that would lead her to seek her 'real' community. Once this mechanism is activated, the process of search and reconnection is described as persistent and implacable.

Local participants explained that a child adopted at an older age is already capable of perceiving the relevance of family obligations and is even more motivated by this feeling of estrangement with their adoptive milieu. This child would also be capable of recognising the relief she could bring to her suffering family remembering the poverty she experienced whilst still in Ethiopia with them. In such a scenario, a reconnection is seen as entirely motivated by the intent of supporting the native family.

Because you [the child] know they [the native family] suffer! And they need you (...) Older children experienced [extreme poverty]. They know and suffer. If they want to go back, it is because they feel the obligation to help. [Intermediary, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

Bodies, embodiment and belonging

According to this narrative, the blood connection will eventually make the child turn toward Ethiopia looking for her origins. Within this conceptualisation, participants listed several elements that the child may have transported to the Global North that might help her throughout her research. These range from objects to body modifications. A child carries these relationally meaningful elements that may be part of the healing, spiritual, or magical realm. The function of these elements is not solely to pave the child's way back to the native family. Instead, these are symbols of care, protection, and emotional interconnection. These characteristics make them the emblem of the connection that keeps the child bonded to her native family. These elements are referred to as material vectors of immaterial relatedness. They embed the relational tie between the child and her relatives of origin, and such a component is a fundamental aspect of the process of search and reconnection. This symphony of clues, symbols and elements carrying potential bonding represents the frame in which we can position material vectors of immaterial relatedness, which allow relatedness to regain a material layer. For instance, tangible objects and body modifications are re-signified with contextual experiences of progressive adaptation and belongingness to specific socio-cultural and geographical spaces.

This is relevant because it backs the argument that belongingness needs to be socially recognised and constructed even in the presence of biological affinity. From an anthropological perspective, bodies are interpreted as "an entirely problematic notion" (Vernant, 1989, p. 20), which according to the temporal and socio-geographical circumstances, is subject to transformation. The body is defined as an entity that merges bodiliness with concepts of intersubjectivity, and selfness, a cultural phenomenon in which society, power, belongingness, and identity play a role.

The body is employed as an analytical tool. It acts, is acted upon, and inter-act, simultaneously contributing to the construction and transformation of the society as it is known. The embodiment of those practices and knowledges that contribute to the reproduction and transformation offers a "discrete focus on perception, practice, parts, processes or products" (Csordas and Harwood, 1994, p. 4) that involves its socio-cultural construction and manipulation. It is the territory where enculturation occurs since birth, as Mauss diligently described in 'Les techniques du corps' (1936). As argued by Mauss and further elaborated by Bourdieu (1996; 1984), the embodiment of socio-cultural, temporal, and geographical situated practices is the basis of one person's habits or habitus. It sets the bases of those patterns that

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predetermine how a person relates to herself and the socio-cultural milieu. Enculturation is not just influenced by those elements mentioned above. As further illustrated by Bourdieu (1998), the interactional peculiarities of a person's social positions also contribute to and influence the embodiment and perception of a body within a society.

As an analytical entity, the body can also be interpreted multi-dimensionally and therefore it can be observed from different perspectives in its ways of 'existing' and belonging (O'Neill, 1985; Douglas, 1970). The notions of embodiment and multiple bodies have demonstrated themselves helpful in observing the several ways in which a (physical, social, theoretical) body belongs and interacts with its environment. However, such a concept might also come in handy to explore what mechanisms occur when a body is displaced from the physical and socio-cultural territories where it was enculturated. What happens when a body moves from its original space of socialisation?

To answer it is worth embracing Scheper-Hughes and Lock's theorisation of the 'three bodies'[69] (1987), which divides the body perception into three different bodies: 1) the individual body, understood as the "phenomenological sense of the lived experience of the body-self" (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987, p. 7); 2) the social body, which embeds the "constant exchange of meanings between the 'natural' and the social worlds" (p. 7); and the body politic, the object of regulation and control. The research on this topic moved from this theoretical configuration of the 'three bodies'. Inter-country adoption is explored as a break between the body-self and the social body due to the regulation and control of the body politic. The body-self was interpreted as a symbolic space, a cognitive map of pivotal importance, to represent relations removed from their meaning. Through the adoptive process, such a body is decontextualised, politically sectioned and manipulated to become the 'right' body, the adoptive one.

The same theory might apply to Ethiopian adopted bodies regarding their connections with native families. The body-self and the social body are shaped symbolically, physically, and socially within their context. When the body-self moves from that context through the political body, its original significance and social body do not move with it. The body-self that moves to the Global North loses all its material meaning to become re-signified. The body-self transfers to another place and acquires a second social body, another signification of its presence and

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[69] Their work, focused on medical anthropology, has been inspired by Douglas' "two bodies" (1970) and O'Neill's "five bodies" (1985).

features. In this interpretation, the child comes to the Global North with 'fractured bodies', given that there is no more communication and harmony between them. Indeed, the political body appears in documents, in written information, which exist from the legal and administrative perspective. The body-self, which has been transferred, finds itself in a context where the practical experience it has acquired up to that point has none or little relevance. Simultaneously, the social body remains in Ethiopia to occupy the space of the body-self.

This background theory supports the understanding how adopted bodies may be interpreted as uncomfortable within social dimensions that differ from the milieu where they were produced, shaped, and socialised.

This study argues that native families 'nurture' the social body whilst addressing the political body represented in PARs and organisations, waiting for the self-body to return. Bodies are reconnected by navigating the meanings and histories of all three of them: the self-body in terms of memories and material vectors; the social body by finding its 'original' meanings again; and the political body by retracing the bureaucratic and social history that moved them from a family to another. In this sense, it is possible to talk about dis/possessed bodies, separated and yet nurtured and kept together with the expectation that they will be effectively together again.

Socialisation and filial obligations

At this point, it is necessary to consider the perception of the relationship between native families and their kin. Participant descriptions of their family relationship with their children adopted abroad is that adoption may end parental rights towards the child. Still, it is not strong enough to break the filial responsibilities of the child towards her native family. In this perspective, parental rights and child duties are described as two different relational channels. As explained in the previous chapter, this substantiates the interpretation that adoption is central to grant and strengthen mutual aid between families.

This consideration applies to the cases touched upon in this research, particularly of children adopted when they already had a shared life experience in their community and native families. In Ethiopia, mutual aid and domestic or agricultural work are considered practices of socialisation, integration, and accountability for the child from an early age. Children are given responsibilities and tasks adequate to their age but relatively early if compared to Global North habits and beliefs. Therefore, very young children may have already interiorised the sense of

collaboration and cooperation for their community's survival and their active role within it. Native families' expectations are tightly related to their children's socialisation of filial obligations.

Does this mean that the Ethiopian legal framework considers adoption a never-ending bond to the family of origin? The answer is negative, as remarked by a child protection officer of the MOWCYA. Inter-country adoption in Ethiopia is legally defined as a closed adoption. The law clearly states that the relationship between the child and the adoptive family has priority over any other relationship. Nonetheless, it remains ambiguous given that the nature of the bond with the native family is not described, nor whether it persists or ceases to exist.

In conclusion, inter-country adoption may be subject to a double interpretation. The first, where the child is *yemadego lij*, does not envisage a definitive transfer of parental rights; the second, where the child is *yeguddifaachaa lij*, clarifies that parental rights are passed to the adoptive family. However, in both cases, the absence of parental rights is not directly connected to the end of filial obligations. Filial obligations and tie strengthening remain part of native families' rights for 'playing their part' in this social exchange of resources, namely their children. In both cases, tie strengthening with the adoptive family and retention of the bond – that in the Alternative childcare guidelines (2009) is expressly defined as 'relationship' – are advocated for by native families. Looking at the practical organisation of native family support and access to information of the MOWCYA, this seems to be considered native families' rights also on a governmental level. This study supports the idea that the local informal feature of tie strengthening and mutual aid – even when recognising a permanent transfer of parental rights – has been reproduced in the inter-country adoption practices, perceived as a replication of local practices onto an international and institutional level. The practical expression of the bond is expected to become tangible, particularly when the relationship has been stimulated by regular contacts through PARs, first meetings, and subsequent experiences of re/connection. Moreover, even though the parental rights may be transferred, the blood connection, which is a direct expression of filial obligation, never ends.

6.5   Conclusion: uncomfortable presences

Chapter Six explored the time lapse after the conclusion of the adoption process in Ethiopia. It emerged that the understanding of the family of origin diverges from the one of the Global North. Quite the opposite, the native family considers intact its kin tie with the adoptee and its interest in that bond. This dynamic becomes particularly relevant during this time, which is a time of waiting for the return of the adoptee. The chapter was divided into three parts to investigate this period.

The first part focused on the strategies that native families enact to get in contact with their children adopted abroad. Post-adoption reports (PARs) have been investigated as tools that might allow the family of origin to collect information on the adoptee and retain contacts and particular kin ties in conditions of international child relocation. This section also offered an overview of the organisations that retain a copy of PARs and what kind of data storage, access, and circulation they provide. It emerged that native families are entitled to view such documentation, but their access is bound to the personnel's perspective. Therefore, the family of origin might find alternatives to bypass the several constraints it may encounter.

The second part centred on the notion of circular narrative and, moving from the consideration of PARs, considers the expectations of the family of origin concerning adoptees' return. According to the native family, some elements might contribute to persuading the adoptee to look for her origins. The first is sharing a blood connection, which indicates an ongoing physical and emotional tie. The second are 'clues' that connect the adoptee to her socio-cultural background and include body modification and tangible objects. The entanglement of such factors is conceptualised through the theoretical idea of the three bodies (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987) to offer a new perspective on child mobility and kin ties in inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

The third and last part considered the obstacles the native family encountered when implementing the idea of inter-country adoption as a circular narrative. The relation between the family of origin and the personnel is questioned to comprehend better the legitimacy of native families' requests and how it is dealt with in Ethiopia with native families' claims of connection and reconnection.

Chapter Six addresses inter-country adoption from an Ethiopian perspective as a phenomenon that does not end with the conclusion of the adoption process. Instead, it explores the implementation of the idea that this praxis of child mobility is a life-long journey for the family

of origin. In this chapter, post-adoption is articulated through the practices and understandings of participants in Ethiopia. During this time, the family of origin deploys its agency, strategies, and parenting in the absence to invest in the adoptee relocation and the meaning of kin ties.

Chapter 7. The return and the Ethiopian kin ties: a polyphonic case study

7.1 Introduction. (Post)colonial mobility, kinship and geographies of belongingness

This chapter revolves around the adoptive story of Samuel, pivoting on the days of the reconnection with his native family in Ethiopia. Samuel's story is worth to be explored and analysed in depth since in it all the elements touched upon in the previous chapters converge and take form. As such, this chapter is a closure of the circular narrative presented in chapter Five. Chapter Six explored how the native family perceives the time after the end of the adoption process and what strategies they enact to keep in contact and encourage a mechanism of reconnection in the post-adoption stage. Chapter Six gave depth to the concept of circular narrative by approaching the relationship between kinship, mobility, and places. All these elements become tangible and mutually intertwined in the story of Samuel, which makes evident the tensions arising from the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

Samuel is a 16-year-old Ethio-descendant adoptee, and his story is a polyphonic account of his post-adoption inter-country reconnection in Ethiopia. His story was chosen amongst others as a pivotal ethnographical account for its capacity to exemplify structural tensions of the process while covering all the main issues touched upon across the research. His story give voice to different subjects involved in the separation, adoption and post-adoption process – the adoptive triad, the community and, amongst them, the intermediary. Hence, this chapter focuses on the different perspectives that collide in Samuel's story and pick the main topics that surface from Samuel's example of reconnection to examine the adoptee and adoptive family's experience. The chapter's structure relies on the case study tool to display all participants' points of view and alternates participant(s) points of view and the analysis.

The analysis ponders upon this research's epistemology, based on the inversion of peripheral and central knowledges and its connection to mobility, space, and kinship. It then plunges such notions into the experience of the protagonists of Samuels' story and explores and deconstructs the issues adoptees encounter when they return to Ethiopia. The displacement

adoptees face during early childhood and their return as (young) adults is compared to Ethiopians' trajectories of international migration. Following the adoptees' experience, it also tackles their effort to reconnect the pre- and post-adoption experience. It underlines three main aspects of their return to Ethiopia: the temporal, the bureaucratic and the geographical dimensions. Furthermore, it explores how participants' understanding of kinship changes when the location where events take place are distant and carry different meanings. The last part of this section tackles the matter of privacy and secrecy and reflects on the meanings the adoptive family assigns to this concept.

This story also gives the opportunity to begin exploring how adoptive and native families differently access reconnection and where intermediaries position themselves in such situations. As such, this chapter mainly focuses on their experience. It further offers final reflections on adoptees' role when involved in the reconnection and native families' alternative strategies when their reconnection requests are ignored or declined by the adoptive families.

Samuel's case study displays an example of reconnection practice. It recounts the story of Samuel from the points of view of four actors involved: the adoptee Samuel, his adoptive family (mother and father), his native family (mother and father), and the community of the native family, which consists of other native relatives. In the middle of this entanglement of relations, the intermediary Lidiya is the translator, mediator, and negotiator amongst the parties. This case study tool offers a view of how different subjects chose to describe events and compares the recalled events to show the dynamics of power, mobility and kinship that reunions often ignite. The analytical considerations highlighted by this peculiar case study are not straightforwardly generalisable to each adoptive story. However, they might echo, to some extent, other reconnections' power dynamics and perspectives, which are employed in the analytical parts to further corroborate this chapters' considerations.

This reconnection story occurred in the Kembata Tembaro zone, situated in the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. The researcher, the adoptive family and the adoptee met in Addis Ababa. The adoptive family and their adopted son were interviewed few days after the meeting with the native family. The meeting for the interview resulted in two days of participant observation. During that time, there has been the chance to conduct multiple conversational and in-depth interviews with the family, both individually and as a group.

The native family was in-depth interviewed during a field trip in the Kembata Tembaro zone. On that occasion, the researcher interviewed other native families of that area. The lasting relationship with the intermediary who mediated the reconnection made her one of the privileged critical informants of the research. It allowed the researcher to understand more in depth the specifics of this reconnection story. The intermediary also provided linguistic support and mediation, notably when the conversation switched to the Kambaata language.

7.2 The adoptee

Samuel: a fractured story.

Samuel is 16 years old. He is an Ethio-descendant adopted at five and a half from Ethiopia. He is originally from the Kembata Tembaro zone, an area located in the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region. Samuel's memories concerning his life with his native family were that they lived in a *tukul*[70] and slept in the shed on the floor. His last recall of his native family was of his mother, pregnant with his younger brother, crying next to their home door while his father was taking him to the orphanage. His native relatives went to tell him goodbye the evening before the adoptive court session. The day after, Samuel legally became the son of his new Italian adoptive family. After the adoption, and once he learned the Italian language well enough to express himself, he started talking to his adoptive family. Samuel explained to them that his native family told him his stay in the orphanage would have been temporary and that they would have come back to take him home. His adoptive parents recalled that when they arrived in Italy, Samuel kept repeating that he had to come back to Ethiopia to help his family. He then stopped asking about Ethiopia until he turned eleven.

When he became a teen, he began refusing his adoptive parents. He told them it was their fault if he had been separated from his family because they took him from the childcare institution. He was persuaded that his native family would have come back to take him home if his adoptive parents would have not adopted him, and he blamed them for this. Their relationship worsened over time. He refused to meet a psychologist and became violent with his adoptive parents. He realised he had a growing desire to go to Ethiopia to understand what had happened back then.

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[70] Round cone-shaped house made of wood and dry mud.

At the same time, Samuel got in contact with other Ethio-descendant adoptees. They had been adopted from the same childcare institution when Samuel was there. Through social media, he managed to find another Ethio-descendant adoptee who made public his experience of reconnection. The Ethio-descendant adoptees' friends of Samuel confirmed this person was in his same childcare institution. Samuel got in contact with this person, who shared his experience of reconnection with him.

Further to this conversation, Samuel decided to return to Ethiopia to look for his native family. He talked to his adoptive parents about his intentions because he wanted to take this trip independently, but they refused to let him go alone. So, he put his family in contact with the adoptive family of the other boy who reconnected to his native family, and they agreed to meet. After talking to this other adoptive family, Samuel's adoptive parents decided to organise a family trip (Samuel's parents, their younger biological daughter, and Samuel himself) to Ethiopia. In Italy, Samuel and his family met the intermediary, Lidiya, an Ethiopian lady who worked for an Italian organisation and speaks Italian fluently. Samuel shared with Lidiya all his memories concerning his village, family, and the time spent in Ethiopia. The intermediary collected this information to support the research. In a month, Lidiya found his native family and sent Samuel a picture. Eight months later, Samuel got on a plane together with his adoptive family travelling to meet his native family in Ethiopia, where he had the constant support and presence of Lidiya. When organising this trip, he refused to include any touristic detour. As Samuel recalls:

> I did not want to visit [Ethiopia]. I just wanted to go to my family, full stop.
> Only that. [Adoptee, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

It was a Saturday when they arrived at the village. As soon as he stepped out of the car, he immediately recognised and hugged his mother. He burst into tears, which, he says, is something he never does. As Samuel recalls:

> I was emotional. I had not seen them [Samuel's birth family] for eleven years.
> I was very emotional (…) There were many, many people, it was stunning. (…)
> everyone was there, everyone. (…) We arrived, and everyone started dancing
> and singing, like that. And the women made the *lhlhlhlhlhlh* sound, (…) and
> everybody was dancing. We took many, many pictures, and then we went to
> eat. (…) all the family members were outside because there was not enough
> space inside. (…) They were a lot. (…) Some of them were eating. Others

were looking inside. It was very, very beautiful. (…) It was fantastic. I mean, it is like destroying a part of my life, so, fantastic. [Adoptee, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

While recognising his biological mother and several uncles, other memories surfaced. The adoptive family and Lidiya were welcomed inside the house, where the biological family had prepared an Ethiopian wedding-like lunch. Samuel wanted to spend the night in his biological family's home, but the native father refused, telling him he was probably no longer used to sleeping in such conditions. Instead, they invited the adoptive family to come back the day after.

During the day, Samuel asked Lidiya to help him communicate with his native family. With the help of the intermediary, who offered linguistic and cultural mediation, Samuel asked his family why they gave him into adoption – "and this kind of questions", he summarised during the interview. The native family explained they did it for his good, to give him a future. One of his Ethiopian brothers told him he would have liked to be in his shoes, to have been adopted, but was considered too old. To this comment, Samuel answered that "One thing is to go away because you want to. Another is to be sent away without your consent". Indeed, he recalls that at the time of their separation his native family had told him something about leaving, and that he was not keen to go. Samuel also told his native family that this misinterpretation about the reasons behind the separation negatively influenced his relationship with his adoptive parents. He maltreated his adoptive parents because he thought they had taken him while he was expected to wait for his biological family at the childcare institution. The native father gave Samuel a pragmatic answer, saying that, as his biological family, they did it for his well-being, to improve his chances in the future, that Samuel had to take this chance. He explained to Samuel that they did not leave him because he was considered a problem, or that they did not want him, or they did not love him; they did it only for his well-being, to give him the chance to study, and become someone. But now, after years, they expect him to support them, his native family, if he intends to do it.

The day after, he and his adoptive and native family ate lunch together and stayed there for the whole day. After eating, the native family helped them prepare *injera*, a typical Ethiopian sour fermented bread. During our interview, the adoptive family remarked that Samuel was the best among them to prepare *injera*. Even his adoptive father tried to prepare it, and he explained how exciting it was to do it in front of Samuel's native family. The adoptive and native families also looked at some pictures the Italian family brought with them. The

biological family asked them lots of questions and asked Samuel if Italy was beautiful. Samuel answered that Italy is indeed beautiful but that he would have preferred to stay there with them. During our interview, Samuel, together with the adoptive father, recollects what the native father answered Samuel:

> Yes, it is true, you could have stayed here. However, we did this to give you a future. Now, if you take this occasion, you study, and you manage to find a job. Then, if you want, you can also help us with your job and come back. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

After eating and looking at pictures, they went to the river where Samuel used to wash, and there he washed his face and hands. As Samuel and his adoptive father recall:

> Then I went to see where I used to go to get the water when I was younger. I mean, when I lived there. Then I visited, again, all the places. We played football. (…) I remembered all (about the area). It was beautiful. [Adoptee, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Samuel's native family also recalled a specific event from when Samuel left, something he did with one of his older sisters before being taken to the childcare institution. Samuel's adoptive mother recounts that event as it was described to her by Samuel's birth mother:

> A few days before he [Samuel] left [his birth family to go to the orphanage], he planted a small tree with a sister. His parents never cut it because they thought the tree was meant to grow, and they compared it to Samuel, who was gradually growing as well. That plant grows into a tree now, just like Samuel (she smiles). [Adoptive mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Before leaving, Samuel gave his biological parents and brothers some small presents. He also handed them some money because Samuel wanted to provide them with economic support. When they left, he exchanged his phone number with his oldest brother, who speaks English. The linguistic barrier was still high as Samuel does not speak English nor Kambaata language.

The temporal, bureaucratic, and geographical dimension of adoption

Samuel's experience as a European boy in an Ethiopian body visiting Ethiopia is similar to that of other adoptees involved in this research. His perspective sheds light on Ethio-descendent adoptees' experience visiting Ethiopia, who face expectations and deal with categories concerning Ethiopians involved in the trajectories of international migration. One aspect that popped out from Samuel's perspective is that during the stay of the adoptees in the country of origin, the implicit and explicit expectations of the native families become manifest, such as keeping in contact, receiving occasional or regular economic support, and having them back in Ethiopia. The presence of the adoptees in Ethiopia makes tangible the reconnection of their individual and political bodies with their social bodies and the juxtaposition of Global North and local social bodies. It is an encounter of different lives. An adult adoptee described this experience as "losing one life completely, and re-building another". This association of lost and re-built selves influences adoptees' perspectives on their experience. This section thus focuses on the experience of adoptees in Ethiopia on a temporal, bureaucratic and relational level.

On a temporal level, the experience of adoptees combines different periods and interpretations. While in the Global North they were experiencing adoption as a life-long and linear journey, once back in Ethiopia adoptees discover that "paths, selves, origins and destinations are multiple" (Countin, Yngvesson, 2006, p. 184). For instance, Samuel's adoptive parents perceive his adoptive experience as linear. On the contrary, Samuel's native family saw it as fragmented and divided it in three main timespans: the presence of Samuel in Ethiopia as a child; his absence from Ethiopia as a child; and his return to the country as a grownup.

Time produced circular lines of temporality that followed the mobility of Samuel and dis/connected his physical and Ethiopian social bodies. Samuel leaves Ethiopia as a child and as a child is referred to until he eventually comes back as a young adult. This 'prolonged childhood' is reinforced by the fact that adoptees in Ethiopia are often referred to as children. Their image is crystallised in that time when they left the country. This idea is linked to conventional international age parameters by organisations that mediate the inter-country post-adoption process. Indeed, participants amongst the personnel of these organisations look at and refer to adoptees as children until they turn 18. Interestingly, this sort of infantilisation impacts adoptees' perceived ability to manage potential contacts with native families. An intermediary made an example:

> I have been recently requested to meet a (native) family. A [adopted] boy
> was looking for his family. He wanted to know if they [his native family

members] were still alive. I cannot describe the emotions I experienced (…).
It was my first experience meeting a child's [native] family (…). They were so
happy, and the child looked for his sister (…). [Showing a picture] He is the
child who left (…), and these are his sisters in Italy. He is a boy now (…). I gave
all the information to the [adoptive] family, and the family has to understand
how to … tell this child [everything]. [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis
Ababa]

For instance, in this case, the intermediary referred to the 16-year-old adoptee she is helping
in the search for his native family as 'the child'.

During the interview, she underlined several times that she sent the information collected only
to the adoptive parents. They decided whether to tell their son that they knew where to find
his native family. When the fieldwork ended, around two months after this interview, the
intermediary had not received any further message from the adoptive family. And yet, the
native family was regularly contacting her, asking for news. This example epitomises adoptive
families' responsibility and parental control - in economic, jurisdictional, and decisional terms.
As such, adoptees' experience is described and framed differently according to the geographic
spaces where it takes place: in the Global North, adoptees live according to their (presumed)
biological age and are intended as in need of protection until they turn 18; to the family of
origin, they are referred to as children until their return, but this does not necessarily mean
they are not considered able to be part of the family dynamics. Such multiple temporal
perceptions of their selves co-exist in different geographic spaces[71].

The other level is the bureaucratic dimension. This dimension refers to adoptees' political body
and their search for the truth behind their native family's choice of adoption. The prominent,
tangible expression of adoptees' political bodies' mobility is the documentation. Documents
are the material tools that anchor a specific truth, inscribe it in a formal record, and tie it to
the foundation of a kinship relationship. Leinaweaver's study on the relation between
documentation and truth in Spain illustrates the concept of a "referentialist documentary
ideology" (2019, p. 4), namely a system of truth that relies solely on documentation as a

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[71] According to Lee (2021), adoptees already experience the Western narrative that often refers to and
interprets their experience as inextricably linked and connected to the stages of abandonment and
"rescue".

source of reliable information concerning adoption and hides different regimes of truth. This study finds similar dynamics between the truths that may encompass adoption in Ethiopia.

On the one hand, there is the tangible, documented, 'authenticated' truth, corroborated by certificates, testimonies, and official files; the truth that can be read, retold, and uncontestably confirmed. On the other hand, there is the mostly hidden native families' truth, generally oral and recounted by families, contested, or confirmed by neighbours. The latter is a truth – or truths – that talks about a family of origin's lives and strategies, understandings of kinship and reasons for opting for child relocation. The difference between Samuel's adoptive documentation and the 'truth' of his native family's child mobility strategies clearly shows the existing hierarchical relations amongst truths.

To the eye of the researcher, the discrepancy between these two – or multiple – regimes of truth may become a productive revelation of different knowledges and interpretations "even more significant than the accuracy of reference" (Leinaweaver, 2019, p. 5). In other words, the 'coherence' of such truths is less relevant than their hierarchical order and the visibility of one over the other. As suggested by this study's (post)colonial feminist theoretical framework, the adoption's primary truth is eventually the result of a (post)colonial relation amongst families, where material disparities dictate who detains the knowledge that will become the definitive truth.

However, to the eye of the adoptees, the return to Ethiopia to reconnect with the family of origin often puts them in front of unexpected versions of their adoption story and a political body detached from its local social representation. As suggested in chapter Six, the gap that often exists between documented facts, subjectively described events, and the documentation provided by the organisations makes this process even more problematic.

In the case of Samuel and other adoptees, documents may reproduce or refract the 'truths' shared by subjects involved in the story beyond the Story. In such cases, adoptees searching for a reconnection between their social and political body need to negotiate the documentary truth and the truths of local kinship regimes. This negotiation may encompass historical, medical, and legal records, labelled as factual or fictitious in producing – hence negotiating – the beginnings of the story. For example, the adoptee Sara explains the problematic exercise of finding the 'truth'(s) behind her adoption:

> There are three different stories … like, [the story of] the neighbours from
> Addis [Ababa], who were literally there when I was a baby, then the story

that she [her native mother] tells, she tells the story that the police tell, there are actually three different stories, but ... I do not know which one I believe. I can just tell you the one that I used to ... My mother, she says that she was really poor, that is a fact, it is not [made up]. She did not have a job; my father was an alcoholic (…). And then she gave me to the neighbours because she told me she had to find a job ... and she went. Two days later, the neighbours decided to give me to the police, because they said they did not know if she would come back or anything, and they just took me to the police and said: "This mother, she is not able to take care of the baby, please take this child". And then she came back, and I was gone. She was really mad, that is why she left. I do not know if this is the true story. Another story is that I was, she abandoned me somewhere near the house, and somebody picked me up and took me to the police. The report said she was a very poor woman, and six months after she gave me away, she went to the police to give her personal details and everything, and because of that, she had to go to jail. And my father too. But she had to go to jail. This is a fact. She went to jail. This is why she was afraid of the police and also why she went away from Addis [Ababa]. And... in the other case I told you before, they took me to the police, the neighbours, they [the police] came and took my parents to jail because they did not take care of me. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

Sara stresses how daunting is for her the exercise of obtaining a post-adoption 'unique narration' of the events. The different versions of the story produce an incongruity that Sara tries to 'fill', starting from the documentation and then finding a potential red thread between the different accounts. As in the case of Sara, discrepancies often increase the level of ambiguity of the information, thus potentially transforming a search of origin into the discovery of a truth susceptible to changes, or a "false beginning" (Yngvesson and Countin, 2006) that leads adoptees to a new condition of incertitude. For instance, a childcare institution worker explained that, in several cases, adoptees and adoptive families decide to take a DNA test in Addis Ababa to verify the legitimacy of the claim and the adoptive stories of potential native parents. A social worker of a residential childcare institution explains:

For one [adoptee] come many mothers. So, to separate which is the real [birth] mother, they need it [the DNA test], [it is] necessary. [Residential childcare institution staff member, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

The last dimension is the geographical, and it co-exists with the two previous dimensions since, in the case of Ethiopia-descendant adoptees, it intersects with their specific somatic features. The local social bodies and their self-body interact with the Ethiopian context and the correlated expectations. Sara further explains:

> In Ethiopia, everybody expects me to speak Amharic. When you do not speak Amharic, people start to be ... they do not understand, even when I tell them I grew up abroad (...) they say like, "Why don't you speak? You know there are places where to learn, there are Oromia people who went abroad, also, and they all know it". And that makes me a bit sad because I really try, and sometimes they are happy that I try, but they still do not get the point. (…) Because they, they know that I was born here, and then they think it is my mother tongue, so I need to learn. I do not know; how do you call it? They have really ... some Ethiopians, I just say some, because I cannot generalise. But they have a very big ... connection to their country. It is like, "I am Ethiopian, I am proud" (…). That is also maybe why, because they see me, I look like an Ethiopian person, and I do not speak Amharic, so what is wrong with me? (She laughs). [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

Sara feels inadequate to satisfy fellow Ethiopian's expectations. Because of the appearance of her self-body, her social body is supposed to keep and express its 'Ethiopianness' by accomplishing specific tasks, such as speaking Amharic, the official Ethiopian language. Her inability to reach this goal does not make her body less 'Ethiopian' or people's requests less insistent. On the contrary, it makes more evident to Sara's eyes the gap between her Global North social body, her local social body, and the assumptions that her self-body produces in others according to the geographical contexts where it is located.

7.3   The adoptive family

Samuel's adoptive mother and father: a new beginning.

At the end of September 2007, Samuel was taken by his native family to the countryside childcare institution. Then, he was moved to another residential childcare institution in Addis Ababa. The adoption was confirmed in February 2008. His adoptive parents say that until he turned 11, he was not interested in talking about Ethiopia. Samuel wanted to speak Italian. He called them mum and dad; he was not interested in anything related to Africa. His change of attitude is described as sudden and unexpected. When Samuel expressed his strong desire to go back to Ethiopia, he also blamed his Italian family for taking him away from the childcare institution. His adoptive parents clarified that no one of his birth family members would have come back to take him from the orphanage. Indeed, the adoptive family told Samuel that he was already in the residential childcare institution when they went to Ethiopia to adopt him and take him to Italy. However, Samuel did not accept this explanation. As the adoptive father of Samuel recalls:

> He [Samuel] did not call us mum and dad anymore. We were no one to him. He got to the point of telling us, "It would have been better if you would let me die there" … we needed to find a solution. He would not go to the psychologist, we changed four or five of them, but he refused to go. He got to the point of doing … harsh things and beating us. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

At that point, his Italian father offered to go to Africa with him, and Samuel refused by saying he wanted to be the one deciding when and with whom he would go to Ethiopia. His father forbade him to take this decision on his own because he was a minor. He told Samuel he could not go without them. There is no one they trusted who could take him there, and the adoptive father should have given legal responsibility to this person through the tribunal of minors. Samuel told his adoptive parents he knew a minor who went to Ethiopia, and they asked him to contact this person's parents. They called the adoptive mother of this other boy who went to Ethiopia, and they organised a meeting.

Meanwhile, Samuel's adoptive parents told him that if he wanted to go to Ethiopia, it had to be with them, and only after having located his native family. They met the other adoptive family in a short time. They brought pictures of the orphanage, and the boys shared memories concerning their time together at the residential childcare institution. Eventually, Samuel's

family decided to begin the search for his native family, even though they doubted they would ever find them. The adoptive mother of Samuel recalls that "I would have never thought we would be able to find his family" of origin.

They met with Lidiya, the intermediary who supported the other family's reconnection. Lidiya asked them for the official documentation of the adoption, and, in a month, she found Samuel's native family. She then organised a WhatsApp call with them. That day, the adoptive family found out Samuel's native family was more numerous than they expected – the family unit alone is composed of two parents and six siblings. Starting from that day, the adoptive parents sensed that Samuel began calming down. Lidiya provided some pictures depicting all the family members as well as a picture of Samuel before the adoption. The journey to Ethiopia was their first international trip after the adoption. The other adoptive family helped them with the planning and explained what to do step by step. They acknowledge it was a moment of great emotion. Samuel's adoptive family admitted that Samuel was never inclined to share his memories of his native family or his past. They heard about most of Samuel's memories during his conversation with Lidiya for the first time.

When they landed in Ethiopia and arrived at Samuel's native family village, they received a welcome they did not expect. The community was waiting for them in the street and in front of the house, even though it was raining. Shouts of happiness welcomed them, and the people were holding plenty of flowers. The adoptive family left the car and was led by the crowd to the house. Samuel's native family welcomed them with flowers in front of the house, where a big gazebo was built for the occasion. They remember there were at least one hundred people. There was a photographer, a band playing soul music, a choir, and signs "Welcome Samuel" in English. A mass was celebrated, with a time for prayers. All the native family was hair-dressed and clothed as for a wedding-like celebration. Then, the adoptive family was welcomed within the house, where they started eating all together with the intermediary, the native father, and his brothers. Samuel's mother and siblings were not at the table with them. Food was served to the guests standing outside the house, as well. The menu was the same that is usually served at an Ethiopian wedding, and people were eating in shifts to let everyone have a portion of food, even those who joined them later. Overall, there was food for two hundred people.

While they were eating, the adoptive father called the native mother to join them at the table and eat together. The adoptive family lamented that the mother was not allowed to talk during the meeting or sit at the table. Furthermore, the questions Samuel asked her were

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answered by the father, not by her. The adoptive mother also expressed distress in thinking the biological mother did not have any decisional power on Samuel's adoption. The birth mother of Samuel seemed never entirely sure about to give him into adoption. Therefore, the adoptive mother thinks that Samuel's birth mother greatly suffered from the separation from his child.

Moreover, the adoptive parents were annoyed that the father's older brothers talked and ate with them instead of Samuel's direct family members. They would have preferred a meeting with more intimacy, with close family members only. The adoptive parents also felt as if their opinions or preferences were not relevant in deciding the essential aspects of that meeting. The intermediary explained to the adoptive parents that the meeting structure mirrored organisations of social status. The father's older brothers sat at the table with them because they were socially more relevant than other family members.

During the interview, the adoptive family also explained that taking Samuel to Ethiopia happened as a reaction to a situation of emergency. They consider the reconnection trip a vital experience when adoptees are in a situation of difficulty and an avoidable, unnecessary option when adoptees are happy, "fine, quiet, calm; they do not complain" they said.

Additionally, a debate concerning 'truths' occurred within the couple. The adoptive father said Samuel showed challenging behaviours because his native family lied to him. To this, Samuel's adoptive mother replied that his native family told him the truth because Samuel knew he was taken somewhere else because of their condition of poverty. However, they could not adequately explain to him what would happen, that he was not coming back anytime soon. The adoptive family also evoked Samuel's requests when he first arrived in Italy. As Samuel's adoptive mother recalls:

> When he arrived, he said, like this, that he must come back to help his family
> (…) when he had just arrived, he wanted to go back to help his family. But
> then, well, who knows if it was true if it was not true … I do not know if they
> [the native family] had it [the expectation the child would return], they did
> not give me that impression … [Adoptive mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Also, Samuel's adoptive father recalled that when Samuel arrived in Italy, he shared a request made by his birth grandfather. As Samuel's adoptive father recalls:

He [Samuel] has his grandparents. The grandfather told him he would have given him 100 birrs when he returned. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

When the Italian parents asked more about Samuel's adoption, the native family told them that the childcare institution had someone going to the countryside telling people they could take their children to the childcare institution. From there, children would have been sent abroad to study, receive a better education, and have access to a better future. Samuel's older brothers desired to go. However, they were considered too old by the brokers of the childcare institution, who told them no one would have adopted them because of their age. So, they tried to convince the mother to send him, who was the youngest one. Even though the mother did not want to give Samuel into adoption, his oldest brother kept insisting that he had to leave and have a better future, that it would have been the best thing for him.

The adoptive parents recalled the adoptive document stating Samuel went into adoption because of poverty. They also remembered the adoption agency manager told them that, at the time of Samuel's adoption process, the Ethiopian judge got angry with the native family because they were giving into adoption a child whilst the mother was already pregnant with another baby.

On the second day of reconnection, the adoptive family recalls there were fewer people than on the day of their arrival. The adoptive family brought pictures depicting Samuel's arrival in Italy, their family, and how he grew up over time. The native mother was very excited to see the pictures. After that, the adoptive parents left them a souvenir, a CD containing all the pictures, to "show them that in any case Samuel is very loved where he is, no matter what happened". According to Samuel's adoptive parents, his native family seemed very happy to look at the pictures displaying his life in Italy. The mother and sisters were crying. The native family also asked them many questions about his studies and what he was doing. As Samuel's adoptive father recalls:

[His native father] Gave a discourse that is also what we always told him: when you will be an adult, if you decide that you prefer to live there [in Ethiopia], no one forces you to stay in Italy, you can live there, we are always here for you, when you want to come back, you can come back. However, you have to study before. You have to do something, otherwise, what will you do there … A part of Samuel is there too, he has two families. One [family] here that loves you anyway, and us. We will always be there for you,

in any case. We are your family, and we will always be ready to welcome you and support you in any decision. You do not have to stay in Italy if you prefer to stay here. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

However, the adoptive father emphasised that Samuel should not renounce to his Italian citizenship for the Ethiopian one, suggesting he already had a conversation with Samuel about this topic. Furthermore, he stressed that Samuel should come back to Ethiopia with some projects and that moving to Ethiopia only to live here would not be a good idea. The adoptive parents were also inquisitive about the conversation between Samuel and his native family and asked him and Lidiya about it. When Samuel explained what he told his native family, his adoptive parents replied it was reasoning with "our mentality", meaning an Italian mindset. However, they also added that it was his right to understand what happened, share his thoughts, and get "some itch to scratch". The adoptive family was also impressed by how many memories connected Samuel to his native village and the surrounding spaces. As Samuel's adoptive father recalls talking to him:

You [Samuel] visited all the places you knew, the river where you went to bath (…) behind the house and the fields. You had the feeling you knew it ever since because it seemed like you never left that place (…). He knew where things were. He took a road to get to the river; they made him take a road, and instead, he remembered another one. He returned and said, "No, I used to go in this direction", and we took his road instead. Indeed, they told him that that road was the one he used to take (when he was a child); the other road they wanted him to take was a new one. That is why he remembered the other one. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

When they arrived in Ethiopia, they realised that probably many of Samuel's attitudes and behaviours that did not make sense to them might have been related to his childhood. Samuel's adoptive family talked about this idea during the interview in the following conversation:

Samuel's adoptive father: He [Samuel] is a person of a few words … in my opinion, he has the Kembata mentality, men speak little and (he smiles) now I understand him (…) (there are) Many behaviours that we ignored but were part of his childhood, things he always did … such as wandering around without telling where you are going, coming home how and when you want,

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here it looks like a routinary thing, especially in villages, to see small children without custody on streets with no lights. In Italy, this is not normal. As you see a child walking, you immediately see an adult coming along. Here not.

Samuel's adoptive mother: And he took [from here] this free spirit, to go, to do.

Samuel's adoptive father: his wild spirit … he does not even tell you where he goes. It's enough if he says, "Bye-bye, I leave". But where do you go? "Around", ok, you tell me around, and you go around … it is like telling me nothing.

Researcher: what do you think? Do you see yourself in this description?

Samuel: yes (he laughs)

[Adoptee, adoptive mother and father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Before leaving the Kembata Tembaro zone, they gave the native family some money. Adoptive parents' explanation about the economic support was that they did not expect all that people and such a massive party. They assumed the native family faced many expenses having all those persons at lunch. Only then they realised the family provided food to all the people visiting their home that day, even including the ones outside the house.

A quest for participants' positioning

During a presentation of her book 'Favelas e asfalto' (2021), Silvia Stefani, an anthropologist who researched in Brazil on masculinity, recounted an interview concerning racism, race and intersectionality. She recalled asking a participant how a man's life in Rio de Janeiro was. The person answered, "I cannot tell you how the life of a man is. I can tell you how the life of a Black, poor, male man living in a *favela* is" (Stefani, 2021, my translation). According to her participant, the specific location he was looking from was also the geographical standpoint to self-define himself. De-localization and self-identification arise as strictly connected and are central to this section when addressing adoptees and adoptive parents located somewhere else concerning their ordinary life. As it becomes evident from Samuel's adoptive mother and father's account, the change of location also impacts their understanding of their experience. Adoptive parents are physically positioned in a context that is far removed from their comfort

zone. This makes inquiries about their phenotypical difference and the (post)colonial feminist implications surface. Dissimilarly, adoptees describe their presence in Ethiopia as an experience that allowed their self-body to 'merge' for the first time with the crowd, and yet whilst questioning their social body's abilities.

Indeed, research concerning inter-country adoption and involving adoptees and adoptive families are usually geographically and socio-culturally located in the Global North.

Conversely, the location where this research takes place offers another perspective and questions the subjects involved through a different position. For instance, Samuel and his adoptive family are geographically in a context that differs from the area, the city, and the community where they co-constructed their relation and their intimate family ties. Their travel outside their comfort zone moves their geographical and interpretational standing point, thus influencing the positioning of their observations. Although, as an adoptee named Sara argued, for an Ethio-descendant adoptee a zone of absolute 'comfort' – intended as a condition of harmonic co-existence of her social and self-body – does not exist. Ethiopia is the starting point of the reflections between the subjects involved in this research and their relational dynamics. For those participants who travelled there, this means addressing different issues and challenges related to their adoptive story. Mainly, it becomes a matter of confrontation with different kinship regimes and interpretations of concepts like kin and family ties. That is a new experience for international adoptees and adoptive parents. Encountering native family members, intermediaries, the wider Ethiopian audience, and their understandings of the inter-country phenomenon forces adoptive parents and adoptees to self-reflect on their interpretative subjectivity and differently self-identify with the context. The adoptive parents of Samuel experienced a shift in their interpretation mainly connected to their geographical positioning, even though their intersectional features remained primarily unchanged, together with their (post)colonial power embedded in social and relational dynamics. Another element that impacts their reflections and reading key concerning inter-country adoption ties and family dynamics is the pervasive use and manifestation of specific family socio-cultural constructions. At the same time, even though Samuel and his adoptive parents are members of the same nuclear family, their positioning significantly differs according to their relation to that geographic space. That is pointed out within the Ethiopian context by their phenotypic traits and may underline otherness for the adoptive parents and belongingness for the adoptees, with consequential expectations from the social environment, as pointed out by Sara. This different standing point also influences their interpretational paradigm of the relationship between a place or territory and the definition of kinship and belongingness.

A choreography of secrecy

To Samuel's adoptive parents' eyes, notions of privacy and secrecy emerged as central during this experience of reconnection. The couple first positioned their idea of privacy in a framework of legality. The adoptive father described privacy in the Global North as an individual right intended to protect the minor. Then, Samuel's father emphasised those situations he interpreted as an infringement of an alleged 'privacy code'.

However, during the interview, it emerged that their experience in Ethiopia introduced new factors beyond the notion of privacy as an exclusively legal matter. As Samuel's adoptive mother and father recall:

> Samuel's adoptive mother: whilst we were there, native parents of other children who left with him arrived, and they were there to ask for information if we knew anything about their children.
>
> Samuels' adoptive father: they wanted to search them [their children adopted abroad] … through him [Samuel] … but for reasons of privacy …
>
> Samuel's adoptive mother: well, privacy apart.
>
> Samuel's adoptive father: we cannot give too much information because one thing is this trip WE decided to do … I mean, I cannot say, even if I know the child, call his [adoptive] parents and say "Look, I have met the [native] mother of your daughter, she is worried and wants news".
>
> [Adoptive mother and father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Samuel's adoptive father and mother's encounters with native families asking for other adoptees' information oblige them to question the concept of privacy and its intrinsic meanings. Indeed, Samuel's adoptive parents initially try to explain their position in terms of privacy to the native families. Eventually, they agree that the point is not linked to the legal interpretation of privacy but rather to what they believe they are socially allowed to say or share.

In this situation, Samuel's adoptive parents prefer not to share information about other adoptees that they know very well in Italy. The reason is that they feel that giving information might jeopardise the relationship between adoptive parents and adoptees. The preservation of the well-being of the adoptive families has priority over native families' requests. When asked

about the reactions of other adoptive families to their trip, Samuel's adoptive family explains at different moments of the interview that such communication happened in the form of unspoken information rather than direct talks. Before Samuel's adoptive family's departure, the other adoptive parents did not comment on their posts on social media; did not message them; did not ask for more information; did not bring up the topic with them. The paradox of Samuel's adoptive parents' communication with other adoptive parents is that the absence of communication sends a clear message to them. According to their interpretation, this avoidance of contact and the choice of not-knowing are the communication forms that other adoptive parents used to express their wish to not being involved. In other words, obliviousness prevails over knowledge. As Samuel's adoptive father and mother recall:

> You have to consider our [Global North's adoptive parents] mentality. Not all the [adoptive] families are willing to [do this experience in Ethiopia] (…) Several families that we know [in person] knew or understood through social media that we were coming to Ethiopia, almost all from the Kembata Tembaro Zone. No one told me, "If you meet my son's parents [of origin], if you have pictures, send us some pictures". No-one asked me anything (he smiles) ... no-one amongst the [adoptive] parents asked me anything. As such, I cannot go to … disturb the peace. Look, at least four, five families with [adoptive] children coming from this area knew we were here and coming here. No one ever wrote to me, "Send me some pictures. If you meet or see by chance also the family [of origin] of my child whilst you are there, tell them [their child] is fine, give them my best". They never asked us anything.
> [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Privacy is therefore re-worked as a condition of persistence of secrecy derived from the social tension they experience amongst their peers, namely other Global North's adoptive parents.

This finding echoes the work of Bakuri et al. (2020), who examined the entanglement between transnational mobility and kinship amongst Ghanian-Dutch and Somali-Dutch in the Netherlands. The study claims practices used to conceal a secret might be interpreted as a 'choreography of secrecy', where "manipulating information and not-knowing are not mutually exclusive but co-produce the choreography" (Bakuri et al., 2020, p. 409). The metaphor of the choreography applies to Samuel's adoptive parents' extensive efforts to deal with the expectations of the native families of the community of Samuel's family of origin and the other

adoptive parents. A significant difference appeared between concealing a piece of information you possess or deciding voluntarily not to know it.

On the one hand, Samuel's adoptive parents do not know whether the adoptive families and the adoptee might be interested to know there are living family members in Ethiopia. Samuel's adoptive parents fear telling other adoptive parents they met the native family of their children because engaging with other adoptive parents about their encounters in Ethiopia might go against their will. Furthermore, acquiring such 'problematic knowledge' has the potential of "disturbing the peace" in the kin relationships or rather tipping the balance of other fictive kinships' dynamics. This element of disturbance seems to root in the complementarity of knowledge and obliviousness. The choreography of actions between Samuel's adoptive family and the other adoptive families produces a concurrence of actions that, in a dynamic of mutuality, preserve the secret: the former knows but keeps the information; the latter might know by asking but voluntarily decides to avoid the question(s).

On the other hand, as Bakuri et al. argued, "[k]eeping secrets requires labour" (Bakuri et al., 2020, p. 407), and this labour is situational. In Ethiopia, Samuel's adoptive parents find themselves morally obliged to conceal information from the families of origin. According to the situation, they avoid confrontations, hide information, misdirect, or decide not to acquire further information. This part of the choreography of secrecy keeps the families of origin away from the piece of information that Samuel's adoptive parents possess. In Samuel's adoptive parents, possessing the secret and maintaining it requires many emotional and tactical energies because they are involved in native families' sorrow and despair. At the same time, they feel the necessity of 'protecting' other adoptive families from external turbulences. This shielding tactic contributes to reinforcing and reproducing existing social relations. In the discourse of Samuel's adoptive parents, discretion is seen as of uppermost relevance to strengthen the authority and legitimacy of the adoptees' adoptive family with the native family members' kinships and geographies.

Samuels' adoptive parents make evident that native families' face-to-face claims put adoptive parents in a contradictory position. Even though the requests of native family members are described as legitimate, they are approached as strangers to the adoptees, as it shows Samuel's adoptive parents' narrative of privacy as a mechanism of minors' and peers' protection from external factors. Samuel's adoptive family decide to shield their peers to maintain the secret: this choice contributes to reproducing unbalanced stratification in

adoption relationships and epitomises power and material disparities amongst Global South and North kins.

Interviews highlight shielding tactics that might be applied to avoid communication between the native and adoptive families and prevent connections between the adoptee and the native family. For instance, Samuel's adoptive father and the intermediary Lidiya recall when Samuel's biological oldest brother asked for his phone number in this quotation. Samuel wanted to give it to him, but Samuel's adoptive parents disagreed:

> Samuel's adoptive father: [Samuel's oldest brother] respected the privacy of the minor because he is the only one who told me [the adoptive father], "Give me your phone number, take my phone number, let us keep in touch" (…)

> Intermediary: the truth is also that Samuel's oldest brother asked me for Samuel's phone number. I, for example, do not have Samuel's phone number.

> Samuel's adoptive father: SHE does not have it!

> Intermediary: I do not have it because I am not interested in it. I have met them [Samuel and his family] because THEY [Samuel's adoptive parents] were searching for the native family.

> Samuel's adoptive father: this is the protection of the minor.

> Intermediary: it is not required [to have Samuel's phone number] … so I have never asked for it. Even the other day, when Samuel's oldest brother told me, "Give me his phone number", [I told him] he [Samuel] does not speak English, Kembatigna [Kambaata language], Amarigna [Amhara language]. How do they do this [communicate]?

> Samuel's adoptive father: how do you communicate? I told him [Samuel]

> Intermediary: I do not have Samuel's phone number; it is true, I do not have it (…) because eventually, every time I want to talk to him …

> Samuel's adoptive father: the protection of the minor comes first!

Intermediary: … they [Samuel's adoptive parents] are available to let me talk to him, eventually

Samuel's adoptive mother: why do they [native family members] need it? [Samuel's phone number]

[Intermediary, adoptive father and mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

This quotation shows the different points of view that Samuel's adoptive parents and the intermediary have concerning direct contact between Samuel and his family of origin.

Lidiya, the intermediary, does not discuss whether direct contact would be unsafe for Samuel. She underlines that she has access to Samuel through his adoptive parents and focuses mainly on the linguistic barrier between Samuel and his family of origin. On the contrary, Samuel's adoptive family frames this potential direct connection as an infringement of their duty to protect their son and implicitly claim their priority in the relationship with the adoptee. Samuel's adoptive parents' description of direct contact between Samuel and his native family members as unnecessary further emphasises this aspect.

In Samuel's case, his adoptive parents discouraged his direct contact with the native family members claiming it would be risky or impossible due to Samuel's protection priorities, privacy, legal requirements, and the linguistic barrier. Samuel's adoptive family insisted on the necessity of their mediation in communicating with Samuel's native family. This narrative reveals a vision of native family members as potentially risky for Samuel's best interest. However, this research allowed to observe that whilst Samuel and other adoptees have to negotiate communication with their adoptive families, several Ethio-descendant adoptees have direct and autonomous contact with their family of origin, regardless of their age. In such cases, adoptee-native family communication does not necessarily involve adoptive parents, as further explored in chapter Eight.

Adoptive parents also correlate the concept of privacy to the above-mentioned bureaucratic dimension. In this case, privacy is declined as maintaining secret the discrepancy between the information contained in the adoptive folders and other information disclosed by native families. Participants explained that pieces of evidence might comprise how adoptees came available for adoption, birth parents' medical or psychological history, and the influence of significant social and historical facts that took place in the country of origin, to name but a few.

According to adoptive parents, the emphasis on privacy may also protect the kinship relation from historical or relational facts concerning the child's adoption, such as illicit practices

connected to the adoption procedure. For instance, an adoptive mother explains her adopted child's history:

> The [biological] mother, being deceased, did not recognise the child. When her family was asked if they wanted to raise her, they refused and left her at the hospital. She remained in the hospital. Moreover, the [biological] mother never declared who the [biological] father was. As such, we have the mother's identity, but we do not know who the father is. However, Zenash [the adoptee] wanted to know. She asked us to know. We went to Adwa (…) because the children abandoned in the hospital were sent to the orphanage of the nuns of Mother Teresa. (…) This [event] happened when the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea was basically closed. So, there in Adwa, which was in proximity [of the border], there were many children abandoned at the orphanage. A lot. (…) We think many were offspring of soldiers (…) because there were [abandoned newborns] in huge numbers, way more than the average. [Adoptive mother, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

In this quotation, an adoptive mother reported her search for her adopted daughter's birth family. The adoptive mother found a highly possible correlation between the increase in the number of orphans (here including her adopted daughter) in the Central Zone of the Tigray Region in the early 2000s and the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. During that conflict, several sexual assaults and rapes were perpetrated against the local population residing near the border. As such, the adoptive parent finds a potential connection between local sexual assaults, the choice of the birth mother not to state the father's name at the hospital, and the refusal of the birth mother's family to recognise the child. As in this example, adoptive families may be aware of more detailed information or discrepancies concerning the pre-adoption procedure and the adoptee's story. In these cases, as illustrated by Leinaweaver, it might be argued that there is a correlation between "controversies or revelations about how children were acquired for inter-country adoption" and the "persistence of valuing of privacy about an adoptee's origins" (Leinaveawer, 2019, p. 9). Historical and relational facts associated with adoption are redirected to a dimension of privacy and intimacy in the making of belongingness to protect both the adoptive families' nuclear model and the adoptees' well-being. Therefore, adoptive families' choice to voluntarily keep out of the picture information perceived as distressing resonates with Bakuri et al.'s interpretation of secrecy or concealment as a "labour of love" (Bakuri et al., 2020, p. 407).

7.4 The native family and its community

Samuel's birth family: a full circle.

Samuel's native family, called his 'natural family' by Lidiya, comprises his father, mother, four brothers, and two sisters – not counting Samuel. His father is a pastor of the local protestant church. When Samuel was still with them, there were Samuel (who was the youngest among them), three brothers and the sisters, and no one was working. When the older brothers heard there was a chance to go into adoption abroad and have a better future, they wanted to go. However, they were too old, and no one would have adopted them. They insisted that their mother should agree to give Samuel into adoption. He was the youngest and, as such, the better suited to fit inter-country adoption's age standard. Eventually, given their condition of poverty, their father decided to proceed and take Samuel to the childcare institution. The family recalled that Samuel's youngest brother was born the day before the Ethiopian tribunal officialised Samuel's adoption, which was also the last day he met with his family and said goodbye for the last time. As translated by Lidiya:

> After giving Samuel into adoption, his native family's economic situation did not improve. They also considered giving Samuel's youngest brother into inter-country adoption. However, the three older brothers migrated to South Africa. Eventually, they started earning a living and managed to send the family some remittances. Meanwhile, Samuel's two sisters got married and moved in with their husbands. Thanks to the reduction of offspring to provide for in the house, and their sons' financial support, Samuel's parents partially recovered from their financial problems. They even managed to build a new, squared house made of dry mud, composed of a big room, a kitchen, a stable for the animals, and a toilet outside the building. [Interview with intermediary, native mother and father, December 2019, SNNPR]

During the interview, the native father said he was the person who decided to give Samuel into inter-country adoption and that he took that choice because they loved Samuel more than all their other children. They wanted that child they loved so much to become someone important. In the Global North, he thought, the child might become someone and help them in the future. As the native father recalls:

Why not send him abroad to live with *ferenji* (foreign, Global North people)? It means a better life, to get to a better position if compared to ours. [Native father, December 2019, SNNPR]

They decided to give Samuel into inter-country adoption because going abroad within a *ferenji* family and getting their citizenship was a chance to improve their son's condition. This choice would have enhanced their situation in the long run, when he would have come back to support the rest of the family. The native mother said she agreed with the father's choice in that circumstance. Separately, the intermediary made clear that she was under the impression that the native family had the expectation that Samuel would have returned and taken care of them. Indeed, one of the reasons they had to send him into inter-country adoption was to be economically supported by him once he had achieved a well-paid job and a consequent good economic situation. Nonetheless, the intermediary said that during the meeting with the adoptive family, the native family denied having such expectations.

Samuel's native family clarified that the childcare institution brokers explained the inter-country adoption process. The brokers told them that, once abroad, the child would have not just studied there. He would have also gained all the rights of the adoptive family as if he was their biological child and their same citizenship. Moreover, they were aware that their child would have legally become the adoptive parents' son. Brokers did not tell them that the child would have come back to live in Ethiopia with them. However, they said they did not have that expectation. They hoped that Samuel would have had the chance to study and benefit from all the advantages of foreign citizenship.

Nevertheless, in their interpretation, these topics are not mutually excluding. During the interview, Samuel's parents used the Afaan Oromo term *guddifaachaa* to name the inter-country adoption and explained that they expected the adoptive family to bring up (*masadeg*) their child. The adoptive family would have legally made Samuel their son. They would have raised him. They would also have made sure that Samuel went back to Ethiopia to visit or stay, even though the native family would not have any right over the child. Indeed, Samuel's biological parents thought Samuel would have supported them. As Samuel's birth parents explain:

Because, in any case, he [Samuel] is the son, no? I mean, he is our son. He is doing well because he became the son of *ferenji* or, in any case, the son of wealthy persons, then they can take care of the other siblings who live here. Given that *ferenji* are a wealthy family, in any case, no matter the [social]

position they hold. (…) After he turns 18, when he has his autonomy and will have his life and income, maybe, when he starts working, he will help the family. Not the adoptive family, but HIM! HE will, after turning 18. He studies, gets a job, and helps the [birth] family. That is our expectation. (…) When the child turns 18, the adoptive family will take him to his natural family. Then they will leave him the choice to decide whether he wants to still be Ethiopian or take the other citizenship. That is a decision that the child will make. (…) The adoptive family will take him back here, in any case. [Native father, December 2019, SNNPR]

Samuel's native family said that they were desperate after having him adopted abroad because they expected to receive some news about their son. Instead, they never received any. They went to the orphanage asking for information, but they could not get any news about him. They did not even know where Samuel was, as they thought he was being adopted in the United States. The native mother recalled that she cried a lot, together with other native mothers who gave their children into adoption and had no news. As the birth parents recall:

We were all really desperate. [Native father and mother, December 2019, SNNPR]

They did not get any information until the intermediary, Lidiya, visited their house on behalf of Samuel's adoptive family, looking for them. From Lidiya, they discovered that Samuel was alive, doing well, and happy. The native family considered being found by Lidiya great luck because they finally received information about their son. They described Lidiya as capable of working as a bridge between them, their son, and his adoptive family. Thanks to her presence, now they could be in contact with him and his Italian family. The natural parents added that they were sure that he would have come back to visit one day. They knew he would have returned to them because they never forgot him. However, at the time of the interview, what mattered to them was to know that he was well and very loved by his adoptive family. As the birth father explains on behalf of his family:

Now, I feel like Samuel is still with me because I know that this (adoptive) family is giving all the love and affection to Samuel, and this is the feeling I had. It was really lovely for us. Even if we need help, we know that his family invested a lot and is investing a lot in our son; for us, this is important to know. So, we do not ask him to help us or give us because they are already

giving a lot. They give him all the affection that a parent could give to a son. To us, this is a big thing. Then, we also saw this family who really, really loves our son. Because of that, we feel very close even though he is far because we have seen how he is well treated. [Native father, December 2019, SNNPR]

Samuel's Ethiopian community: a quest for 'connection'.

Several families in the Kembata Tembaro and Hadiya zones in the Ethiopian Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region gave their children into inter-country adoption through the childcare institution where Samuel was. Together with the native family of Samuel, other 'natural' parents who were part of their community – in terms of proximity or relations – decided to give their children into adoption. All the subjects involved in this story underlined this aspect. Conversely, during the research it emerged that different native families' understanding of the procedure were not always the same. In some cases, the child's relocation to a foreign family was considered a form of fictive kinship relatable to *yeguddifaachaa lij*. In other cases, the child's presence in the adoptive family was relatable to *yemadego lij* (see Annex D). Even though they had a different understanding of the practice, there were similar expectations. All the native families believed they would have kept some contact with their child or the adoptive family after the conclusion of the adoption process. They expected updates on the child's condition, information about potential economic support, and have the child return to Ethiopia sooner or later, in a temporary or permanent form. Lidiya, who mediated other reconnections in the area, reported that, unlike Samuels' native family, other families were getting the PARs of their children from the director of the childcare institution. The director received PARs from the adoption agencies and then redistributed them to the native families. However, the native families reported that the procedure was not consistent with all of them. For instance, Samuel's birth family never received anything in ten years.

As for the relationship between Samuel's adoptive family and the community of his birth family, during their stay in the Kembata Tembaro zone, they had to deal with other birth parents coming to ask for information about their children adopted abroad. Many other native parents of children who left with Samuel came to ask his adoptive parents if they knew anything about their children. In a few cases, they just asked for information. In many others, they also expressed the desire to get in contact with their children adopted abroad. The family felt uneasy about this situation because they did not want to share any information without

the consent of other adoptive parents. They tried to disincentivise native family members who came to them for linguistic and cultural support to reach the children adopted abroad. One of the requests they faced was to provide help by calling phone numbers found on PARs documentation – i.e., the phone number of a doctor on a medical record. As Samuel's adoptive father and mother recalled:

> Samuel's adoptive father: for instance, we [adoptive parents] have to attach also medical records, and there was a boy who wanted news about his brother. He had the medical record, and he found the phone number.
>
> Samuel's adoptive mother: he wanted us to call the doctor (she smiles)
>
> Samuel's adoptive father: but I told him, listen, this phone number is the phone number of the doctor, do not call this number, you call the doctor. Apart from the fact that he could not tell you anything, I mean, do not call him, this is the doctor's phone number, this is a medical record, ok? It makes you understand that the boy is well. Nevertheless, you, you must not call it, do not call it.
>
> [Adoptive father and mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

In this situation, Samuel's adoptive parents insistently advised the native brother against making that call. However, they were willing to provide compendious information to other native parents who came with pictures of their children and asked for news without requesting any support for contacts – where the child was living, that she was well, grew up, played volleyball. Their goal was to relieve the concerns of the native parents without jeopardising other adoptive parents' positions. In some cases, the adoptive parents were shocked by the intensity of some native relatives' reactions. For instance, a native mother kneeled and kissed their feet as a sign of gratitude when she heard the news about her daughter.

To further explain their firm position about not supporting contacts amongst native and adoptive families, the adoptive parents of Samuel added that not all the adoptive families are at ease with Samuel's adoptive parents' choice of reconnection. The proof is that no one contacted them when they made it clear on social media that they were going to visit Ethiopia. They explained they have never talked with other adoptive families about their trip, but they are in contact via social media with at least four or five parents who adopted in the same area. Samuel's adoptive parents did not make their travel to Ethiopia a secret on their social media.

They concluded that if other adoptive parents were interested, someone would have contacted them.

These meetings with Samuel and others' native families also raised some perplexities concerning the PARs they should send annually. Adoption agencies demand that adoptive families do not write phone numbers, addresses, or other personal details within those documents. As such, the narrative of their adoption agency promotes a clean-cut, forbidding any contact between adoptive and native families[72]. The adoptive mother explained that the adoption agency warned of potential extortion from the birth family. They recalled the experience of another adoptive mother who wanted to search for the native family of his Ethio-descendant son. She decided first to contact the adoption agency for further support, which refused to support her search and opposed her choice.

Furthermore, Samuel's adoptive parents disclosed that during their search for his native family, they discovered the "biological parent's right to know about their child". As Samuel's adoptive father recalls:

> [If they want] To get a piece of news, they [the native families] do not know what to do and where to go, even though, unfortunately, it is in their right to know it because it is [written] in the adoptive contract from Ethiopia that the parental tie will never cease. However, the adoption agencies demand to prepare synthetic inflexible PARs. [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Considering the relationship between the intermediary Lidiya and the community, she faced different challenging situations because of her intermediation role. An example is the case of Gabriel. Gabriel is a native father trying to find information about his boy adopted abroad, Abebe. Gabriel is a member of Samuel's native family community. When he found out that Samuel's adoptive family contacted them, he approached the intermediary and the adoptive family, asking whether they knew his son, Abebe. The adoptive family disclosed they knew the Italian parents of Abebe, and the intermediary told Gabriel that Abebe was a friend of Samuel. As explained by the intermediary:

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[72] The fact that usually the inter-country adoption system tends to maintain the separation between native and adoptive families has also been documented by other studies (Smolin 2007, Bhabha 2004).

He [Gabriel] is also the father of a child who has been adopted. They [Samuel's adoptive family] know his boy because he is a friend of Samuel, and they were at the same time in the same place [the orphanage]. That [adoptive] family is not interested yet, but he [the native father] is very anxious. He calls me all the time. I also do not know what to do because I feel sorry for him. [Intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

Because of Lidiya's intermediation, Gabriel did not have direct access to Samuel's adoptive parents. However, he kept contacting Lidiya. On her behalf, the intermediary tried to reach Abebe, but she failed because she did not receive the support of Samuel's adoptive family. Lidiya is exhausted by the requests of Gabriel, the repeated refusal of Abebe's adoptive family to get in contact with him, and Samuel's adoptive father's denial to share their experience of reconnection with Abebe's adoptive family. After the interviews in the Kembata Tembaro zone, Lidiya decided to try a different communicative channel to reach Abebe. She let Gabriel tell his story in a WhatsApp video sent to Samuel from his native parents. Lidiya then asked Gabriel to stand between Samuel's biological mother and father and sends a video where Gabriel has the chance to talk to Samuel and Abebe through her mediation. The intermediary introduces Gabriel, Abebe's birth father, and translates what Gabriel says from Amhara and Kambaata languages. Lidiya first introduces Gabriel and briefly explains why he is included in the video[73]:

This person in the middle is the father of Abebe, Gabriel, who is really praying to receive news from Abebe, if possible. He prays you to let him know, at least, how he is doing and if you know anything of Abebe (…). They [the native mother and father of Samuel] thank [Samuel] to have let me [the intermediary] give the news about Abebe, even though, at this moment Abebe does not know that his father is looking for him. He [Gabriel] would really love to know about him, how is he doing … however, if you have the chance, he prays you to contact Abebe and his family and let him have his news (…) [Extract of an audio message of an intermediary to an adoptee, December 2019, SNNPR]

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[73] This excerpt and the following quotes of audio and audio-video material are part of the communication that occurred during participant observation. The researcher has been authorised to collect and use such material to the extent of this research.

Afterwards, Lidiya makes a direct translation of Gabriel's words, which straightforwardly addresses his birth son Abebe:

> Direct translation: You came [in Ethiopia], Samuel, and gave this joy to all the village and your family. I am your father, Abebe. Even if your mother is not here anymore, there are many relatives here who want to know how you are doing, and we ask, we ask you, we pray you, Samuel, if there is any chance to tell your parents to contact Abebe's parents (…) (showing a picture of Abebe and him) Look! When you were a child, Abebe, we took this picture together. Today, Abebe, I brought it to say that you are still inside me, and I pray you [Samuel and adoptive family] to send me any news of my son. [Excerpt of an audio message of a native father to an adoptee with the linguistic intermediation of the intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

In this last example, the involvement of Samuel and his native family becomes evident. Indeed, the native family of Samuel is the first to reconnect in their community. As such, other native parents or family members who are interested in finding their children adopted abroad approach them with the intention of both reconnecting or collecting news. In practice, the native parents of Samuel react with openness to following suggestions that may improve the chance of their community members to get in contact with their children adopted abroad. Moreover, they allow them to access their own 'communication space', or connection to the Global North. They did that with the call to their son Samuel and their availability to let other native family members enter the physical space of their home or property to approach Samuel's adoptive parents. Their accessibility seemed linked to relational and social obligations between community members. However, there was no precise positioning concerning this aspect.

Samuel's native family looks voluntarily embedded in a reciprocal obligation and support mechanism. Conversely, Samuel's involvement happens without consent from him or his adoptive parents. His involvement is due to the native parents' agreement and Lidiya's assumption that, as a reconnected adoptee, Samuel might agree to share the video and his story with Abebe. As such, Samuel is also involved in the native community's practices of reconnection, as it happened with the Ethio-descendant boy that he contacted in the first place to know more about his trip to Ethiopia. However, there is a significant difference between the two situations: Samuel is eager to know more about the other boy's experience of reconnection; conversely, Abebe is unaware of what is happening. In this case, adoptees

returnees' interconnections are considered a way to strategically differentiate options to reconnect adoptees to their native family members, thanks to community obligations, proximity, and relations.

The right to contact adoptees and adoptive families

From Samuel's community's story, a crucial point emerged about native relatives' rights to contact adoptive families and adoptees. During the research, participants shared diverging points of view on this topic. Two different opinions emerge from this discussion, and they are both rooted in a different interpretation of what relation represents the focal point of this practice.

The first interpretation puts the child-adoptive parents' relationship at the centre. The focus is on the child's needs and recovery. The will of the adoptive parents is considered the most appropriate to protect the child's interests. Child interests are framed in terms of individual rights. Generally, they refer to UNICEF guidelines (1989): the right to play, to live in a safe and loving environment, to choose, and to receive an appropriate education. There is the right to know more about the biological family and choose which kind of relationship to establish with them. The adoptive parents are depicted as subjects who gave their complete availability in welcoming the child, a stranger, and make her part of their family with unconditioned love. Their gesture is described as a sign of altruistic benevolence.

The second interpretation, given by most of the Ethiopian participants, puts the child-biological parents' relation at the centre. The focus is on the child's native family and social integration. Native families' will of reconnection is described as a 'natural' parents' right, the result of personal or economic growth, and the consequence of the desire to give the child a sense of completeness and belongingness. Child interests are framed as relational rights and refer to belongingness, integration, and self-identification.

In this double interpretation, intermediaries play ambiguous roles and try to understand and represent both interests. For instance, in Samuel's reconnection story, Lidiya seconds the adoptive parents' interpretation but does not dismiss native families' requests. The story shows that the primacy of the adoptive parents in the triad adoptive parent – adoptee – native parent has been incorporated into intermediaries' approach to reconnection.

Apart from Lidiya, almost all the intermediaries involved in the research argued that they tend to refuse requests of search from native families and adoptees who are minors and do not have received their adoptive parents' support or consensus.

As Samuel's story shows, several techniques utilised to connect adoptive families and native families also mirror adoptive families' preferences. Indeed, when intermediaries search for native families on behalf of adoptees and adoptive families, they often use the snowball technique, or word of mouth, to contact more native families through other families who have already reconnected. According to participants, adoptive families usually apply this method. Therefore, such tactics are relatively easy to activate and reproduce in searching for families of origin. In Ethiopia, adoption agencies worked with specific childcare institutions outside Addis Ababa. Those childcare institutions operated in specific geographical areas and were the point of reference for the local population. Therefore, this link between place and kinship is beneficial for intermediaries when they have to find native families through contacts related to reconnections cases they have already solved. However, as in Samuel's story, native families as a resource to support adoptive families and adoptees in their search of origin are hardly exploited in its transitive property. In fact, during the research, three intermediaries faced an impasse condition. Native families asked them to look for their children adopted abroad, but intermediaries do not want to stress or burden adoptive families. In these cases, intermediaries clearly explained that chances of reconnection entirely depend on adoptive families' interest in it.

Adoptees' peer-communication in post-adoption

Another aspect that emerged from Samuel's story is that, in this context, adoptees demonstrated availability to communicate with each other about origins and native families. This has been used as a channel to circumnavigate adoptive families' veto and negotiate native families' access to children adopted abroad. In the case of Gabriel – the native father trying to contact his child adopted abroad – Lidiya's knowledge suggests that adoptees are more available to share their own experiences with their peers. Indeed, some of the adoptees she supported in reconnection contacted her thanks to peers' communication. When Lidiya sent the audio-video to Samuel's phone number, the intermediary used the existing relation and direct connection with Samuel, and its connections to Abebe, to try to reach him. The intermediary discussed her idea of contacting Abebe with Samuel's native parents. They agreed to 'host' Gabriel in their direct contact with Samuel and renounce a part of their time

and communication in his favour. By doing this, the intermediary circumvented the communicative channel of the adoptive parents. However, the hierarchical relationship amongst subjects persists, and even in direct communication with the adoptee, adoptive parents are prioritised, along with their decisional parental rights. This aspect is evident in Lidiya's choice of wording for Gabriel's request and Gabriel's overall communication. Indeed, the intermediary did not dismiss the adoptive parents' decisional role.

On the contrary, Lidiya decided to reinforce it by talking to them and recognising them a role of mediation and decisional power concerning the contents of the statement, even though the message was sent directly to Samuel.

According to participants, adoptive parents' shielding trend opposes adoptees' attitudes, who seem more inclined to share their experiences with their peers. Conversely, reconnected adoptees' descriptions emphasise their willingness to support other adoptees searching for native families. Interviews highlighted that peer communication amongst adoptees included talking about the emotional well-being derived from visiting the country of origin and collecting more information about their adoptive stories.

Native families who (circum)navigate adoptive families' refusal

Samuel's story also makes evident that adoptive families may consider strategies intended to bypass organisations – in their case, adoption agencies and childcare institutions – that do not agree with their desires of reconnection. Conversely, families of origin have reduced options. Empirical data from this study confirmed this tendency. Participants pointed out that native families often are in conditions of chronic poverty, and they lack economic instruments, accessibility on a logistic and bureaucratic level, informatics skills and literacy to manage contacts in international contexts. This general deficiency of access and skills negatively impacts their chances of contacting adoptees and adoptive families. As in the case of the communication from Gabriel to Samuel through the mediation of Lidiya, native families may also become aware of adoptive parents' shielding tactic and consequently plan and act towards the reconnection process. In these cases, the adoptive parents' priority and rights are acknowledged and considered. However, a reaction of refusal to connect or recognise native families' existence by ignoring them may activate, when possible, alternative strategies that do not intend to overstep adoptive families' parental rights but identify some communication.

Something similar to Gabriel's experience happened to a native uncle looking for contact with her niece adopted abroad. This Ethiopian uncle found her niece and her adoptive family members on Facebook. Her uncle is also a public relations specialist of an Ethiopian association that runs a childcare institution and was involved in inter-country adoption in the past. A relevant part of his work focuses on supporting adoptees and adoptive families coming to the organisation to look for their native families. When he decided to start the search for her niece adopted abroad, the uncle possessed both the access and the competencies to start and positively end his search. When the time to make the first contact came, the uncle was aware of adoptive families' preferences, and he intended to inform them that he respected their parental rights. His communicative choice was to contact the adoptive mother by message. Aware of the potential linguistic barrier, he translated his message into her mother tongue. The following quotation is the introductory message that the participant sent to his adoptees' adoptive mother[74]:

> Hello [name and surname of the adoptive mother]. I hope you are fine, how is your family? I hope everyone is in good health. My name is [birth uncle's name]. I write you because of your daughter. I have found your account on Facebook through research. I thought you might be her mum. If this is the case, I will tell you more about me. I would be grateful if you could confirm whether [adoptee's name] is your daughter or not. One more time, I thank you very much for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon. God blesses you and your family. [Extract from a written communication on social media from a native uncle to an adoptive mother, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

The uncle intended to express his interest in contacting his niece without looking alarming or threatening with this message. He did not refer to himself as a native family member; he did not mention Ethiopia or inter-country adoption. From his perspective, he wrote an extremely polite and respectful message. However, the adoptive mother saw his message but did not get back to him. After two weeks with no response, he interpreted the lack of answer from the mother as a refusal to start a communication. He felt disrespected and dismissed in his role as a native family member and only then decided to direct a message to his niece. His niece answered almost immediately, and they started an exchange of messages. However, even in this case, the uncle decided to mention to her that he contacted her adoptive mother first.

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[74] The participant offered access to this written communication.

During the interview, the uncle recounted his niece asking her mother about that message, and the mother told her she did not see the message. The uncle felt very disappointed by this answer. Even though he decided not to mention to the niece that the mother visualised his message, the feelings of rejection and nonrecognition that this event provoked impacted his relationship of trust and reciprocal recognition with the adoptive family.

As presented in the next chapter, intermediaries play another fundamental role in the post reconnection stage. Indeed, native families are often accompanied and restrained in their communication and access to the adoptive family members. This dynamic reconfirms unbalanced relations amongst parties and shows again the discrepancies that arise when different kinship regimes meet in inter-country adoption.

7.5 Conclusion: divergent expectations and contentious narratives

Chapter Seven aimed to continue the exploration of the notion of circular narrative when applied to international mobility and fictive kinship. It recounted the adoption of Samuel, an Italian 16-year-old Ethio-descendant adoptee. It intended to retrace his adoption story from the origin of the native family's decision to give him into adoption until the post-reconnection phase. Whilst chapter Six focuses exclusively on native families and their strategies to contact adoptees and adoptive families, this polyphonic account intends to show what happens when families succeed and manage to reunite. The chapter builds over significant analytical considerations and investigates adoptees' and adoptive families' challenges in visiting Ethiopia and meeting the families of origin through the case study of Samuel. This first-hand experience of the actors involved offers the chance to ponder from a (post)colonial feminist perspective the cross-cultural dynamics that inter-country adoption activates.

A major topic that emerged from the reconnection process concerns the truth(s) behind the native family's choice of adoption. This part investigated the documented, written truth; the native family's oral truth; and their hierarchical order in producing a universal narrative on adoption. The analysis then explores adoptees' challenges in merging the information they possess to create a coherent, shared version of their adoption story.

For what concerns adoptive parents, the face-to-face presence of native families offered an in-depth revisitation of their notion of privacy, which is declined in terms of secrecy and

concealment. Overall, the research underlined that the adoptive family activates shielding tactics to protect other adoptive families' nuclear model and their fictive kinship relationship from potentially disrupting external factors, such as the families of origin.

Until this chapter, this study approached Ethio-descendant adoptees and adoptive families as marginal subjects. That is related to the epistemological choice of the research, namely to invert mainstream power representations and the dynamic between peripheral and central knowledges. As already mentioned, this research aims to recentre specific socio-cultural and geographical Global South narratives and decentralise actors' subjectivities. This study argues that marginality might be addressed in its political and cultural form as a counter-discourse intended to disrupt dominant narratives and therefore takes place in physical spaces located and perceived as marginal from a Global North perspective. As shown in the story of Samuel, this choice does not stop with selecting subjects and researching spaces within the Global South geographical context. It also delimits the – permanent or temporary – geographic location of the participants involved in the study within those peripheral geographies where the described experiences occur. Marginality becomes a living experience that shapes and impacts participants' thoughts and practical experiences. Remote areas of the Ethiopian countryside become significant and central elements for those who navigate Ethiopian spaces and kinships as extraordinary, namely adoptive families and adoptees. As the story of Samuel shows, the 'concreteness' of the adoptive family is absent in the preliminary construction of kinship mobility and invisible to the eyes of the Ethiopian subjects. The features that made them potential assets in a project of kinship mobility are mainly related to their properties as *ferenji*.

Nonetheless, adoptive parents regain their active and relational role during the inter-country adoption reconnection. They are central elements to reinforce or deny contact between native families and their children adopted abroad. Together with their – geographically and emotionally situated – discourse, adoptive parents have a crucial role in contributing to the circularity of the adoptive process or disrupting it.

As the story of Samuel displays, in this inversion of marginal and central knowledges, adoptive families and Ethio-descendant adoptees find themselves navigating geographies of relatedness or, as Nash defined them, "particular ideas of 'place of origins'" (Nash, 2005, p. 460). The reconnection process represents the metaphorical territory where participants' geographical and positioned "particular ideas" on kinship mobility impact. This encounter may give life to

new understandings resulting from a reciprocal influence or, vice versa, show rigidity and interrupt the dialogic relation amongst parties.

Within this (post)colonial feminist theoretical framework, the main aspects that this chapter intended to investigate concern how inter-country belongingness is re-produced and protected in kinship and (post)colonial mobility. Hence, it explored this phenomenon through the bureaucratic, geographical, and reproductive dimensions. It then focused on reflections concerning adoptive parents' and adoptees' positionality, or intersectionality, and the need to reflect on their shifting positioning in the reconnection process. It emphasised Samuel and his adoptive parents' viewpoint concerning their adoptive experience and how they re-elaborated it from the Ethiopian socio-cultural and geographical context. In particular, it explored the concept of privacy and its different meanings. Lastly, it focused on the disparities regarding access to information and reconnection. It explored those situations where adoptive families are reticent to support other native families' search for their children adopted abroad. In particular, it tackled the intermediaries' role in limiting or interceding for the families of origin. It emerged that adoptees are considered more willing to share their experiences of reconnection than adoptive parents. Intermediaries or adoptees' native families might involve them in helping other families of origin reach their children adopted abroad when adoptive parents are not inclined to help. Furthermore, it highlighted native families might detect adoptive parents' reluctance to be contacted and find alternative ways to reach adoptees.

The adoptive story of Samuel makes evident the paradox adoptive parents have to face once in Ethiopia. On the one hand, as *ferenji*, they hold one of the (post)colonial, ethnocentric powers of the Global North: the – at least apparent – ownership of the main narrative, perceived as the dominant and indisputable system of knowledge and truths. On the other hand, they have to face 'facts' and pieces of evidence of dynamics unexpectedly dissimilar from the version they considered unique and definitive.

For instance, when Samuel arrived in Italy, he repeatedly referred to a family he must return to support. However, his knowledge and memories about his pre-adoption living experience were dismissed by the family history the adopters built upon the information they possessed and were able to verify according to the 'bureaucratic truth' they could access. The dynamic of separation that Samuel experienced, together with its complexities and challenging interpretations, was reduced to a category, poverty, which was not further investigated. This category was highlighted for its indefiniteness also by Samuel's adoptive mother. As she recalled, "in the documents, it was written 'because of poverty', which means everything and

nothing". Nonetheless, a child abandoned because of poverty leaves open the narrative space for different events' reconstructions.

In this context, the paternalistic interpretation of abandonment as the last act of love works well with the market-oriented understanding of native families' relationship with the child, emphasising a multi-dimensional interruption of ties between the birth family and the adoptee. From a Global North perspective, the conjunction of these interpretative models of inter-country adoption adheres to the production of a universal, unique truth of adoptive filiation.

According to Samuel's adoptive parents, the reconnection trip was an attempt to anchor specific family historical events to the past and confirm the adoptive parents' filiation truth. Instead, it unexpectedly threatened the legitimacy of the adopters' story, gave new credibility to Samuel's experience, introduced new elements, and forced the whole family to rediscuss the circumstances of Samuel's adoption. This reversion of the main narrative challenges Samuel's adoptive family's documented (hence reassuring) perspective on the matter. For instance, Samuel's adoptive mother experienced ambivalent feelings when she "touched by hand" unexpected gender-related power dynamics between Samuel's native mother and father and witnessed expressions of affection between Samuel and his biological mother. This troubled her perspective and her perception of parental legitimacy. As Samuel's adoptive mother recalls:

> To me it was, it was … I was crying when I left, because I, I hugged his mum, I wanted to …I told her, I do not know if she understood that we, I really love him, I told her, "I love your son as if I gave birth to him, and I thank you because … thank you I could become a mum", and I felt like I was taking him away from her again (she starts crying), I felt … if I think about it again, when we left … I felt like I was taking him away from her again, from his mother! Because it was clear this mum would have never given him [into adoption] has she not been forced (she cries). [Adoptive mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The legitimacy of Samuel's adoption story, based on the bureaucratic truth that led Samuel's native parents to abandon him – poverty – is confronted with Ethiopian narratives and dynamics that remained marginal until now. Samuel's adoptive mother's representation of their adoptive history loses validity in her eyes and forces her to renegotiate her 'rescue' narrative. Her experiences and knowledges regarding adoption are rediscussed in the light of

her physical standing point, in the Kembata Tembaro zone, within a specific socio-cultural, economic, and geographical context.

Chapter 8. "Now we are family": stories of transnational relationships, belongingness, and mobility

8.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses what happens in the post-adoption stage after the reconnection. Chapter Six describes and analyses the events in the timespan between the conclusion of the adoptive process and the reconnection of the adoptive triad. Chapter Seven presents a whole story of adoption. The participants, met in person in Addis Ababa and Kembata Tembaro zone, demonstrate that the reconnection generate unbalances of existing bonds and potential recreation of precedent ones. Such dynamics resonate onto the following and last stage, post-reconnection, which is the focus of this chapter.

Chapter Eight focuses on the stage after the reconnection, when a first contact has been established. During this phase, native families are mainly oriented toward establishing relations of geographical or relational proximity. These take the shape of more tangible requests, actions, and interpretations of kin relations and family ties. The chapter tackles these aspects in four sections. The first section addresses native families' thoughts, expectations and actions afterwards reconnection. The second section analyses the adoptees' perspective concerning the relationship with their international, geographically distant extended families. Adoptees' relationship with their large and diversified family is explored in terms of family reconfiguration, negotiation of contacts and mobility.

The third section deals with the management of interactions between adoptive and native families. It confronts issues related to mutual support and disparities amongst family members; moreover, it questions the matter of exclusivity and inclusiveness in fictive kinship relationships. The last and fourth section addresses priorities and boundaries in the post reconnection stage. This section builds upon the theories of power unbalance developed by (post)colonial and (post)colonial feminist scholars approaching inter-country adoption. Furthermore, it explores the interaction between belongingness, power and (post)coloniality.

Additionally, this chapter considers data collected during Samuel's post-reconnection stage, particularly during the first four months afterwards the reconnection in Ethiopia. This information is analysed to point out individual and collective strategies to manage interpretational divergences and means to negotiate and maintain the relational bond.

8.2 Native families' expectations in the post-reconnection stage

Before addressing this topic, it is worth remembering that this research has a twofold intent.

The first is to explore adoption from Ethiopia as a circular process. Inter-country adoption tends to be seen as a fictive kinship practice that envisages a 'linear' evolution where the adoptee goes through the stages of the native parent – abandonment – adoption – adoptive parent(s). Instead, this study intends to consider adoption as a life-long journey for all the three 'subjects' involved in the process: the adoptee, her native family, and her adoptive family. The particular focus on native families aims to underline that, from their perspective, the child's absence does not correspond to the end of their family bond; rather, it is seen as a pause between a time before and after the child transfer. The second intent is to show the discrepancies between the Global North and the Ethiopian understanding(s) of inter-country adoption.

This thesis aims to point out, chapter after chapter, the different interpretations of key moments in the adoption process and the relevance of each step in shaping post-adoption expectations and relations. There is a sharp opposition between the sequences of disconnection stages envisaged from a Global North perspective (abandonment and clean break) and the relational connections expected in Ethiopia (separation and production of new relational and family ties). Therefore, post-adoption is also differently interpreted and planned regarding future kin outcomes.

Within this framework, the following section intends to underline the point of view of native families and their expectations concerning child belongingness, contacts and presence.

A child that belongs to both families: international extended kin networks

Post-adoption relations are substantially different from the ones preceding the moment of reconnection. The new kinship tie between the adoptee, the native, and the adoptive family is evolving and unprecedent. For what concerns native families, it is crucial to consider in the first place how they navigate this new stage, what they experience after reconnections take place. During an in-depth interview, a native father reconnected to his adopted son explicated his interpretation of the current kin ties existing between the adoptee's native and adoptive family. For example:

We [family of origin] absolutely consider them [the adoptive family] part of our family, no matter what. In fact (…) they are maybe the family members that we feel more as part of our family because our son is with them. Because he, our son, is with them. He is family, and automatically, they are family as well. [Native father, December 2019, SNNPR]

In his explanation, the native father of Samuel compares the relationship with other Ethiopian relatives to the one with Samuel's adoptive parents. As clarified by his words, the simple, material fact that the adoptive parents are the caregivers of his biological son is sufficient to consider them members of his social kinship ties. All the families of origin interviewed for this research shared this interpretation of the post-reconnection ties with the adoptive family, and intermediaries confirmed their understanding. This interpretation of social ties is further explained by this other native family, composed of two uncles of a girl adopted in Italy at the age of 3. In this case, the younger and the older uncle have different points of view on the matter. The younger uncle believes there is some connection between their niece's adoptive family and them because they all care about the girl. However, he is not entirely convinced that the adoptive family might be considered part of their family as well. Conversely, the older uncle's idea is "100% different", as the younger uncle underlines, because he considers their niece's adoptive family part of their extended family. Their different opinion encourages the younger uncle to further explain the notion of the extended family in an in-depth interview. For example:

Younger native uncle: He [the older birth uncle] considers them [the adoptive family] part of our extended family. Have you got me? Do you know the extended family? So, he considers them as we have other family [members] in Italy. (…) Because that [adoptee] is our child. We say in our culture, [if] she is your niece or what [other vertical kin relation], we say "our child". Ok? Not your child, her child, we say our child! It is a kind of collectivism (…) So they, you know, they assist, they HELP our child. And our child grew up there. So, we consider them as our family. (…) He [the older uncle] told me that the child is theirs. (…) She is ours, as well. (…) If your sister has a baby, she is hers, isn't it? (…) That child is yours, as well. Not only hers. (…) according to our culture, the child is hers and also mine. (…)

Researcher: even if the other family is made of strangers?

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Younger native uncle: yes!

[Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

In his explanation, the younger uncle introduces the concept of "collectivism". Collectivism has been approached by scholars of different domains – psychology, sociology and anthropology. Usually, it is represented in opposition to individualism. The anthropologist Geert Hofstede (1980) described the duality of individualism-collectivism as the tendency to focus on the individual rather than on gregariousness and group orientation. Individualism and collectivism are not intended as unidimensional constructs but rather as inclinations suitable to understand whether the relation centres more on the group or the self within society. As mentioned in the explanation of the young uncle, collectivism envisages social obligations, belongingness, and mutual aid. Those features characterise a collectivist-based reproduction system that applies to extended kin networks. His explanation resonates with notions of family collectives, horizontal and vertical interdependence explored in chapter Four in terms of mutual support and intergenerational relations.

However, it also resonates with the idea of circular kin interdependence. As argued by Abebe on the notion of interdependent agency during childhood, "the interdependent relations between children, families and communities are dynamic and evolve with time" (Abebe, 2019, p. 11). The participant applies the concept of collectivism to the bond that emerges during the post-adoption stage. This understanding highlights a mindset based on inclusiveness that profoundly differs from the attitude of exclusivity that characterises the 'international' discourse on inter-country adoption. As explained by the young uncle, their niece is a member of her adoptive family who has legal rights. However, this 'fact' does not imply the absence of social and family ties with the native family. The separation and legal re-assignment of the child to another family group do not mean the end of the relation of belongingness with the native family, nor the restriction of the kin ties to the adoptive family unit. To all the Ethiopian families involved in the research, the termination of parental rights is not conceptually conflicting with a potential re/connection. Rather, it epitomises the coexistence of different features in their conceptualisation of family ties, family networks, and interdependence. Features that are instead seen as unable to coexist in the Global North main narrative concerning inter-country adoption. On the contrary, the Ethiopian interpretation reinforces the role of the child within family groups in creating and strengthening new family ties and networks.

Relations and responsibilities: intercontinental contacts within international extended families

The quality and consistency of relations are pivotal to the making – or remaking – of relatedness. Native families expect adoptive families and adoptees to retain social and family ties. Persistence in contacts represents a crucial criterion for this purpose. "What matters in social life is to have close contact", an Ethiopian admin of a childcare institution explained during an interview. This contact may differ in substance according to the context of the fictive kinship tie. Regardless, it is vital for the re-production of social relations. During an in-depth interview, an Ethiopian participant who worked in the inter-country adoption sector and currently manages post-adoption native families' support and reconnections compared the extended local and *ferenji* family configuration to explain at length this concept. For example:

> If that [international extended] family has created a close contact, a close relationship, not only physical but also through electronic or other means; if they [the native and adoptive family] keep on contacting each other, exchanging whatsoever feeling or material, whatsoever; if they have such relationship, they feel they are family. Even if you do not have any legal recognition of your relation in Ethiopia, or that such ties [exist] through *guddifaachaa* or anything, if you keep a very strong relationship and support each other, they (the native family) consider you [adoptive family] part of that family. So, the relation matters. Even in the family, the [Ethiopian] extended family (…), there is an expected relation, a responsibility to each other if we belong to one family. If I fail to play my role (…), that family may exclude me. Even though I biologically belong to that family, they can exclude me to that extent. But, if I maintain my relation and responsibility (…), I continue to belong to that family. So, what most matters is the relation.
> [Residential childcare institution director, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

In this quotation, the participant refers to maintaining relations and responsibilities as a crucial step to sustaining any family network.

During the fieldwork, several examples of actions and expectations arose as essential aspects to substantiate the relation of an extended family composed of Ethiopians and *ferenji* members. In-depth interviews with native families corroborate this view of international extended family networks. For instance, this native relative explains his expectation regarding

the international members of his extended family by juxtaposing his canonical idea of family members' interpersonal relations:

> When you have a family, what do you expect from the family? Maybe you expect the family to call you, that the family sometimes emails you. That is what family [does]; what he and I even do. (…) Visiting each other, calling each other, keeping in touch and staying with them (…). So, we expect them to visit each other, ok? [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

In the case of this reconnection story, when the interview took place, the adoptee and adoptive family did not intend to visit Ethiopia anytime soon. However, social media allowed the native family to reach them and, to cite a previous quote, have a regular exchange of materials and feelings – pictures, native family history and anecdotes, expectations, and greetings. Because of their ongoing communication on social media, this native family considers their relationship with the adoptee re-established. Despite the adoptive family's unwillingness to meet in person, this birth family considers the relationship with the adopted niece strong enough to ask her to come and visit. These uncles long for that moment and they hope they will soon reunite with the adoptee in Ethiopia, as is better explored in the following sections.

As summed up in a previous quotation, the practice of "exchanging whatsoever feelings or material" emerged for its relevance. Interviews, participant observation and first-hand data collection during the fieldwork underlined that information exchange includes messages, pictures, video calls, audio-video messages, and family group audio-video messages. In this section, the study focuses on three main contact practices that were mentioned and enacted during participant observation in post-reconnection, namely direct audio-video calls, deferred audio-video calls, and visits.

The first is direct audio-video calls. For instance, in the following transcript, the adoptee Samuel sees his native family on the mobile phone of the intermediary, Lidiya, who mediates and translates the call:

> Intermediary: Hi Samuel! Hi! Look, there is a surprise! Who is here?! Can you see? Hi Samuel!

> Adoptee: how are you?

Intermediary: I am fine, and you, how are you? Can you see who is here?

Adoptee: Yes, hi!

Intermediary: Have you seen who is here? What a surprise!

Adoptee: Yes! How are they [the native father and mother]?

Intermediary: There are your parents!

Adoptee: Yes! How are they?

Intermediary: They are fine. Look at them [Samuel's birth parents]!

Adoptee: Yes, I saw them (he smiles)

Intermediary: Did you see them? Have you seen your mum?

Adoptee: Tell them a big hello on my behalf!

Intermediary: Look, look, they greet you (his parents wave their hands)

Adoptee: Yes, yes

Intermediary: Did you see? They are very well. They say they send you a big hello [the mother looks emotional, she whispers], look, your mum and your dad. Thank you, they are very happy to see you.

[Extract from a video call of a native mother and father to an adoptee with an intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

At the time of the research, Lidiya was always present during the communications between the adoptee and the native family principally because the native family did not have any access to social media. Additionally, they needed linguistic mediation. The native family of Samuel tried to get in contact with Samuel and his adoptive family every time Lidiya was available. They often travelled for over an hour to meet with her.

Lidiya's mediation is predominantly linguistic because Samuel's native parents do not speak English nor Italian, whilst Samuel and his adoptive family speak little English. As such, Lidiya is a decisive element in their communication. Nonetheless, her mediation is also logistical: calls depend on her availability. Likewise, she is the one deciding when to interrupt the encounter and how to structure it.

For what concerns the audio-video call, visual support is central for native families to have direct communication and overcome the linguistic barrier. Gestures, smiles, hands waving, fingers moving and pointing into the space of the screen are part of the non-verbal communication used by the native parents of Samuel. The reported conversation is an example of how the image becomes central to the communication during direct calls, and the verbal response is used to underline the physical presence and interaction of the main subjects – "can you see?", "have you seen it?", "look at them!", "look".

Samuel's history offers another theme to underline: the absence of the adoptive family's mediation between the adoptee and his native family. During post-reconnection, adoptees and native families try to find ways to achieve a 'direct' form of contact. In this case, during the reconnection stage, the intermediary Lidiya claimed not to have the adoptee's phone number, as explained in chapter Seven. Now, four months later, she has it, and she is the one in charge of mediating the direct communication between Samuel and his native family. Whilst during the reconnection, Lidiya was asking permission from both families, in the post-reconnection phase, she autonomously decides how to manage and mediate contacts.

The second type of communication is the deferred audio-video call. The following fieldnote reports the transcript of a short audio-video message to Samuel from his native parents, invariably with Lidiya's linguistic and logistical support. For example:

> Fieldnote:
>
> WhatsApp video sent to Samuel. The intermediary tells everyone to say "Hi!"
> (In Italian language, all together, looking at the camera).
>
> Intermediary: Samuel, your mum and your dad are saying hello. They are asking how you do (she laughs).
>
> The intermediary translates what the native father and mother say: We are fine, how are you? How are your family, mum, dad, and little sister? How is all the [adoptive] family?
>
> [Extract from a video message of a native mother and father to an adoptee with an intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

The central part of the conversation focuses on the adoptive family's well-being and the linguistic mediation transposes native parents' greetings and questions to Samuel: by doing this, verbal communication becomes dominant in the message.

This part explores the last type of communication, the family group deferred audio-video call. In this case, the conformation of the group changes together with the length of the communication. This example involves several family members and the interaction takes place with the logistical and the linguistic mediation of Lidiya in the Kembata Tembaro zone. In the following transcript of a deferred audio-video call to Mohamed from his native family (his mother, father, younger brother, and uncle), the intermediary Lidiya translates literally from Amharic to Italian until she autonomously decides to interrupt the communication:

> Native father: Hi Mohamed, how is it going at school? How are you? We were very anxious to see you again, how is the school, we heard you have become famous, and I am happy, we would be happy if you could come here and visit us another time, all together.
>
> Native mother: How is your family, your sister, your family, your parents, your sisters, your brother, how is everybody?
>
> Native uncle: How are you all? We are fine, thank you. We always think about how is [your adoptive mother], your father, how is [your adoptive sister], how is [your adoptive brother]. We always think about you as if you were here with us because we know everyone loves you [there]. Consider always your [adoptive] family as your natural family because that one is your real family, and we are family, too. But your family is always the one you are living with now. Say hi to all your family on our behalf[75].

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[75] Mohamed's uncle categorises families as 'natural' and 'real'. The concept of a 'natural' family emerged during interviews and resonated with the idea of the original and biological connection explored in chapter Five. Likewise, the concept of 'real' family echoes the local praxes of fictive kinship. Such praxes are vehiculated by the Amharic verb *masadeg*, which translates to raising and taking care of someone, including the care for someone else's child coming into your family. This linguistic difference between 'natural' and 'real' has also been remarked on and addressed by two European adoptive parents who took part in this research and belong to two different adoptive families. They both live in Ethiopia, fluently speak Amharic and are often questioned by their Ethiopian friends and acquaintances about their parenthood. Caught in a moment of self-reflection during an in-depth interview, the adoptive mother describes the conversations on the nature of her relationship with her Ethio-descendant children (who did not reconnect to their native family). For example: "When I talk about my [adopted] children [in Amharic language], when I say that my children are adopted, [I say] *asadegachu alle*, I raise them. *Asadegallo*, I raise. I talk about my children, *asadegachu alle*. I raise them. *Masadeg*, to raise, but it is the same thing ... Wait, no. If they are your [biological] children, you do not say *asadegallo*. (...) [You say] *yelij*, my child. [In my case,] they are the children I raise" [Adoptive mother, October 2019, Addis Ababa]. During the fieldwork, similar considerations were informally shared by the other adoptive parent living in the country in a conversation concerning his way of talking about his child in the Ethiopian context.

Intermediary: Stop, it is enough! (She closes the video).

[Extract of a video message from a native mother, father and uncle to an adoptee with the intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

In this message, Mohamed's brother remains silent whilst the other three family members express three different aspects of their relationship with Mohamed and his adoptive family, perhaps elicited by our previous conversation. Similarly to Samuel and his native family, this communication is not mediated by the adoptive family, who is not consulted before sending this message.

In Mohamed's case, the reconnection took place more than one year before this message. Contacts between Mohamed, his native and his adoptive family are already well established and happen regularly throughout the year. This native family has an alternative communication channel with the adoptive family, mainly comprised of messages in the English language or indirect communication with the support of Lidiya's direct involvement and cultural mediation, as further explained in this chapter. However, adoptive family members are mentioned as part of the concerns of the native family and are included in the greetings, similarly to the case of Samuel. Remarks implying the existence of a 'family hierarchy' or a 'belongingness priority' surround the discourses concerning the adoptive family.

Lastly, Mohamed's father talks about the chance of meeting again. The issue of physical proximity is the centre of the following part of this section, dedicated to requests for visiting and moving to Ethiopia.

Wish you were here: adoptees' mobility and physical proximity to native families

"We would be happy if you could come here and visit us another time, all together". With these words, Mohamed's father invites his son adopted abroad to visit the Kembata Tembaro zone with his adoptive family. His invitation introduces the issue of face-to-face meetings and the relevance of maintaining a relation "not only physical" but also based on spatial proximity,

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Mohamed's native uncle's words echo these remarks and consider raising the child a crucial element to determine the degree or quality of belongingness of the child with 'natural' and 'real' families.

when possible. Participants explained that for Ethiopian extended families spatial and physical proximity is often challenging.

Ethiopian history is marked by several international and internal migrations for economic and political reasons, internal displacements due to population reorganisation plans and conflict motivations, and increasing environmental disasters connected to climate changes. In a federal country like Ethiopia, four and a half times bigger than the United Kingdom, even moving internally to the country might be difficult on many fronts (logistics, costs, household organisation, to name a few) and compromise the frequency of direct contact. For these reasons, visits and in-person encounters are even more valued when they mean travelling long distances.

In this context, having the economic power and mobility rights that allow international movement to and from the Global North becomes a significant asset. For native families, getting a citizenship that would allow their children to have the freedom of movement was amongst the reasons to give them into adoption in the first place. Native families are mainly focused on the adoptees' temporary or permanent return to Ethiopia. Considering participant observation, interviews and informal conversations during fieldwork in Ethiopia, there were only three cases of native relatives (one mother and two sisters) in the Global North: one lived in Europe; one was about to move in Australia with the adoptee and her adoptive family; one was adopted by the adoptive family of her younger sibling.

The wish for an immediate, definitive return of the adoptee to Ethiopia was mentioned only by one native family composed of two paternal uncles. In this case, after the adoption process, the adoptee's older uncle decided to register the land of the adoptee's deceased biological father in the adoptee's name. That was the only land their entire family possess, and it was given to her so she and her adoptive family may come to live there. As explained by the younger uncle:

> He [the older uncle] decided to change [the name of the landowner] to her [adoptee's] name. Now that land has her name, and she has that kind of book here [a property license], with her name and picture. He showed me the little book with her picture. (…) She is better [meaning wealthier] than us [native uncles] (they laugh) because we have no land, but she has (they laugh out and loud). [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

The registration of the land[76] in the adoptee's name took place one year after the adoptee left for Europe. The older uncle did it with the expectation that the adoptee would be back once she turned 18. After reconnecting, the native uncles hope the adoptee will be interested in moving to Ethiopia and starting a business. The older native uncle further explains:

> I did not support [provide for] her [the adoptee] ... because I was not able to do that, she could not grow up with me, so I cannot force her to live with me now. But she can, she can do whatever she prefers. It is her choice to live here or go, but my idea is that she visits us (…). Even though I would be very happy if she would live here ... this is her preference, to live here or ... BUT! But I would be very happy if she could come here, and starts her own business, here! Yes! And live here! [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

The older uncle expresses awareness concerning the feelings of abandonment the adoptee may have experienced, even though the intention that led to taking her to the residential childcare institution contemplated a temporary separation. Moreover, demanding the adoptee to return to living in Ethiopia does not feel right to the older uncle because, in his perspective, he failed to raise her. Nonetheless, he does not hide his wish to meet and reunite with her in Ethiopia; have her in Ethiopia with the adoptive family and build their own house; to be together again and find a connection with her adoptive family. As explained by the younger native uncle:

> I told you that she [the adoptee] has a land, so he [the native relative] would be very happy if the [adoptive] family and she as well, could come here and live in the land and everything (he claps once his hands), we will be more than happy to (clap again), to, welcome them! [Native uncle, November 2019, OSZSF, Oromia region]

In opposition to this view, other native families would rather have their offspring living in Europe and come to visit. The native family of Samuel is amongst them, as emerged during the observation of their post-reconnection dynamics. After the reconnection, explored in detail in Chapter Seven, Samuel and his adoptive family left Ethiopia to return to their lives in Europe. Follow-up meetings and conversations with Samuel's adoptive father and Lidiya disclose that,

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[76] In this case, it is a property of little value in the rural countryside.

in the months following the visit to Ethiopia, Samuel's first intentions to join his native family grew more substantial than expected. Once acknowledged this information, the international, mediated communication amongst Samuel's international extended family members resulted in a collective effort of Samuel's adoptive and native families to discourage him from moving to Ethiopia. This piece of fieldnote, written after communicating with Samuel's adoptive father and Lidiya, underline the same concept. For example:

> Fieldnote:
>
> The native family is trying to convince Samuel not to return to live permanently with them because, when he was in Ethiopia, Samuel told his adoptive family and me [the researcher] that he would like to come and settle here in Ethiopia. After all, he said, it is here that he would like to be. Now, his native family is trying to change his mind. They told him not to move to Ethiopia with them because they would feel distressed by seeing his distress. [Adoptive father, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

The main point of the native father is that his adopted son would not adapt to his life in Ethiopia, and the fact that Samuel does not speak English, Amharic, or Kembaata would only further isolate him. The native family advised Samuel to stay in Italy, learn English to communicate directly with some of them, and study hard to get a good job and support them. In their reasoning, the native family of Samuel invited him to profit as much as possible from the condition they managed to obtain for him. They gave him into adoption with the expectation – the intermediary called it "the claim" – that he would be back and support them. His native family hoped he would have better opportunities living as a *ferenji* in the Global North with freedom of movement, access to good education and working opportunities. They were also expecting his return, hoping he could provide economic support, thus diversifying their family incomes and validating their migration strategies.

This notion of international extended family support also relies on filial obligations. It implies that economically better-positioned family members would provide support to those who are in greater need. These expectations burden their son, who, in the long run, should become able to provide for his native family and engage the adoptive family by transitive property. Native and adoptive families are connected by ties of belongingness to the same child are are therefore all involved in a mechanism of mutual aid. As such, adoptive families are linked to the logic of economic support. The responsibility of the adoptee, who is not yet able to provide

for himself or others, is shifted to the adoptive family, whose members should support the extended family.

In conclusion, this section focuses on analysing birth families' understandings of kin ties after the reconnection and the associated expectations. In line with previous findings on inter-country adoption interpretations in Ethiopia, it reveals that by and large native families expect the kin tie with the adoptee to remain with different degrees of intensity, even though generally the priority has to be given to the bond with the adoptive family. The strength of the existing tie between the adoptive triad members depends mainly on the quality of their relationship and the frequency of their contact: their relationship needs to be cultivated through contacts.

For what concern digital encounters[77], social media that allow private messages, calls and video calls offers interactions that might not exist without the use of technology and plays a crucial role in facilitating communication and overcoming linguistic barriers between family members. However, native families may struggle to access social media and may need some intermediation either way. The need for intermediation or communication devices might allow the convergence of multiple native relatives in the same space, an event that may create new forms of situated interactions between families who have in common a kin tie entanglement with the Global North.

For what concerns adoptees and native families' encounters in person, adoptees' Global North citizenships grant them a certain level of freedom to move internationally in Ethiopia and other countries. Conversely, the Ethiopian citizenship's 'mobility power' is insufficient to allow native families to cross borders freely. Therefore, adoptees are mostly expected to take advantage of their freedom of movement and permanently or temporarily return to Ethiopia, or at least visit Ethiopia regularly.

This research reveals that it is not uncommon for reconnected adoptees to visit native families. Conversely, it is very unusual for native families to travel North and meet the adoptees in their adoptive environment and community. A crucial factor determining whether native families and adoptees keep in contact is the adoptee's willingness to maintain such a relationship and how they manage it, which is at the centre of the following section.

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[77] The notion of 'digital encounters' is intended as encounters mediated by digital technology (i.e., a mobile phone).

8.3 The post-reconnection stage from the adoptees' perspective

This section addresses adoptees' desires, challenges, configurations and expectations related to the post-reconnection stage. The first part of the analysis centres on the post-reconnection family reconfiguration through the specific experiences of three adoptees: Sara, Abebech and Samuel. These three adoptees have been selected because it was possible to conduct in-depth interviews, participant observation and follow-up conversations and meetings with each of them. Moreover, at the time of this study, they had an established and ongoing relationship with their native family. Whilst not representative of the entire adoptees' relationships spectrum, these three experiences contain valuable elements for an analysis of the post-reconnection stage from the point of view of the adoptees.

A fourth participant, Bisrat, the youngest adoptee involved in this research, also answered such criteria. However, his situation is quite different because, during this study, his native family interrupted their relationship for reasons he could not wholly understand. Such a sudden break was a source of emotional strain because his adoptive family had quite a journey to support his reconnection, as explained in the last part of this section. Given that Bisrat decided not to develop his thoughts on this topic, his experience is mentioned at the end of this part through his adoptive father's words to contribute to exploring the representation, relations and metaphorical images adoptees employ to describe their new family assets.

The second part of this section addresses contacts between international extended family members, with particular emphasis on how contacts happen with their limitations and cross-cultural misinterpretations. Furthermore, it aims to explore social media communication with its challenges. In this part, the experiences that better epitomize the post-reconnection stage are the ones of Sara, Abebech, and Mariam.

Mariam's case is peculiar because the adoptee was never directly involved in this research. However, her story is emblematic of other adoptees' experiences and displays how adoptees try to negotiate boundaries with their native family when social media are involved. For this reason, this part includes Mariam's story as experienced by her native family, who granted access to their written communication and explained on several occasions the development of their relationship and their attempts to overcome linguistic and cross-cultural challenges.

In the third part, the matter of mobility is framed from the perspective of the adoptees, highlighting unexpected trajectories of mobility and belongingness. The experiences of

Abebech, Genet, Sara and Bisrat are organized to exemplify the variables engrained in adoptees' mobility. To this extent, this section addresses matters like native family's international migration; biopolitical logics that privilege specific forms of racialized migration; transnational diasporic belongingness and homing; adoptees' 'return to roots', their 'token' whiteness and quest for similarity; and the structural and social racism that Ethio-descendant adoptees must deal with in the Global North. In this last part, given the relevance of Bisrat's experience, quotations from his adoptive father have been chosen to recount his experience. Bisrat's family took part in the research since its beginning. Therefore, this choice allows to include his relevant experience, which offers a brief insight into the intersection between inter-country adoption, mobility and race.

Family reconfigurations after reconnection: jungles, nets, transformative destruction

One of the themes that emerged during interviews with the adoptees was how their family's configuration changed in the post-reconnection stage. Adoptees' interviews highlighted a kin ties reconfiguration that mirrors their feelings of belongingness and describes their family structure with representations that connect them to their native and adoptive family members. A participant that talked at length about this matter is Sara. Sara is an 18-year-old Ethio-descendant Swiss girl. She lives together with her Swiss adoptive parents and her Ethio-descendant adopted sister. When she was a teen, Sara agreed to be taken to Ethiopia by her Swiss parents in search of her native family. It took several years to find the native family members of Sara. When asked about her current family configuration, Sara refers to the idea of a family tree with multiple connections to its roots. For example:

> I have two mothers, just ... my mum in Switzerland, she is my mum, no doubt. I grew up with her, I love her and (…) even if my mother here [in Ethiopia] would want to take me back, I would not go. I do not know anything else [than Sara's adoptive family], I was small, and my normal parents there [in Switzerland], and my sister, my adoptive sister, too, she is my sister without any [doubt]. (…) But then, I met them [Sara's native family] here [in Ethiopia], and now I have even more connections to my roots, let us say. And I think I can consider it ... two ... two mothers, two sisters, one brother from different ... sides! [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

As Sara described it, her international extended family is composed of a biological and adoptive mother, one adoptive father, one Ethio-descendant adopted sister, a half-sister and a half-brother. Sara represents a junction point of several family ties. She moves from the metaphor of the tree to transform the classic family diagram and create the concept of a jungle of different trees, all connected to the same roots and interconnected through her. In her reconfiguration of the international extended family structure, relations between family members play a central role. For example:

> My Swiss mum was very happy, for me and everybody, that I could find my biological family because I was really asking a lot of times, so they [Sara's adoptive and native mothers] have a good relationship. Also, my Ethiopian mum asked me this time, "Where is mamma?" (she laughs out loud). "She is not here", I said, "I am alone, I am sorry" (she keeps laughing), "She is in Switzerland, but she will come, do not worry" (she laughs again), and also my sister, they are ... they are really happy. My mum, my Ethiopian mum, is very happy that she sees me in this condition of life.
>
> Researcher: And your Swiss parents, are they helping and supporting your mother?
>
> Sara: Yes

[Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

In the post-reconnection stage, Sara interlocks the different relations of her pre and post-adoption process. The members of her international extended family are in contact and exchange various forms of support: her sisters are in touch; her adoptive parents economically support her native mother, who requires regular medical care. Moreover, Sara feels supported and trusted by her adoptive parents in her relationship with her native family members. In particular, her adoptive mother's approval makes Sara confident in representing her families as interconnected. From the intertwining of this multitude of trees joined because of Sara, her description resembles a metaphoric jungle of relations, entangled and connected.

Sara's interpretation of her family configuration resonates with Chiodini's considerations about the need to allow adoptees to represent kin ties that may diverge from the normative Global North nuclear family model[78] (Chiodini, 2017). In her work, Chiodini offers a tool to provide adoptees with a representational option for extended kin ties. The model Chiodini describes is the graphic illustration of a mangrove tree that combines vertical kin ties – which Mattalucci argued are preferred by Euro-American genealogy representations (Mattalucci, 2017) – with a horizontal and rhizomatic development of the roots. According to Chiodini and Mattalucci, this configuration allows for a representation of the "plural relationships" that the child might experience during mobility, relocation and fictive kinship (Mattalucci, 2017, p.65). The "rhizomatic forest" resulting from Chiodini's contribution to "represent the multi-belongingness" (Chodini, 2017, p. 75) of adoptees echoes Sara's family reconfiguration because it graphically epitomises the potential multiplicity and complexity of adoptees' kin ties

Figure 12: the rhizomatic forest (Chiodini, 2017).

THE "RHIZOMATIC FOREST" (Chiodini 2017)

*The adoptee's drawing was presented by Chiodini at the annual SIAA (Applied Anthropology's Italian Society) conference in 2017. The author granted the use of the drawing to the extent of this thesis.

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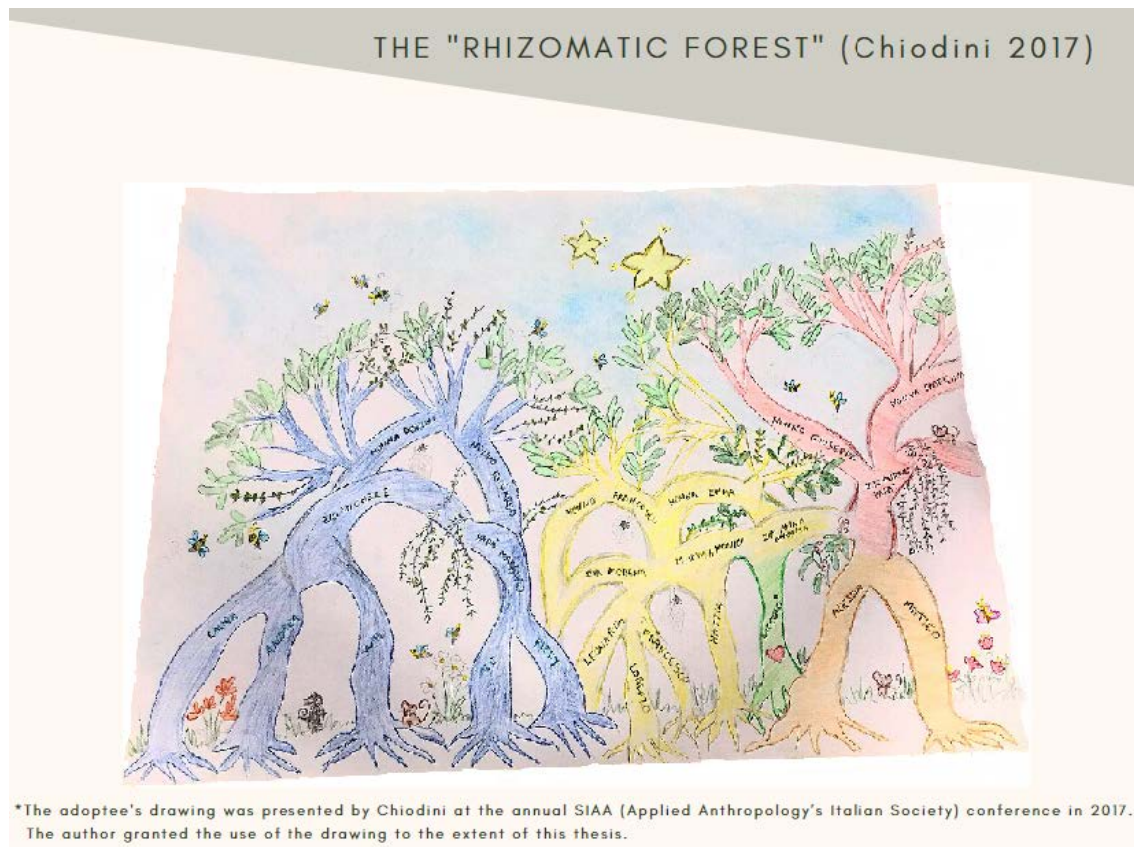
[78] Chiodini's contribution also illustrates that adoptive parents solicited social workers to create a tool that prioritises the interpersonal and relational dimensions. The mangrove tree graphic was created to favour older adoptees to represent and talk about their experiences and extended kin ties, aspects of their lives that are often blurred by the bureaucratic dimension of the child relocation (as it explores chapter Seven).

(see Figure 12).

This representation shifts the adoptive family's model from an adoptive-parents-centred to an adoptee-centred perspective and offers a multi-belongingness-based model of the adoptive family[79]. Sara's narrative and acknowledgement of her kin ties deploy an imaginative use of graphics (i.e., the family tree) and images that supports negotiations and representations of her intimate, individual and social understanding of her inter-country extended family. However, adoptees might find other and different ways to represent and voice kin ties reconfigurations. For instance, Abebech's reconfiguration projects the image of a spider's web. Abebech is an Ethio-descendant woman in her thirties. She moved back to Ethiopia ten years ago, and lives in Addis Ababa with her children in her native family's house. However, her native mother moved with her brother to the United Kingdom, where they live, whilst her European mother lives in Belgium. The mothers of Abebech are the core of her intimate kinship ties, as she clearly states during an interview:

> I do feel like, at least with mums, we are part of the family. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

However, many people appear on the scene when she talks about her family. For example:

> Coming back and getting in touch with my Ethiopian family was a blessing. That is it. My two mothers get along, and they actually call each other, and they visit each other because one is in the UK, and the other is in Belgium. They see each other and talk to each other without me (she laughs). (…) They have a bond. Not necessarily their husbands, thou, and not necessarily with my siblings. (…) Also, there is my [native] father. I have siblings in Australia. (…) My siblings in the Netherlands and Belgium are not in touch with my siblings in the UK. My mum has two sons, my Ethiopian mother. She is in London. Then, my siblings are in the Netherlands and Belgium with my adoptive families. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

As Abebech emphasises, many members of her international extended family do not have much more in common than her relationship. They usually do not keep in contact, even

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[79] As illustrated by Chiodini (2017), this interpretative perspective has also been required by social workers for post-inter-country adoption interventions with adoptees who a) keep memories of their country of origin, native families and siblings; and b) did not experience prolonged institutionalisation but instead stayed with their native family until shortly before their adoption.

though they are interconnected by different degrees of family belongingness and blood ties. Nonetheless, they are part of her family reconfiguration, even though they do not all cover an active role in her life. The description of Abebech depicts a group of family members geographically and relationally dispersed, with many migration trajectories involving both her adoptive and native family. She does not distinguish between siblings and half-siblings and includes her mother's current husband in her family description. In the representation of Abebech, the main point of contact of all these family members is Abebech herself.

Conversely to Sara and Abebech, Samuel did not find (yet?) any harmony or balance in the relationship between himself and his native and adoptive families. When asked about his reconnection with his native family, Samuel's first comment was, "It was fantastic. I mean, it is like destroying a part of my life, so, fantastic". This idea of "destroying a part of his life" continued during the post-reconnection stage. In his words, the demolition metaphor describes the reconnection process, symbolising how this experience impacted Samuel's life.

On the one hand, similarly to Sara and Abebech's cases, the reconnection revealed aspects of his adoption omitted or blurred by the bureaucratic dimension of the inter-country adoption process[80]. Samuel's visit to Ethiopia brought pieces of evidence that backed his memories concerning the adoption, as explored in chapter Seven, which focuses on Samuel's adoptive story. After they visit Ethiopia, Samuel's adoptive parents' story (which was built on the information they possessed) becomes unreliable because it does not narrate a truth comprehensive of Samuel's adoptive and native families' perspectives. Indeed, in Ethiopia, Samuel discovers that his childhood memories were correct, and his adoptive parents must also acknowledge that.

On the other hand, Samuel learns that his birth family's story is more stratified than he was told. For a decade, Samuel's birth family was described as united in the choice to abandon him because they were too poor. Conversely, the decisional process that brought him into adoption was not linear and included power and gender relations, survival strategies, and different understandings of the adoption process and outcomes. Most of all, Samuel discovered that he was a loved member of his family and that, in his family's eyes, his belongingness to their kin was not altered by their choice to give him out for adoption.

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[80] The bureaucratic dimension is explored in chapter Six.

Such discoveries disrupt the foundation of Samuel's adoptive family's narrative, which becomes unstable in his eyes. Samuel's destructive process progressively evolves into a transformative approach that leads him to look for the reparation of his ties of origin. This process does not envisage the participation of his adoptive family. Samuel's decision to establish an exclusive relationship with his native family clashes with his adoptive parents' will, who invested their energies in the reconnection to give a fresh start to their family unit rather than introducing new family ties. Therefore, Samuel's kin ties' reconfiguration is at a condition of impasse: Samuel wants to re-establish his relationships with his native family without including the adoptive family, whilst his adoptive family do not want to be excluded. Samuel's adoptive family was not expecting the presence of the native family to become this pervasive. They intended this visit to Ethiopia as a "restarting point" for their relationship, an experience that they hoped would "unite more him [Samuel] to us [adoptive family] even though keeping contact with the [native family]", to use Samuel's adoptive father words.

Samuel's desire to deepen his relationship with his homeland was clear since his visit to Ethiopia. However, after returning to Europe, Samuel's wish to have independent contact with his native family became more evident. Direct follow-up conversations with Samuel's adoptive father and Lidiya, the intermediary, revealed a delicate emotional dynamic between Samuel and his adoptive family. Lidiya, who was first involved in mediating between Samuel's adoptive and native family, is now often contacted by the adoptive family to intermediate between them and Samuel. During an interview where Lidiya explains her interpretations of the interactions within Samuel's extended family, she recounts some anecdotes of the situations she has to deal with. For example:

> He [Samuel] was happy. Everyone was happy, even he was happy. Then [the adoptive father] said, "Look, Samuel, let us make a video. We [Samuel and his adoptive family] can send it, and they [Samuel's native family] will also be happy". And Samuel answered that he wanted to do it on his own. Not together. He did not just want to send it [from his phone], but to make the video on his own where he speaks to them [Samuel's native family] and then send the video on his own. [The adoptive father's] feelings were hurt because [Samuel] did not behave as they [the adoptive family] were his family. [Intermediary, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

During the participant observation in Ethiopia, Samuel mentioned several times his intentions: to learn Amharic and travel back to Ethiopia, renounce his Italian citizenship, get his Ethiopian

nationality back, and finally move to Ethiopia with his native family. His plan finds the resistance of the intermediary, his native and adoptive parents. This disagreement generates a negotiation between Samuel and his families. Eventually, Samuel agrees to put more effort into his studies to get a qualified job, which would allow him to help his native family financially. His final goal is to save money, get a good job and achieve a temporary or permanent reunification with his family in the Kembata Tembaro zone.

Samuel's family reconfiguration attempts are facing resistance from his adoptive family. He is at the beginning of his post-reconnection process, and his post-reconnection story does not resemble those of Abebech or Sara. However, these three narratives focus on participants' reconfigurations of their kin ties and have in common the goal to re-arrange their relationships to produce, to some extent, an international extended family.

Abebech, Sara and Samuel's choice to reconnect with their native family and build long-lasting and inter-dependent relationships is not necessarily generalisable to all the situations. Moreover, adoptees' intentions must confront native and adoptive families' aims. In Samuel's case, the adoptive parents oppose Samuel's attempts at kin reconfiguration. Likewise, Bisrat's experience underlines the native families' potential role in disrupting adoptees' rearrangement of their relationships and feelings of belongingness.

Bisrat was adopted when he was 2 years old. Once he reached Europe with his adoptive family, his parents discovered the child claimed his native relatives were alive even though, according to his official adoptive documents, he was a full orphan. After several searches, Bisrat's adoptive parents managed to find his native mother. As Bisrat's adoptive father recounts:

> After we adopted, [Bisrat's adoptive mother] came back [to Ethiopia] to talk to the [native] mother and ask her if she was ready, if she wanted us to take Bisrat there. Because we were under the impression that Bisrat wanted to come back, we asked him, "would you like to come back to Ethiopia? To see your mum?". He said that he was fine with it. (…) He was 3 years old. The [native] mother said it was ok to go there [in Ethiopia]. [Adoptive father, November 2017, Addis Ababa]

Bisrat reunited with his native family in Ethiopia at the age of 4. It was eight years before the beginning of the fieldwork. During the in-depth interview, Bisrat's adoptive father recounts the reconnection from his perspective. For example:

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We [Bisrat and his adoptive parents] returned [to Ethiopia] one year after [Bisrat's adoption]. In the beginning, it was very hard for him because we were there, [in Ethiopia,] in that city, with the usual sea of people. Everyone was staring at us, everyone. Suddenly we heard "Bisrat! Bisrat!" because his little friends started to recognise him. Then we heard a shriek, "BISRAT!!". It was his mother who was running to him. Initially, he did not want her; he spent an entire day sulking at her. (…) The second day he began [interacting with her]. And then, on the last day, he was so happy, and he said, "I love my [adoptive] mum, I love my [adoptive] dad, I love my [birth] mother, I love my [adoptive] siblings", etcetera. I mean … he really felt he could love everyone, at the beginning. [Adoptive father, November 2017, Addis Ababa]

According to Bisrat's adoptive father's interpretation, Bisrat reconfigured his family as comprehensive of his native and adoptive family members. After the reconnection, Bisrat's adoptive parents decided to move to live in Ethiopia with their biological children to be closer to his native family. According to Bisrat's adoptive parents' plans, Bisrat would have the chance to spend time with both families. During the first years, Bisrat and his adoptive family kept in contact with his native family through visits and phone calls. However, his native mother went to work in the Middle East as a domestic servant, a working trajectory that involved many Ethiopian women over the last years (Fernandez, 2019; Sabban 2012). Since then, a few months before the beginning of this fieldwork, Bisrat and his adoptive family had no news from her. For example:

Bisrat saw her [Bisrat's native mother] at a certain point because we took him back [to Ethiopia]. Now, she had disappeared again. She went away again, to Dubai, and nobody [amongst her native family members] is doing anything to find her. Now, we are here [in Ethiopia]. They [Bisrat's native family] know our phone number. I am in contact with his [native] brother. (…) He [Bisrat] now says his mother is dead. [Adoptive father, November 2017, Addis Ababa]

Two years after the first field trip and the quoted interview, Bisrat's mother was not back yet, and he still received no news. The feelings of Bisrat's adoptive parents moved from guilt for the adoption to concern for the birth mother and eventually frustration because of her silence. In the meanwhile, Bisrat's adoptive family splits between Europe (where the siblings of Bisrat live with his adoptive mother) and Ethiopia (where the adoptive father of Bisrat lives with him,

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his step-mother and his half-sister). Bisrat mentions his adoptive parents and siblings: his family configuration after the reconnection did not envisage his native family. During the participant observation, Bisrat's adoptive father explains that his son refuses to talk about his native family, particularly his birth mother, who he says is dead to him.

As surfaced during participant observation and interviews, Bisrat endured several changes during the post-reconnection stage. His family reconfiguration went from considering his native and adoptive family as a whole to removing his native family from his depiction of family relations. Bisrat's case shows that reconnection does not naturally end with a new family reconfiguration. Circumstances might change and weaken or interrupt the will to keep in contact and the interest in reconfiguring the family by including native family members. Bisrat's experience underlines other aspects of the post-reconnection stage that might already be spotted in Samuel, Abebech and Sara's stories. Whilst these four stories are not generalisable to the whole spectrum of adoptees' post-reconnection experiences, the elements emerging from these recounts offer distinctive insights.

Firstly, the family reconfiguration occurs from a relationship that needs to be maintained through a minimum level of interaction, identified in keeping contacts and visiting. Indeed, it emerges that having living native family members do not imply *per se* a family reconfiguration. Interactions are identified cross-culturally by all the participants as critical to define the interest in maintaining a specific kin tie and express care. Interactions run parallel with another crucial element that emerged from adoptees' stories: the validation of one's kinship belongingness from the family of origin. That is evident, for instance, from Samuel's confirmation that his native family considers him part of their kin or Bisrat's feelings of exclusion from his birth kin.

Conversely, the 'bloodline', which emerged in chapter Six as a relevant element to encourage the reconnection process from the Ethiopian point of view, was never mentioned by adoptees as a criterion to reconfigure their kin ties in the post-reconnection stage. It might be argued that, in family reconfigurations, the social and relational affiliation are more relevant than the biological belongingness. On the one hand, this aspect confirms the fictive kinship's belongingness backbone; on the other hand, it may weaken adoptive parents' fear that reconnection might produce a break between the two families because of the blood connection.

Secondly, the discrepancy between the story of Samuel – which had just entered the post-reconnection stage at the time of the interview – and the other three underlines that the

reconnection is a time in evolution. Participant observation and interviews suggest that the adoptees' process of reconfiguring their family structure to mirror feelings of belongingness is a life-long journey. It might be subject to several changes and adaptations over time. Family configurations are likely to be reshaped in this ever-evolving period, but this does not imply a definitive picture emerges to stay forever. In short, relational tensions do not evaporate after the reconnection. They instead might grow either to become stable or unstable – as notable in the destructive urge of Samuel or the current exclusion of Bisrat's native family.

Lastly, the post-reconnection stage resembles a quest for a redefinition of adoptees' family reconfiguration, with clear subjective choices. This journey to rewrite one's kin ties might appear linear and rational. However, it is a long and winding road considering the many private and public obstacles a person must overcome. Private obstacles include the cross-cultural challenge of accepting families' peculiarities, including their presence, and re-organise their configuration: merging, separating or intertwining relationships to produce an entirely new private redefinition of family. Also, variations in one's family reconfiguration are tightly connected to a) the family members' willingness to support the adoptee in such a journey, and b) unforeseen events that might not directly depend on the adoptees' will or actions. For instance, Bisrat's adoptive parents still wonder if his birth mother's disappearance is intentional or derived from Ethiopian servants' well-known harsh living conditions in the Middle East (Demissie, 2018; Cooper, 2013).

Public obstacles are possibly even more challenging, given the authoritative picture of the so-called 'natural family'. Moreover, adoptees must manage family models from a cross-cultural perspective – the Ethiopian and the universalised Global North models - and merge them. From a (post)colonial feminist perspective, taking this road toward family redefinition implies that adoptees challenge the *status quo* with their own bodies and life story. This is a naked confrontation with a system in which, often, families are thought of as a fundamental societal element with a minimal range of possible variations, as already explored in the previous chapters. These adoptees, each one with her own peculiar story and bonds, each one with her own definition of family, feel compelled to rethink and reconfigure the meaning of family belongingness and kin tie in a (post)colonial scenario, with the empirical awareness that this journey towards a reconstruction necessarily ask for a deconstruction, an un-learning of what a family ought to be.

Family distances: maintaining and negotiating contacts

A significant part of reconnection and post-reconnection in internationally extended families envisages the use of communication technologies. This phenomenon is in line with literature suggesting that contact with the birth family in domestic and inter-country adoption is increasingly likely to occur via technological means (Goldberg, 2019; Koskinen and Book, 2019; Farr et al., 2018).

That is already an ongoing phenomenon since social media and messaging platforms – i.e., WhatsApp and Facebook messenger – played a pivotal role for participants in keeping in contact. Almost all the native families involved in the research, with one exception, need support to use social media.

Conversely, adoptees reported an absence of guidance or mediation in the first phase of the post-reconnection stage, apart from the case of Samuel. All the adoptees involved in the research have contact with their native families without mediation and are even independent of their adoptive parents, as recounted by Sara.

Sara and her native mother used to call each other regularly until her mother moved to a medical health centre in Addis Ababa. Since then, her mother has had limited access to phone calls. Their communication is facilitated by the native sister of Sara. Otherwise, Sara daily visits her when she spends time in Ethiopia. During the in-depth interview, Sara underlines her good relationships with her native sister and mother. For example:

> My (Ethiopian) sister has a smartphone, and we talk on Facebook or something. We call each other, we have a good relationship, very good, and so … with my mother, before she used to be in a clinic (…) we used to call each other, now it is not allowed to have a phone. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

Sara says she has a well-established relational bond with her native family. However, she explains that her relationship with her sister resulted from a negotiation. When Sara and her adoptive family discovered that Sara's native mother needed proper healthcare, they decided to move her to Addis Ababa. Sara took this decision without consulting her native sister, who is now the primary caregiver of their mother, because Sara is physically absent most of the time. Even though Sara's intentions were good, this unilateral choice deteriorated her relationship with her sister. For example:

> The first few times, it [the relationship] was really, really good. Then my
> sister turned a bit angry because I brought my [native] mother to Addis
> [Ababa], which means that now she [Sara's native sister] has to take care of
> her. She was very mad at me, but now she is fine. (…) It is a big responsibility
> for my sister, because … she is the one who lives here. I … I just can …
> support them to come and visit, but I, … you know, it is like I am far away
> (she looks down). (…). She was a bit mad also because I just brought her
> [Sara's native mother to Addis Ababa] and left. But I told her she is also her
> mother. It is not totally my responsibility. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

After their disagreement, Sara and her native sister negotiated a way to keep in contact and share their mother's care even though Sara is often out of the country. Sara pays their mother's medical health centre bills and keeps in contact with her mother, whilst her sister provides their mother with material and proximal support when she needs it. In Sara's case, post-reconnection contact aims to keep intact relational ties and to manage practical matters related to the collaboration in the care of her kin. Social media and instant messaging play a crucial role in the communication and management of Sara and her native family's life, which would not be possible without technology. Sara also had to learn how to manage conflicts with her sister and negotiate her role. In her view, Sara is now a regular presence in her native family even when she is physically absent.

Conversely, Abebech, struggles to keep regular contact with her family members. Abebech reconnected with her native family almost twenty years ago, and her mothers are the core of her family ties. Even though she chose to live in Ethiopia, Abebech considers regular communication a relevant component of her relationship with her mothers. However, she considers herself a strong independent person, and regularly speaking to them is a difficult task to achieve, as she explains during an interview. For example:

> I am really not the type that talks to them on a regular basis, to my mums …
> but now I kind of try really once in two weeks, once in a week. You know, I
> try to call both, I always have to do both. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis
> Ababa]

Abebech's close connection to both her mothers and her intention not to create a relation of exclusivity with one or the other mirrors her management of contacts, which always happens in parallel. Abebech's communication with her mothers is also structured to avoid potential conflicts generated by feelings of exclusion. Abebech keeps in contact to preserve her

relationships; besides, she covers a role of mediation in the communication between her mothers and their grandchildren to pass on her multi-situated feelings of belongingness to them.

The examples of Abebech and Sara show that with time passing, the relationship amongst members of the international extended family in the post-reconnection stage is sensitive to changes and needs a certain level of emotional and conflict management, mainly when there is no physical proximity. Besides, their experience also highlights that the kin tie might better overcome emotional strain and relational struggles when there is no linguistic barrier.

This consideration seems obvious, but overcoming this obstacle requires a considerable amount of energy and skills. For instance, Abebech's kin ties' interactions request her to speak three languages (Dutch, English, and Amharic), whilst Sara currently speaks two languages (German and English) and is becoming fluent in Amharic. As exemplified by Abebech and Sara's experiences, adoptees involved in this research overcame the linguistic barriers with time by learning Amharic, English, or both, except Samuel. During fieldwork, it emerges that adoptees at ease with different languages, technological access and digital literacy become capable of autonomously managing their multiple relations. Data also suggests that native families' members who managed to reconnect with adoptees with the use of technology possessed the same skills with the only potential exception of adoptees' language fluency. In such cases, the linguistic barrier was overcome by using other accessible online technologies, such as Google Translator.

In adoptees' accounts concerning post-reconnection relations, social media and technologies seem to play a relevant role in the retention and negotiation of direct contacts between them and their family members. As emerged from interviews and participant observation, their ability to manage different aspects of this communication is directly proportional to the time they have been involved in post-reconnection dynamics.

Adoptees who engaged in a long-standing relationship with their native family were confident about their ability to manage communication. On the contrary, those beginning their reconnection or post-reconnection venture were still experiencing communication adjustments. Reasons may be that, in line with current literature on the topic, social media accelerate the pace and frequency of contact. Besides, it provides simple and instant access to personal information and allows sharing of photographs, calls, video calls and instant messaging (Shier, 2021). In these cases, social media creates a double pace in communication.

On the one hand, the rapid fruition of information and audio-visual material consents participants to engage in intense communication rapidly. On the other hand, the accelerated intensity and frequency of such digital encounters might generate emotional and relational strain that is difficult to manage. In other words, adoptees might struggle to consolidate the information they receive, internalise their emotional responses, and adjust the pace of their interactions. This issue happens because the quality of the communication is very personal whilst the level of intimacy between adoptees and native families is not adequate to make the individuals involved in such communication feel comfortable. It might be argued that adoptees that engage in digital encounters and receive sensitive information from individuals with whom there is no emotional closeness or feelings of trust might feel vulnerable and struggle to negotiate the terms of such communication openly.

The notion of vulnerability in reconnection and post-reconnection dynamics relates to the need for mediation or, in a perspective of adoptees' capacity-building, the ability to establish boundaries and maintain suitable online relationships with birth family members, as argued by Black et al. (2016). For instance, it has been argued that information on social media can be limited through privacy settings (Fursland, 2010) or open discussions between adoptive and native families about information sharing (Krueger, 2014). However, in cases of closed inter-country adoption, adoptive families may not be ready or have considered a potential contact from native families. Moreover, the potential unveracity of the adoption documents also makes it difficult for adoptees and adoptive families to foresee this possibility.

Consequently, contact between native families and adoptees in the early stage of their relationship might evolve. Such relationships can develop in the progressive formation of social ties but can also become challenging when adoptees are in a phase of relational impasse. For instance, a deadlock in communication might happen when adoptees are undecided about the purpose of the communication. Contact with native families can offer adoptees a chance to reconnect and know more about their pre-adoption life. Besides, as explored in the previous section, the choice to reconnect does not necessarily imply the desire to re-arrange the idea of family and reconfigure it. Adoptees might not be interested in reconfiguring their family assets nor reconnecting or maintaining a long-time connection with their native family. In these cases, social media makes it more difficult for adoptees to process information and decide the next steps after the reconnection stage. An improper social media communication may become too challenging and make adoptees renounce to continue their relationship with their native family in the post-reconnection process.

These considerations concerning social media contacts and challenges are well illustrated by the story of Mariam and his native uncle. Mariam is an adoptee contacted via social media by her native uncle. After the first contact and once he confirmed her identity, her native uncle engaged in an intense, primarily unidirectional exchange of personal information with her and tried to call her through Facebook several times. Mariam's native uncle was eager to speak to her and share many details concerning her pre-adoption life. Mariam reacted trying to deflect communication on written messages by never answering his calls and adducing motivations of linguistic and internet speed limitations. Mariam also explicitly wrote to her native uncle that she was uncomfortable talking.

By refusing to pick up his calls, Mariam sets a boundary and decides to avoid spoken communication for the time being. Conversely, Mariam's uncle is eager to let her know that whilst she was absent, her native relatives did not receive any news about her. Nevertheless, they cared, worried about her, and looked for her. Mariam's uncle searched for her for a long time because they always considered Mariam part of their kin. When he found her, he was thrilled to finally be in contact with her. On her behalf, Mariam was not even aware she still had living relatives until his uncle's message.

This information gap produces an unbalance in communication. Mariam was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of her native uncle and slowed down the pace of their communication. Sometimes she does not answer for days. Because of this, after two months, Mariam's uncle fears she might feel intimidated and renounced keeping in contact. When reflecting on the communication that followed the first encounter online, her young uncle was self-critical concerning the timing and contents of his interactions with the niece. He conceded that many details he shared at the beginning of their communication probably were too intense. However, her native uncle did not realise it at the beginning of their interaction. Conversely, he lamented the difficulty of this personal and intimate exchange with someone who grew up in the Global North and the cultural misunderstandings concerning the contents, frequency and intensity of their contact.

From an external perspective, Mariam's native uncle's complaints mirror her progressively growing ability to interpose limitations and adapt the communication to her pace. Mariam's boundaries and her uncle's insistency show that their communication is still at a point of relational and cross-cultural negotiation. Arguably, this is possible because even though social media exposes Mariam and her uncle to uncontrolled information sharing, the physical distance and the mediation of technology "does create a boundary and a distance that

participants found helpful at times in terms of managing the contact" (Shier, 2021, p. 417). When there is the capacity to manage online relationships and communication, this distance consents participants to 'pause' the communication when needed, without necessarily withdrawing from it. Online contacts offer the chance to deal with emotions, structure a communication strategy, and safeguard the participants in the conversation.

For instance, even though Mariam explicitly tells her uncle that she is very well with her adoptive family, she does not disconnect from the conversation. If anything, she modifies the pace of the communication by avoiding the insistence of her uncle whilst explaining to him her communicative preferences. On his behalf, the native uncle takes advantage of these pauses to self-reflect on the frequency and quality of contact he has with his niece and adjust interactions to what he believes would encourage her to keep in contact.

At this point of their relationship, Mariam and her native uncle carefully navigate and negotiate the complications they face during post-adoption. Without directions for interactions, they work on boundary management by trial and error. Their communication with no intermediation reveals that relational elements like trust and closeness may emerge from both sides as problematic aspects to deal with, as the native uncle explained. For example:

> At this stage [first contact on social media], I did not trust her. (…) (he reads a message he wrote) "Please tell me if you are not [Mariam], please, please". Do you know why I asked this? Because I suspected [her not to be my niece], I did not trust [her]. [Native uncle, October 2019, Addis Ababa]

Mariam's native uncle is trying to build some relational intimacy with her. This task is hard to pursue because, as illustrated by O'Neill et al. in sibling post-adoption relationships (2018), remote encounters can provoke feelings of fragility and ambiguity. Indeed, this relationship is based on the native uncle's certitude that the kin tie between him and Mariam was never interrupted. In addition, Mariam expressed the wish to know more about her pre-adoption story.

Relational intimacy is crucial also because, contrary to what might be argued, it is reciprocal. As explained by Mariam's native uncle during his interview, he did not trust Mariam or her adoptive mother, and he could feel they did not trust him. The conformation of the social media arena allowed him to contact Mariam and her adoptive family and have immediate access to their profiles. However, this complete accessibility – profiles, walls, pictures,

interests, to name a few – does not simplify the production of intimate relationships. Conversely, it may enhance feelings of fear and vulnerability because it makes it impossible to refuse unwanted contact and potentially impacts other members of the – native or adoptive – family (Samuels, 2018; Haralambie, 2013).

Mariam's story is peculiar because the native family did not meet the adoptee in person, and her case exemplifies the main issues of communication through social media. It makes evident that adoptees and native families share similar issues when dealing with contacts through social media. Other than the linguistic and technological skills and the access to adequate devices to conduct the communication, it seems evident that such contacts also need cross-cultural interactional skills. The ability to navigate social media by establishing boundaries and openly discussing access and limits of online communication seems crucial in reconnection and post-reconnection contacts between adoptees and their native families.

Mobility: a crucial factor for adoptees' self-identification

Mariam's native family wishes to meet her in person soon. In their eyes, reconnection and post-reconnection contacts through social media may be intense and develop social ties, but they do not compensate for physical proximity. Mobility is critical in the relationship between adoptees and their families in the post-reconnection stage.

To frame the notion of mobility in this context, it needs to be pointed out that, as underlined in the first section of this chapter, native relatives listed freedom of movement amongst the reasons to give their children into adoption. This privilege, which comes with specific citizenships or conditions of wealth, is often denied to the adoptees' native families, who generally come from chronically poor backgrounds (Abebe and Aase, 2007), as explored in chapters Five and Six. The only chance adoptees and native families have to meet in person often depends solely on adoptees' right to circulate between countries or offer sponsorship to their native family members and allow them to travel to the Global North. The intrinsic adoptees' opportunity to travel back and forward to Ethiopia is paradoxically the outcome of their native family's adoption choice: to re-move adoptees from their native family and allow their international transfer to a Global North adoptive family.

This part of the section aims to explore mobility as experienced by the adoptees in post-reconnection.

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Adoptees' meetings with their native families took place mainly in Ethiopia. *Vis-à-vis* encounters are primarily characterised by the unidirectional movement of adoptees from the Global North toward Ethiopia, except Abebech.

Abebech's case is peculiar because the first encounter in person with her native mother took place in Europe, as she recalls during the interview. For example:

> First, she [Abebech's native mother] came to Europe, and then she stayed with us for two months, with my adoptive family (she laughs) (…) That was quite a turnaround for her, but it was also her first time outside of Ethiopia (…) We were kind of ok to do that because it is kind of unique, but normally they [European embassies] would not give a Visa if you [Ethiopian person] have nothing that you own. But like, this house [in Ethiopia] is on her name, she had a car, she had other, like, my brother is here [in Ethiopia]. So, she had so many reasons that she would have come back for. So, they gave it [the Visa] to her. And she was paying for her own ticket. Her husband was supporting her from the UK. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

The case of Abebech is pretty unique for several reasons, as she remarks, and shows the potential complexity of the notion of mobility. Furthermore, it offers the chance to explore the entanglements between adoptees' mobility and native families' strategic approach to international migration.

From the adoptees' perspective, the mobility of their native families looks exceptional. On the one hand, the idea of native families involved in the international migration phenomenon can be striking because the central narrative concerning native families, which is the one the adoptees are used to, does not recognise them such agency. On the other hand, once understood that inter-country adoption might also be interpreted as a way to differentiate incomes and experiment with alternative strategies of international mobility, it does not seem off that native families navigate other migration trajectories that might intertwine with adoptees' privileges.

For instance, Abebech's native mother's mobility results from the entanglement of her own economic stability (which gives her enough credentials to obtain a Visa for a Global North country) with Abebech's adoptive mother's availability to sponsor her travel. However, when the reconnection takes place, Abebech's native mother is already entwined in other migration routes that envisage joining her husband in the United Kingdom.

Conversely, Abebech's father moved to Australia on his own, as other adoptees' native relatives did, such as Samuel's brothers, who ventured to South Africa; and Bisrat's native mother, who works in the United Arab Emirates. Furthermore, adoptees' native family mobility might include some of their native siblings who, similarly to them, were given into adoption. For instance, Bisrat's native sisters were one adopted internationally and the other as *yemadego lij*. Besides, Sara's brother was informally adopted by an Ethiopian family in Djibouti as *yeguddifaachaa lij*. Samuel's native family also considered his younger brother's adoption, but then the family situation changed, and they decided to keep him with them.

Adoptees and their siblings' relocation and native families' international trajectories suggest that family members' mobility and circulation are central to the survival of these extended families. It appears that their Ethiopian native families have to regulate the delicate balance between family members who cannot contribute to support the family group, those who may provide some sustenance, and those who are includible in migration trajectories that may produce some remittance or more stable economic support in the future.

This patchwork of migration routes is crucial to differentiate support sources and have more chances to negotiate and diversify the family's financial support. This aspect might seem unrelated to the matter of adoptees' mobility, but it is at the origin of native families' choice of inter-country adoption and therefore influences their relationships with the adoptees in the post-adoption stage, and adoptees' own choices. For instance, Samuel's native parents insist on him to remain in the Global North and profit from the benefits he has access to from his current situation in the Global North.

To this extent, the intercountry adoption path is akin to other international migration strategies implemented by native families. If viewed from the perspective of mobility, adoptees' relation with Ethiopia is comparable to the tie between Ethiopians of the diaspora and their homeland, as further explored later in this section.

Another point that Abebech's experience makes evident is that the 'gift of free movement' may also indirectly pass to native families. From a (post)colonial feminist perspective, native families' mobility is framed in terms of adoptees and adoptive families' potential to give native family members access to 'first-class' migration flows that would otherwise be forbidden to them as 'subaltern' (post)colonial subjects (Spivak, 1988). Genet's story exemplifies this peculiarity.

When we met in Addis Ababa, Genet was 15 years old. She has lived in Australia with her adoptive mother since she was 9. As she explained during the meeting, that was her second

visit to Ethiopia to meet her native family, whom she and her Australian adoptive mother called "her family, her siblings". Genet's adoptive mother is not very keen on travelling to Ethiopia. She came to Ethiopia again for her adoptive daughter, and she does not know if she will accompany Genet again for a third trip because she finds Ethiopia very discomforting. However, she keeps returning to Genet's country because she knows that her daughter needs physical, material proximity to her native family. On her behalf, Genet's adoptive mother did not intend to visit Ethiopia or move there regularly. She travels with Genet to visit her native family with the hope that her adoptive daughter – whom she calls by her name Genet – might decide in the future to stay permanently with her in Australia. When Genet hears her mother's expectations, she does not reply.

Genet and her adoptive mother are in a negotiation phase in their relationship. Genet's adoption quickly turned out to be different from the normative adoptive family that her adoptive mother was expecting when she decided to adopt. Genet's adoptive mother believed her relations with Ethiopia would end once she adopted Genet; she wished for no connection nor relational bonds with her adoptive daughter's country of origin or native family. However, her mobility is 'glued' to the one of Genet, who considers Ethiopia her home and wishes to return as many times as possible. According to their accounts, Genet's mobility unceasingly takes her back to Ethiopia, which, contrary to her adoptive mother's expectation, is to Genet the unique place where her kin ties are.

From Genet's perspective, her kin are exclusively composed of her Ethiopian family. When adopted, Genet did not show any interest in creating new family ties. When asked about her family, she explained, "We are nine siblings", describing her native family solely, and did not add any other family member. Genet feels displaced. She does not identify herself with her social self in Australia, and her adoptive mother recognises Genet's struggles to appease the geographical fracture that distances the place where she lives, in the Global North, from her native relatives.

Genet's adoption resembles a form of inter-country child transfer. Her experience suggests that inter-country adoption has several points of contact with international kinship care placements. As illustrated by Tesfaye (2016), the Ethiopian authorities have managed international kinship care arrangements between Ethiopia and Australia as forms of private international arrangements or relatives' international adoption (meaning that the child's custody shifts from her Ethiopian guardian in Ethiopia to an Ethiopian relative abroad). Tesfaye focuses on the motivations that push Ethiopian native families to opt for inter-country child

relocation rather than local kinship care. Similarly to this research, his study argues that international migration strategies and extended family collectives' reciprocity and mutual aid are amongst the main factors for considering inter-country child relocation. Moreover, Tesfaye argues that "the pre-existing informal support mechanism in Ethiopia, especially in the form of kinship care" (Tesfaye, 2016, p. 77), enhanced the phenomenon of oversea child placements.

Tesfaye's considerations of kin interdependence and international child relocation resonate with Genet's story. Given her age and the fact that she lived with her native family until her adoption, Genet is not interested in establishing other kin ties. She already has a strong identity and kin belongingness with her native family, and even though it is not clear whether her adoption was discussed with Genet, it is evident that she struggles to adapt to her new living situation. To reduce the distance between Genet's wishes and her (adoptive and native) families' needs, her adoptive mother suggested moving a family member to live with them in Australia.

In Genet's case, the element of native relatives' mobility is crucial. Native family members' mobility is the pivotal element that Genet's adoptive mother is trying to deploy to find a compromise with her relational needs and settle permanently with Genet in their Global North home. Genet's adoptive mother aims to convince Genet's younger native sister, who had just turned 18, to join them in Australia to study. The native sister's presence would support Genet's reconciliation with her multiple selves.

In this story, Genet's freedom of movement is stretched to other members of her native family to reunite kinship through mobility. Genet's acquired citizenship, her new Global North political body, may offer to her native family international migration means that would have been otherwise denied to them. Therefore, Genet and her adoptive mother can now negotiate the presence of her native family in the Global North and make Genet's sister's political body suitable to travel internationally. This convergence between two modes of conditioned mobility uncovers another critical element, which is the concept of desirability.

Adoptees are relocated in the Global North 'to belong' to the (mostly) White nuclear family model. To do so, the biopolitical logics concerning their international relocation work on an intimate level to reframe and differentiate the adoptee's politic and social body, whose presence is desired and privileged, from other international migrants. Myong et al. (2015) argue that this effort of intimization is contingent on creating a different narrative for migrant adoptees, who are meant to become Global North's citizens through the creation of solid kin ties with the adoptive family. For example:

While the "ability to integrate" is managed through legislative measures and by desk employees, the "ability to attach" is largely managed within the intimate setting of the adoptive family or the relation between child and therapist. (Myong et al., 2015, p. 74)

The adoptee's privileged migration in a time of anti-immigration politics is not contentious because the adopted child is reconfigured to become a White Global North politic and social body, and her reconfiguration is almost entirely performed on an intimate level.

This perspective offers insights into Genet's mobility story because she does not conform to her adoptee status. Genet does not belong, does not want to belong. She refuses to rediscuss her Ethiopian kin tie and fends off her adoptive mother's attempts to reconfigure her presence in the Global North as Australian. The migration of Genet's native sister is an act of reconciliation between Genet and her adoptive mother, who bridge the sister's international migration by assembling different regulatory regimes. Genet's selected inclusion in the Global North facilitates her native sister's temporary access and allows two family members whose bodies are differently regulated to reunite in the Global North.

In conclusion, Genet's mobility might be interpreted as a 'breach' in the Global North's biopolitical governance of adoptees' bodies. It is a child relocation story that resembles Ethiopian international kinship care arrangements because Genet is an older child, well-aware of the ties and dynamics of reciprocity and support between her and her Ethiopian kin. Her feelings of belongingness cannot be shattered, and her mobility becomes a tool to pave 'intimate routes' for further encounters and relocations in post-adoption.

Genet's complete self-identification with the 'Ethiopian' identity suggests another important topic concerning mobility. Like Genet but to different degrees, other adoptees travelling to Ethiopia felt ground of belongingness – both those who reconnected and those still searching for their birth family. In this case, adoptees' mobility reveals an in-depth connection with their feelings of belongingness. The returning experience resonates with the necessity of having a physical place to identify oneself even partially or, as Sara said, feeling not identifiable. For example:

To be here and to be there makes me feel complete, maybe this sounds weird, but ... here [in Ethiopia], I have this feeling that I belong here because I was born here, and also ... this is, maybe this sounds really weird, this thing that you go out, and nobody would recognise you. (...) This is very special to

me. I do not know why this is ... In Switzerland, this is not happening. Sometimes, I get homesick, and I really want to come to Ethiopia, but I do not want to live here, I want to live in Switzerland, (...) so, I had like … both sides, no? Both sides. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

This mechanism is ambivalent, as Sara underlines. To her, belongingness is not exclusively connected to a specific geographic space. Quite the reverse, multiple selves may simultaneously coexist in different locations. In the case of Sara, several trips to Ethiopia nurtured in her a sense of belongingness. Whilst the first trips were mainly focused on her birth family search and evolved around the concept of 'origins', now Sara is reconfiguring her own interpretation of her post-adoption, post-reconnection story. Her account establishes a narration that, thanks to the reconnection, does not revolve around the concept of pre and post-adoption but sections and simultaneously connects several timespans of her life – the pre-separation, the time in the childcare institution, the adoption, the search, the reconnection, the post-reconnection. In Sara's explication, the adoption event no longer needs to be named. Instead, she distinguishes her mothers by their nationality and defines places according to the peculiar sense of belonging that she attributes to them. Ethiopia becomes "my country", the place that produces a feeling of homesickness in her. Switzerland is where she grew up, shaping her into the young adult she is.

Sara's interpretation of her presence in Ethiopia offers insights into the relationship between Ethio-descendant adoptees and the diaspora. The Diaspora Policy (2013) defined the Ethiopian diaspora members as "Ethiopians and foreign nationals of Ethiopian origins residing outside Ethiopia" (Diaspora Policy, 2013, p. 6). Ethio-descendant adoptees are included in this category, as specified in the document. It might be argued that adoptees and Ethiopian diaspora's experiences are similar when they travel to Ethiopia because both categories have to face expectations related to their trajectories of international migration.

Building on from this idea, Sara's multi-sited concept of belongingness and home also resonates with studies concerning the transnational belongingness of people in the diaspora. Blunt and Dowling (2006) claim that diasporic people's quest for belongingness is shaped by "the existence of multiple homes, diverse homemaking practices, and the intersections of home, memory, identity and belonging" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006, p. 199). Similarly, Walsh (2006) argues that transnational migrants experience the concept of home as fluid and multiple, a "localised and (trans)national space of belonging" (Walsh, 2006, p. 123) situated

between the material and immaterial conceptualisation of homing[81]. King and Christou's considerations on counter-diasporic migration (2008) envisage the relation between belongingness, identity and home as an "unsettling consciousness of the state of migrancy" (King and Christou, 2008, p. 22).

To give sense to this feeling of in-betweenness, when she is in Ethiopia, Sara employs her social body(ies) to articulate her multiple belongingness and hybridity. Her creative way to conceptualise her return to Ethiopia is to sew the different spatial and temporal stages of her adoptive experience, similarly to what King and Christou theorise for diaspora's second generation, whose search for 'belonging' and 'home' is often "an enactment of family heritage across time and space" (King and Christou, 2008, p. 16). Indeed, her visits in Ethiopia are compelled to a daily routine: volunteering at the residential childcare institution, in the exact section where she was abandoned; being hosted and learning Amharic from the person who intermediated her reconnection; visiting her mother in the health centre where she moved her after their reconnection. In her post-reconnection experience, Sara connects different temporal phases through her everyday life in Ethiopia, which supports her personal reconfiguration and meaning attribution.

Sara's returning experience also resonates with Basu's claim about the 'return to roots' as a process of (self-) discovery concerning the "locating of the narratives of the self within broader narratives of families, cultures, nations and diasporas" (Basu, 2004, p. 40). In the reappropriation process of her own narrative, Sara benefits from her Swiss parents' trust. Their support, practically expressed through their permission and financial help to go to Ethiopia alone, is a sign of recognition of her path to self-discovery and identification that encourages Sara's mobility. For example:

> For them [Sara's adoptive parents], I am still a child, but still, I was telling
> them I really needed to go to my country [Ethiopia] now, and they are sure I
> will come back, so they do not say anything. They know it is very important
> for me, and it is important for them to let me go. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis
> Ababa]

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[81] In social sciences, the traditional use of the term 'homing' revolves around the entanglement between mobility, transnationality and the different ways of making and feeling home (Yapo and Boccagni, 2020). Here, this concept is used to specifically address diasporic bodies' experiences of transnationality, mobility and belongingness.

Sara's adoptive parents did not feel threatened by her reappropriation path: this reinforced her feelings of double belongingness for both countries. As a result, Sara feels at home in Ethiopia and Switzerland and considers those locations as spaces where her selves find recognition and identification. At the same time, both places make her feel alienated and do not allow her identification as a whole. Sara's process of homing in her perceived condition of in-betweenness and multiple belongingness works through the existence of her loved ones. To her, the existence of significant people and meaningful interactions gives value to the places they inhabit and produces transnational geography of kin belongingness. This interconnection between belongingness, kinship and places works differently in the experience of Abebech.

Similarly to the other adoptees, Abebech's mobility to Ethiopia is a life-changing experience. Abebech's process of reappropriation of her own narrative also works through mobility but implies finding a deeper connection to the history of her native family. For example:

> I went to the other extreme, right? (…) I went completely the other way. I wanted to be back to my roots. I wanted to understand about Africa. [In Europe] I became really like a kind of empty White man, you know? [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Abebech's statement might at first sound like a mythical, symbolic diasporic return to the homeland, as Bruner (1996) described African Americans' travels to the slave ports of Ghana. However, differently than Sara and Bruner's participants, Abebech's return to the roots is not only symbolically framed as a reconnection to the 'homeland'. Abebech physically and permanently moves to Ethiopia as a performative act and a quest for belonging.

To Abebech, recomposing her native family's genealogical tree and exploring her ancestral connection to the history and lands of Ethiopia in terms of lineage, blood and corporeality roots her sense of belongingness within her 'Ethiopianness'. Abebech describes getting in touch with her Ethiopian family as an act to regain control over the "empty White man" she said she became[82].

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[82] Abebech's words echo Frantz Fanon's major autoethnographic work 'Black Skin, White Masks' (1952), which refers to the subjugated, postcolonial dynamics that Afro-descendants of the colonies endured in the Global North when confronting White, coloniser subjects. Abebech's consideration surely reminds that most Ethio and Afro-descendant adoptees are transracially adopted. However, Abebech's Fanonian ponderation on Afro-descendants' alienation in the Global North also refers to structural racism and transracial adoptees' struggle to live in contexts where blackness is forced to exist 'in relation' or 'in comparison' to whiteness.

To Abebech, this reference intends to explain her choice to move away from the idealisation of whiteness, which she felt did not belong to her, to get closer to her Ethiopian roots. Such racialised description of her experience of return resonates with Potter and Phillips' exploration of second-generation 'Bajan-Brits' return to Barbados (2006). Their work focused on the pervasive effect of Bajan-Brits' symbolical whiteness on notions of otherness, belongingness and in-betweenness. Similarly, Abebech and her Ethiopian social body carry with them the 'whiteness' of her adoption. Participant observation suggested that all the adoptees interviewed in Ethiopia felt the need to reduce indicators of their nationality and mimick local Ethiopians. For instance, Sara worked very hard during her stay on the introductory talks in Amharic and non-verbal greetings with the aim not to be spotted as an outsider, whilst Biruk forbade the researcher to speak English to him whilst they were on the bus because he did not want to be treated as a foreigner. In his article on the 'return' of African Americans to Ghana, Fehler (2011) deploys Bhabha's postcolonial conceptualisation of mimicry (1994) to offer an interpretative lens for this quest for similarity. According to Fehler, this may be a strategy employed to socialise the body to pass for locals, or "to become (in)visible, seen but not seen" (Fehler, 2011, p. 42), and access a symbolic community to answer the need to 'belong'. Fehler's participants describe their effort to perform 'Africanness' as a variety of cultural markers but also other indicators that are embedded in their bodies' memories, as explained by one of Fehler's participants:

> (…) Even when blacks go home [to Africa], we are still looked at as white … because of the way we speak, because we have been domesticated to be like Europeans. We identify more with white people than we do with Africa. All those things you gotta overcome, and that takes years and years of culturalisation and socialisation to let them [Africans] know that we are one. (Fehler, 2011, p. 596).

However, for adoptees, this is not enough to separate from the symbolic whiteness they carry within their kin ties. For instance, Bisrat, who at the age of 16 has lived in Ethiopia for almost fourteen years, lives in an Ethiopian neighbourhood, has Ethiopian friends and schoolmates, and a numerous Ethiopian biological and social kin; who wears and speaks accordingly to the urban area where he lives, eats Ethiopian, speaks Amharic. Bisrat has been recently labelled by his peers *tikur ferenji*, literally "Black foreigner". This label has deeply hurt Bisrat, who considered himself wholly included in his Ethiopian cultural milieu, and discovered that, to his friends, he is "almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86).

Bisrat lives in Ethiopia, and his mobility mainly focuses on the summer holidays with his adoptive kin. The adoptive and step-family of Bisrat were shadowed for two years through participant observation and interviews. At the beginning of the fieldwork, when he was 13 years old, he liked to spend time in Europe, but he wanted to live in Ethiopia. At the end of the fieldwork, Bisrat was 16 years old, and his geographical desires changed. He agreed with his adoptive family he would move to Europe for high school. On their behalf, his family in Ethiopia is distraught that Bisrat's 'blackness' would put him at risk of discriminatory reactions, as explained by his adoptive father. For example:

> Honestly, I see him better off here [in Ethiopia] than there [in Spain]. Because
> here (...) there are people who love him. In Spain … now he is 14 years old,
> 15 years old. He moved from being the *negro negrito* to the *negro negraço*. It
> is a different story when people meet a Black teenager on the road. (…) They
> do not have pleasant reactions or friendly attitudes. [Adoptive father,
> October 2017, Addis Ababa]

With these words, the adoptive father of Bisrat explicates his worriedness concerning discrimination against his son who transitioned from childhood to adulthood. As his father underlined, the connotation of "being Black" moved from the stereotypical category of *negrito*, a little Black child, to the one of *negraço*, a corpulent Black man[83]. With his doubts, Bisrat's adoptive father highlights different attitudes that may drive reactions in the context where Bisrat is going to live. Similarly, the Ethiopian step-mother of Bisrat disagrees with his potential transfer to the Global North, where she says she experiences discrimination herself every time they visit their family in Europe.

In this case, Bisrat's desire for mobility is limited by concerns related to his age and phenotypical features, an issue that did not exist before he grew out of childhood, as his adoptive father underlines. Many adoptees problematised blackness in the Global North as one of the elements that made them feel at home in Ethiopia, as Sara and Abebech emphasised. The matter concerns the preference for child mobility and relocation from the Global South to the Global North (De Graeve, 2015; Myong et al., 2015; Taliani, 2015). Instead, adults and young adults who exercise their mobility and migration rights have to face issues related to ethnicisation of labour (Chow, 2002, p. 34), citizens/migrants-related

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[83] *Negrito* and *negraço* are here translated with the meanings the participant ascribed to such terms.

misunderstandings and mistreatments (Yngvesson, 2006), stereotypization and xenophobic discrimination. That has been underlined as a challenging issue for many adult and young adult adoptees living in the Global North, who recounted being mistaken for caregivers or servants of their adoptive parents, asylum seekers, foreigners (Costa, 2013). In this section, this element brings to the surface that feelings of belongingness in inter-country adoption may be entangled with social body configurations and the consequent negotiations and discrimination that adoptees must address concerning the external perception of their social self in the Global North.

For instance, Abebech discusses this aspect in relation to the mechanism of a) the production of a European social body once the adoption takes place; and b) the disconnection of the adoptee from her previous Ethiopian social body. For example:

> There is a lack of understanding behind the fact that once a child goes, he loses his culture, his language, his people, everything, right? So, it is like losing one life completely and re-built another and not understanding also interracial issues. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Abebech's point about the native family's difficulty in understanding the child relocation to the Global North also includes problematised notions of cultural socialisation (Harrison et al., 1990). For racial and ethnic minorities, cultural socialisation "specifically entails the transmission of cultural values, beliefs, customs, and behaviours from parents, family, friends, and community to children that foster racial/ethnic identity development, equip children with coping strategies to deal with racism and discrimination, and encourage prosocial behaviour and appropriate participation in society" (Harrison et al., 1990, pp. 717-718). In the case of transracial adoptees, White adoptive families are less likely to have first-hand knowledge of adoptees' experience in the adoptive cultural milieu (Lee et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2015; Vonk et al., 2010) and be able to support their racialised experience in the Global North.

The phenotypical difference is an issue that adoptees raised during interviews. It ranges from the transracial adoption paradox (Lee, 2003) of the apparent racial and ethnic difference existing between adoptees and their adoptive kin and community (even when the adoptees' milieu includes other Ethio-descendant or Afro-descendant adoptees, like in Sara's case) to structural issues such as racism, pointed out by Bisrat's migration trajectories. Nonetheless, adoptees' phenotypical characteristics also make them somehow different, or 'misplaced', in their homeland, like Sara and Samuel, who are expected to speak local languages. Adoptees'

symbolic whiteness stigmatises or differentiates their bodies within the community as diasporic, such as in Bisrat's case.

8.4 The native family perspective on adoptive families: promises, support, interactions

This section considers the relationship between the native and the adoptive family in the post-reconnection process. Two points of view are considered. The first is the position of the adoptive family; the second is the perception native families have of their relationship with the adoptive family. The first point centres on the reconfiguration of the adoptive families, whilst the second refers to the interpretation of the native family concerning the power dynamics amongst families internationally reconnected.

Exclusivity and inclusiveness in the making of the kin

Several native families explained they felt disqualified by the adoptive families. Indeed, native families who took part in the research recognised a power unbalance in their relationship. This perception was supported by the intermediaries, who recounted that adoptive families often begin the search for origins moved by the requests of their children or pushed by families' issues. This *modus operandi* can be seen in the practice in the reconnection story of Samuel, who decided to search for his native family. In his adoptive family's opinion, their choice was obligatory since it was impossible to deal with their intrafamily issues otherwise. The reconnection could have been prevented if the relationship with Samuel had been considered less problematic, as the adoptive father explains whilst talking about other adoptive parents who decided not to search for the native family of their children. As Samuel's adoptive father explains:

> Maybe the other [adoptees] are fine. They are happy, and why [their adoptive parents] should take them to Ethiopia? They [the adoptees] are fine, calm, peaceful. They do not complain. Why should they [adoptive parents] take them [to Ethiopia]? [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

This interpretation also applies to the requests of Gabriel, the native father presented in chapter Seven, who is trying to contact his son, Abebe. The intermediary, Lidiya, who attempts to help Gabriel, receives a similar answer from Samuel's adoptive father, as explained during a follow-up interview. For example:

> He [the adoptive father of Samuel] is very happy about the father [of Abebe].
> However, he is very sorry because the adoptee is very peaceful … he
> [Samuel's adoptive father] does not see the need to put them in contact, talk
> about it, and show [Abebe] the video. Even seeing a picture of him [Gabriel]
> could be an issue because (…) the child is very happy and quiet, he plays, he
> does not feel the need to know about his family. Because going there and
> telling him his father wants to see him, know more about him, let's say, if we
> tell him these things, apart from the fact that his [adoptive] family would kill
> us, because they do not [approve] … and then, this kid now is quiet. If he
> understands we are doing this thing, and then he has a crisis … "Why do you
> want to put in crisis a kid who is fine? Why?" [asked Samuel's adoptive
> parent]. I answered ok, let it go. The moment when the kid will ask will come.
> So, I thanked [Samuel's adoptive father], and told the native father that the
> kid is well and that, when the moment comes, the kid himself will look for
> him … [Intermediary, December 2019, Addis Ababa]

This interpretation envisages reconnection as the last resort to solve problematic issues but also a potential source of problems within the nuclear family. This view did not find correspondence with the accounts of two adoptees, who were actively guided and supported by their adoptive parents in searching for their native families, such as Sara and Abebech. Sara and Abebech consider the ability of their adoptive parents to understand their needs as a crucial element in the positive outcome they eventually reached in their relationship with the native family. Abebech explains her experience:

> My [adoptive] mum immediately was like, "Ok, even if you are not interested
> in this, hang on this". So, even if I was not saying it, she knew I was, and she
> asked them [acquaintances] to search for my [native] family. [Adoptee,
> November 2019, Addis Ababa]

For Abebech, the ability of her mother to understand her needs before expressing them was vital in her search and in strengthening their relationship when Abebech was a teenager

struggling with her identity. Likewise, in the case of Sara, the adoptive family decided to search for her native family to deal with identity issues that were beginning to surface. For example:

> My sister and I, we were sometimes sad because we were asking our parents [questions] like "Do we have siblings? How does my mother look, how does my father look, where are we from, where were we born?". Many questions. And sometimes you just cry for … nothing. Because there is always something unfulfilled because we do not know. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

In both the cases of Abebech and Sara, their adoptive families had close relations with other families who reconnected and shared their experiences with them. As Sara explained:

> Some who went to Ethiopia shared their experiences with us, and they said it was very good being here [in Ethiopia]. It will just … fill a gap that, you know, where you are from, it is just … even if you do not like it, you just know it by then, you know you are from here. You can come back [to Ethiopia] every time you want. But I can still get there [to Switzerland], too. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

According to Sara's interpretation, the guidance of her parents in re-establishing missing links with Ethiopia gave her the freedom to relate with no fear with her native country. It also gave her the power to decide where to stay and what relations of belongingness establish with different places.

A common element in the stories of Abebech, Sara, and Samuel is that adoptive families started their journey towards reconnection from their perception of the needs of their daughters and son. The difference is in how parents framed those needs. In the case of Samuel, his inability to cope with his everyday life became the expression of that need. In the case of Sara and Abebech, the need is articulated in terms of identity inquiries. However, it does not reach the point of generating a fracture within the family group. This aspect, which arose from the reconnection stage, impacts the post-reconnection stage on the re-organisation of the adoptive family structure. Extracts from interviews give an idea of how adoptive families see themselves after having met the native family of the adoptee. Participants argue that two main scenarios may take place. In the first situation, the predominant tension is the desire to restructure peaceful relationships within the original

adoptive family unit. In the second, it is the connection between past and present time in the narrative of the adoptive parents that leads to a potential reconfiguration of family ties.

In the first scenario, the reconnection trip aims to restore an intra-familiar balance, as explained by Samuel's adoptive father. For example:

> Adoptive father: Let's hope that this will be a restarting point for us ... stronger, tighter to us, all the four of us.
>
> Researcher: what do you mean by restart?
>
> Adoptive father: restarting as a tighter family. Because we do not, we really got to the point where … we were at the end of our rope. So, we hope that this experience will tighten, tighten him, tighten him to us even though we keep contact with the [native family] (…) because otherwise, this trip did not make sense, it does not make sense.
>
>   [Adoptive father, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

Samuel's adoptive father invested emotionally in this trip to Ethiopia. He perceives it as a chance to have a fresh start for his family. He intends to lay the ground to recover from a period of complex relationships that made their family structure almost collapse. For him, the reconnection stage is the transitional phase that would hopefully end with a re-sewing of the relationship between Samuel and his adoptive parents. In this interpretation, the weight of the native family is functional to make the daily life dynamics of the adoptive family unit work. As his adoptive mother recalls:

> We always feel like the family of Samuel, and we consider him as our full-fledged son (…). I tell him: "Samuel, you have two families, the family of 'before', that in any way we understood that loved you, and there is us. I mean, it is all you. You are a whole of them and us, now even in terms of mentality". I mean, I am not jealous of this family. On the contrary, I mean, I thank them, this family, because their sacrifice allowed us … to become parents. At the same time, maybe we … I mean, in any way we brought him back to them, we showed them he is fine, that he grew up, that we are doing [things for him]. It is an exchange. [Adoptive mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The adoptive mother portrays the native family as something that concerns Samuel's past. In the present, she depicts the family of origin as geographically and emotionally distant. The narrative of the sacrifice of the native family who decided to give away their child as the last gesture of extreme love sets the relation between the two family groups on a temporal line: the past, which belongs to the native family, and the future, which belongs to the adoptive family. As explained by the adoptive mother, the presence of the adoptive family in the Kembata Tembaro zone does not imply a unification of the two families in an international, extended family. Instead, it proves a separation of their temporal and family roles with Samuel. His native family, the biological family, gave him birth, whilst the adoptive family took the responsibility of raising him. The "exchange" she refers to builds on their commitment to the native family, proving they are seriously taking responsibility in their role as parents and caregivers. To her, the exchange is not a prelude to the reconfiguration of their family group. It rather is part of a process of restoration of the 'truth of the origins' of Samuel. The 'rescue' narrative contributes to restoring their role as adoptive parents. The rescue of a child with no future in Ethiopia, according to the adoptive father. In this framework, the adoptive family exclusivity represents the basis of the social construction of this fictive kinship relation. In the adoptive story of this family, a relational breach disconnects the past, present and future times of the adoption. Whilst the reconnection has been an experience of extreme emotional impact on their lives, Samuel's adoptive family does not see room for future entanglements with the native family in the post-reconnection stage, as emerged during an interview. For example:

> Researcher: Would you like to keep in contact with Samuel's native family?
>
> Adoptive father: If it is for his sake … if he needs to hear from them, sometimes … the call, there is that [Italian] famous advertise, that a call makes your life longer (he smiles) … otherwise, we would never come until here, no? (he smiles).
>
> Adoptive mother: If it would be good to hear from them now and then, send them something, sometime … we … yes, absolutely, he [Samuel's adoptive father] has been given the phone number of the brother, the one in South Africa, and then he was given the phone number of the other brother who still lives at home [with the native parents], so maybe sometimes we can call each other.
>
> [Adoptive father and mother, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The quality and frequency of the communication that Samuel intends to maintain in the post-reconnection stage diverges from the sporadic contacts that the adoptive family envisaged, as underlined in the previous section.

The interpretation of the adoptive family of Samuel concerning the post-reconnection stage differs from the second scenario, which is the one recounted by Abebech and Sara regarding their adoptive parents. Abebech and Sara also found a connection between past and present times in the narrative of their adoptive parents. However, according to their discourse, their adoptive parents could comprehend the potential existence of the native family before searching and reconnecting with them. Therefore, they often included them in their discourses related to their parental role. As explained by Abebech:

> I think the main reason why it is all different is that my Dutch mother always said like, "I am a mother, I am a mother to you, but your mother is out there somewhere, or ..." you know, we used to think she [Abebech's native mother] was dead (she laughs). She came to live with us when I was 18. [Before that] I did not know she was alive. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

The adoptive mother of Abebech imagined potential native kin ties even when, as specified by Abebech, her adoptive documents stated that she had been found in the street next to her dead native mother. Similarly, Sara depicts her adoptive mother as able to hold in a relation of continuity the 'before' and 'after' adoption. Indeed, she keeps a figurative dialogical relationship between spaces, kinship and mobility when she describes to Sara the country she left as a country where she could return. For example:

> It was my Swiss mum who always told me, "It was us who took you away from there, so now it is us to make you come back again". That is what she said. [Adoptee, July 2019, Addis Ababa]

As underlined by the descriptions of Sara and Abebech, their adoptive parents base their fictive kinship relation on the presumption or assumption of a potential presence of native relatives. That allow adoptees and adoptive families to rework and reconfigure their family ties in an inclusive way in the post-reconnection stage.

The comparison between the first and second experiences shows two family scenarios based on different fictive kinship interpretations. In the latter, the adoptive family envisages a reoccurrence of the native family members since its early stages. Hence, the parents co-

construct their relationship with the child following an inclusive adoptive family paradigm. In the former, the adoptive family predicts the exclusivity of the parental role in the adoption process. Therefore, parents consider a clean break with the pre-adoption stage and, consequently, apply an exclusive adoptive family paradigm. This idea of parental 'uniqueness' is quite predominant in the Global North, and its universalisation is challenging in the Ethiopian adoptive context, where multi-parental care is ordinary and considered central to the social reproduction system. Several Ethiopian intermediaries involved in the research explained the connection between these different culturally rooted understandings of fictive kinship as the 'gratuitousness' of the adoptive act. In the Global North, the concept of gratuitousness is addressed in conjunction with the idea of adoption as an extreme, unselfish act of parental love from the family of origin. Conversely, here gratuitousness is addressed as the duty of the adoptive family to privilege the child and the right to know about her roots over their parental interests of unicity. The intermediary Lidiya problematises parental exclusivity in relation to the 'gratuitousness' behind the adoptive act. For example:

> We [human beings] do not always adopt for egoistic needs. We do it for gratuitousness. This gratuitousness must characterise also each parent that wants to adopt because I do not seek [adoption] for my personal satisfaction but for the joy of the child that I adopt. When you position yourself in this way, it comes by default [the gratuitousness]. Then, ok, the child wants her or his origins back. She or he wants to know her or his origins and get her or his identity back. That gives her joy, so you must be happy, even if it costs you dearly. It may cost you dearly. It is true because we are all human beings, so we feel that feeling. However, when you are a person who gives the chance of a better life to someone else, you also are basically a good person, right? Then, you must nourish this side and allow this goodness to prevail in the adoptive parents. I would be happy to be the only parent of my child, but I am not because I did not make him biologically. As such, I cannot deny them [the origins] to a person because the human being is complex (…) the more your past, your origin is denied, the more you search for it. That is how it works. [Intermediary, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

In her reflections concerning the responsibility of the adoptive parent to support the child having "his origins back", the intermediary raises issues regarding inter-country adoption that has been long debated. Her idea of international adoption as an act characterised by the

absence of personal interests collides with numerous studies that pointed at inter-country adoption as a demand-driven market, both in economic and human resources terms (Cheney, 2014; Smolin, 2010; Goodwin, 2010; Dorow, 2010 ; Dickens, 2009 ; Briggs, 2003.). As Lidiya partially discloses, intermediaries occupy a tricky position whilst conciliating cultural gaps and negotiating different expectations, as further explained in the next section.

Economic support in the adoptive triad and the role of 'culture'

When reconnections occur, another issue that recurrently emerges is providing sustenance to native families. In post-reconnection, adoptive families and adoptees often offer economic support to the native family. This support might take a financial or material form. In the latter, the intermediaries receive the money to buy items the adoptive family would like to donate to the native family. In this circumstance, intermediaries also take care of the delivery of the goods – for instance, scholar material for the education of the siblings of the adoptees. In the case of economic support, the adoptive family might provide it directly or through the mediation of intermediaries. Most participants reported that the adoptive families who maintain relations during the post-reconnection also financially support native families, especially after observing the disparity in their living conditions. According to intermediaries, native families do not always ask for financial support during reconnection. When it happens, intermediaries try to anticipate that situation by informing beforehand families that the counterpart in the conversation might not share the same priorities. When this information does not limit the families' requests, intermediaries might find other ways to mediate the communication. Many intermediaries avoid translating the most complex bits. That is the case with Sara. The intermediary who facilitated her first meeting with the native family was shocked by the insistence the native family showed when asking for money. Sara and her adoptive family were unaware of this because the intermediary usually does not translate the immediate requests for economic support of the native family but instead tries to move the conversation to family topics. As recalled by the intermediary who mediated Sara's reconnection:

> I told them, "We are here to talk about family. Let's talk about family".
> [Intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

The dynamic of mutual support, which usually results in the help of the financially and socially most solid family members toward the most vulnerable ones, might interest the native family

from the very beginning of the process of reconnection. This aspect has been framed as a reason for concern for adoptive families. It was also described by Abebech, who worked as an intermediary for several years, as a reasoning deeply rooted in Ethiopia's socio-economic conditions and child-raising logics. For example:

> In Ethiopia, your pension will be your children. They will be the ones who take care of you when you are older. The government does not support you. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

This reflection introduces the welfare issue of giving children into adoption as investing – and potentially losing – the only support the group members will have in the future in a context where the welfare system is non-existent. Besides, the perceived well-being in this socio-cultural setting impacts the whole system of priorities when *vis-à-vis* meetings with Global North families occur, as reported in the interview notes of a meeting with an intermediary who asked not to be recorded. For example:

> Interview note:
> When I ask the intermediary to explain better what she means, she tells me: "Culture, it is just culture, Ethiopian culture". I asked her if she could describe to me what it means. She explains: "For example, when Ethiopians meet, they talk, ask how the other person is doing, drink a coffee, and at that point, you start talking about what you met for, they get to the central part of the conversation. On the contrary, Swiss people need to talk about everything in detail. When adoptive families visit, they talk about how they are feeling; they show pictures of mountains, children dancing, and pictures of dogs". (…) She adds that Swiss families tell native families about their children's hobbies and their guitar or classic dance classes. However, Ethiopian birth families are interested in other information: which grade the child is attending, her marks, what she is doing (for her career and school) if she will go to the university afterwards. Nowadays, in Ethiopia (…), children who attend after-school activities (…) are just a few of the total. It is the minority. Most children are "school *injera bunna*" (school, food, prepare coffee), and then they get to the essential things. Swiss families say things like, "She likes to sing, is it something she gets from here, is it a cultural thing?" and the intermediary vigorously answers herself, "No!". [Intermediary, August 2019, Addis Ababa]

This intermediary builds her position on the same logic of reciprocal intergenerational care. During the interview, she vigorously underlines the extent of the gap between Swiss and Ethiopian parents' priority in the development and socialisation of the child. The adoptive families consider the role of leisure time and creative skills crucial in the child's growth. From the Ethiopian point of you, a child given into adoption is more likely to get proper instruction and a job and make a significant step forward in her life and the life of her family. This consideration resonates with the exploration of birth families' communication with the adoptees in a previous section of this chapter. In that paragraph, the birth father of the adoptee, Mohamed, briefly mentions the theme of the school during a family group deferred audio-video call to Mohamed. Native families and intermediaries who participated in this research frequently raised the topic of the academic performance of adoptees as relevant. For those families who decided to give their children out for adoption to invest in a better life, obtaining good marks and investing in proper education implies better chances for all the family group.

This intermediary also underlines this point when talking about reconnection and post-reconnection relations. The intermediary marks this opposition as a sharp dichotomy that echoes the child-welfare model versus the parents-welfare model described by Blackhurst (1996). This also resonates with the Global socio-economic inequalities that differentiate the access to resources in the Global South and North and the consequent choices that family groups have or have not made to capitalise on their human resources. The comments of the Ethiopian intermediary concerning the adoptive families' investment of affective and economic resources for pets and leisure time exemplify the difficulty in mediation. It also shows the complexity of explaining to Ethiopian families why the White European privilege of adoptive families is used in such 'unproductive' ways.

The intermediary Lidiya further underlines this aspect. She explains to a native family the reasons why the adoptive family of their child promised them a new home but then kept procrastinating the construction. The delay was due to a significant economic investment of the adoptive family to finance a creative class in the United States for their adopted son. For example:

> They [the adoptive family] promised them [the native family] they would
> have built a [new] house. So, they [the native family] demolished their *tukul*
> to build a bigger house, and now they are without a home, so they live all
> crowded in a smaller *tukul*. So, this is the discomfort they are experiencing. In

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any way, I told them, "Look, his [adoptive] family is great, but they invested in taking him two months abroad for his studies". I told them, "Look, with that money, you would have built twice the house [you are planning to have] because they spent lots of money. So, you do not have to think that this family [does not want to build you a house] because it is not that they do not want to. They had this opportunity [for your son] that they did not want to lose, but it was for the best of your son, which is also their son".
[Intermediary, December 2019, SNNPR]

This last quote raises an additional theme: the 'promises'. Adoptive families often bide themselves in verbal agreements to support native families facing daily life issues. According to participants, the redistribution of economic support with the native family is almost seen as 'natural' when a significant economic gap becomes visible. Almost all adoptive families have been described or described themselves as providers of some financial support. This availability in providing economic aid usually shows up in two different moments: the first meeting and the reconnection. Whilst during the reconnection, or the first meeting, the adoptive family physically gives some money to the family members of their adoptee, it is not unusual to promise additional money. This exchange of promises is strictly or less strictly binding from the adoptive or native family perspective. An arrangement that may only provisionally involve the thoughts and intentions of adoptive families might be decisive for family members in Ethiopia. Therefore, delays and postponements may be interpreted as predictive of a lack of interest in maintaining reciprocal arrangements (even when motivated by contingent reasons) and produce consequent misunderstandings and animosity. That was the case for this native uncle, who engaged with the researcher to clarify his feelings about the adoptive family's suspension of money dispatch. For example:

Sometimes they [the adoptive family] send some money [for instance 5000 birrs per month], but this is not enough to buy the school uniforms of students ... materials, and also ... also food. But they [the native family] have no land! They are a large family with many members, his brother also (he points at a young boy next to him) and older brothers, who divided a piece of land into two parts. Also, they have no house in Ethiopia. Sometimes they [the adoptive family] promise to work or to build them a home. But they do not ... (he shakes his head) (...) They have no house! They destroyed it: their old house, which was built from scratch. So why did they say or promise

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them a brand-new home? (...) so, why do not they keep their promise? (…)
They said: "We will do your house gradually because we pay more money to
(let the adoptee) go to America the last months, this is very expensive", so,
yeah, no money at this time, but even now, after two months ...! [Native
uncle, December 2019, SNNPR]

What surfaces from this quote reverberates in different directions. The subjectivity in the urgencies of the two families is shaped starting from their existing and dissimilar needs, thus creating an unalike order of priorities. Native families are often pressured by impelling needs that might envisage significant changes in their family organisation and survival. Adoptive families focus more on the emotional level. They are eager to illustrate the developmental milestones reached by their child and her potential. This difference is based on expectations raised by a paternalistic relationship between parties. Adoptive families are supposed to be in better-off economic conditions and able to support, by any means, native families. Several interviews showed that both parties take this unidirectional exchange for granted. Besides, adoptive families address native families as subjects lacking material, financial, educational and intellectual means. This infantilisation of the native families gives the adoptive ones the power to decide on their behalf instead of negotiating reciprocal needs as equals. Such relation is based on the supposition that native families are unable to understand what is happening and results from more general global disparities in access to resources. This unbalance represents the core of the extended international fictive kinship dynamics. Almost all participants addressed these aspects, which also need reconciliation amongst parties when it becomes evident that native families have ideas and understandings related to post-reconnection and act their own agency.

When explained in detail, though, another aspect of relational responsibility and filial obligation is pointed out. As other intermediaries, Lidiya underlines that this claim of economic support towards the adoptive families is misplaced, given that their engagement is towards the care and raising responsibilities of the adoptees and not their families. The 'natural' connection between a parent and her biological child makes the child adopted abroad responsible for the native family. At the basis of this narrative, it comes back again the concept of the ineluctability of an original, foundational linking that cannot be untied through the making of new kinship bonds but only generate further connections. This idea of remaining filial ties contributes to understanding the practical application of a concept based on multiplying and extending networks instead of cutting and separating subjects.

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Disparities in communications amongst adoptive and native families

Power unbalance between families is a hot topic that emerged several times with native families and intermediaries. According to interviews and participant observation, intermediaries use mainly two *modus operandi* to intermediate the communication amongst adoptive and native families. The first considers the absence of direct communication between native and adoptive families. In this case, families communicate only through the person who managed the reconnection. In the second case, native and adoptive families can communicate directly. However, the communication of the native families undergoes a revision run by the intermediary. A native uncle of an adoptee explains the method described by many native families and intermediaries. The uncle laments that intermediaries tend to privilege the requests and interests of the adoptive families. This assumption builds upon the control that most intermediaries have on the communication coming from native families. For instance, this native uncle describes the steps his messages to the adoptive family go through before being sent. For example:

> Researcher: you were saying you messaged the adoptive family. Did you message them directly or through the intermediary?
>
> Native uncle: I write my opinion to the intermediary. And then, she tells me what to write and I send it to them [the adoptive family]. Not directly. If she says ok, I send it.
>
> Researcher: do you send your messages to the intermediary to ask whether they are ok or if you have to revise them?
>
> Native uncle: Yes, yes!
>
> Researcher: Are you messaging with [the adoptive] parents or with the adoptee?
>
> Native uncle: With his parents, officially his mother.
>
> [Native uncle, December 2019, SNNPR]

The procedure of control and revision that the intermediary applies to their exchanges aims to mediate contents and formats. Many participants report that intermediaries enact limitations on direct contacts and requests to keep the development of the relationships under control.

In another case, a native father speaking in the Kembaata language asked for a direct translation to another linguistic mediator to explain to the researcher his current situation with the intermediary. As transcribed from the translation:

> The intermediary knows something about the child's adoptive family. His biological son. So, the intermediary knows something about his child. She found his child. So, she knows more [than she says] about his [the adoptee's adoptive] family. [Native uncle, December 2019, SNNPR; translation from Kembaata to the English language performed by a linguistic intermediary]

This native father is under the impression that the intermediary knows more than what she tells and protects the adoptive family's interests over his. The particular attention to the interests of adoptive families also emerged during interviews with intermediaries. Many confirmed that adoptive families prefer to have their relationship with the native family mediated, with no direct interactions, in the post-reconnection stage. According to intermediaries, the adoptive families prefer mediation because it prevents them from being engaged in a continuous relationship. Conversely, they have someone else taking care of it when they are not interested or able to maintain contacts. However, the disparity in treatment between native and adoptive families has also been framed as an attempt to smooth out the cultural gap and the incomprehension. As explained by one intermediary:

> In the end, what would be the goal? To develop their [the adoptee, native and adoptive family's] relationship, right? A life-long relationship ... But it is almost like swimming upstream because everybody here [in Ethiopia] has been told by everybody, and [have received] confirmations on TV all the time, "People have money abroad!" (...) And here it is, like ... the social structure is so different as well. There is no government to take care of you. There is no social support or formal support. Either your children or your social contacts [will take care of you], so you always depend on people, here ... and that is so different abroad, the independent mindset versus the communal mindset ... How do you glue that together? [Intermediary, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

With the metaphor of "swimming upstream", this intermediary explains the complexity of keeping together different expectations. She also offers a consideration concerning the role of the intermediary *per se*, who should be a person able to properly accompany and mediate the

families to create a life-long relationship. The choice of phrasing is interesting because adoption has recently been approached as a life-long journey instead of a two-phase experience – pre and post-adoption (Coleman et al., 2016; Walton, 2012; Arsenault, 2006). The intermediary also connects the economic pressure the adoptive families may feel from the native families with the welfare system in Ethiopia. Once again, the topic of the economic power imbalance that characterizes relations between the Global North and South comes to the surface, thus placing the different expectations in the post-reconnection stage in the gap between relationships imprinted on mutual aid and collectivism versus a social system that prioritizes individualism and personal achievements.

8.5   Conclusion: matters of privacy, roots, and identity

This section aims to recap the main themes discussed within this chapter. They all revolve around the moment after the reconnection or the post-reconnection stage. In the first section, the perspective of native families was at the centre of the analysis. The adoptee is perceived as belonging to the family of origin. Despite the distance and the 'clean break', relationships are thus expected to be maintained and consistent.

Furthermore, native families see visits of the adoptee as a central element in the framework of her mobility, which is a 'gift' received through the adoption. In the second section, adoptees are the main characters. The analysis focuses on how they reconfigure their family network once they have met their native families. In the aftermath, what becomes visible is the configuration of an international extended family network. Adoptees navigate this network in different ways, reinforcing or negotiating their bonds as time passes. The last section considers the voices of adoptive families. In the post-reconnection stage, they might adopt an 'exclusive' approach that addresses the native family as belonging to the past tense, or rather an 'inclusive' approach in which the native family (once blurred and in the distance) is seen as a new, tangible component of what now is a more extensive family network. By and large, adoptive families contribute financially to the well-being of native families. Yet, expectations are different, and the role of the intermediary becomes prominent and worth analysis. Lastly, the chapter considers financial support in light of the profound inequality and imbalances in access to resources (both material and immaterial) by native and adoptive families.

Regarding inequalities, it is worth remarking that adoptive families proved themselves able to limit their accessibility to native families and demonstrated control over the access to 'their'

native families, at least on a symbolical level. This paternalistic attitude was evident on several occasions when intermediaries expressed their concerns about getting the researcher in contact with the native families without the explicit consent of the adoptive families. To them, the approval of the adoptive families was fundamental to allow someone else to collect the 'history' of the native family of their adopted child. Nonetheless, adoptive families were rarely, if never, contacted. As explained by an intermediary:

> I should not only ask the native family if they agree, but … I should ask the
> [adoptive] family what they think about it because anyway they did not … it
> is all-new, it is recent, and the child does not know anything yet.
> [Intermediary, September 2019, Addis Ababa]

While adoptive families have privileged access to native families, intermediaries are hesitant to connect researchers to native families, even if privacy and discretion are granted. It seems that when adoptive and native families connect, the latter become symbolically dependent and subordinate to the preferences of the former when it concerns meeting other people from the Global North. For instance, in one case, the intermediary who agreed to take the researcher to meet a native family underlined the secrecy and exceptionality of that event because she did ask the native family if they wanted to meet without enquiring about the adoptive family's opinion first. The approval of the native family is of secondary importance: the absence of consent of the adoptive family is considered a deficiency. Including native families in the research meant going through a variety of intermediaries that argued the consultation of the adoptive families was required to conduct the interviews but then refused to ask for their opinion on the matter. In this context, meeting the native families was a potential lack of attention towards the adoptive families or an infringement of privacy agreements, as outlined by intermediaries.

This chapter also focused on the adoption framed as a life-long journey. It highlights several post-adoption stages, such as the recovery of contacts, the reconnection, the post-reconnection, and the events that might follow these steps and generate new forms of family relationship. Looking at these phenomena, the end of the international adoption process might be reinterpreted as the beginning of new forms of entanglements. In Ethiopia, the closing of inter-country adoption to or from a country implied the disappearance from the territory of adoption agencies and other organisations involved in the adoption process. Considering intercountry adoption as a life-long journey should encourage the presence in the country of entities that deal with post-adoption. Indeed, the case of Ethiopia shows that

interrupting post-inter-country adoption services comes at a cost for the country and the native families. In line with these considerations, the MOWCYA and the native families lamented the disruption of dialogue with entities who mediated the adoptions. As pointed out by the intermediary and adoptee Abebech, the local adoptive praxes are based on customary forms of open adoption, and this element creates asymmetrical expectations and understandings of the intercountry practice itself. For example:

> Have it [inter-country adoption] based on a local practice that is open ... it gives the people here [in Ethiopia] the expectation that their child would come back and will support them financially. [Intermediary, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

Inter-country adoption should be a procedure sensitive to local contexts and engaged in satisfying the child's best interest. If this is true, those who facilitate this model of fictive kinship might have some knowledge of local adoption systems. This research outlines that, even though the reasons and expected outcomes of native families might be not that evident, the discrepancies in the understanding of the adoption practice were perceivable – and, for what concerns participants, perceived – before the ban of inter-country adoption. Nonetheless, no adjustments were made to provide effective post-adoption services in response to the public and private requests concerning this model of international child circulation. The themes and matters underlined by this research illustrate that reconnection, and post-reconnection stages need appropriate attention and care in their intimate and collective dimension. As stressed by Abebech, that is imperative because of the socio-cultural and economic gap between the actors involved, the different needs of the persons involved, and their different interests on the matter. For example:

> For adoptees, it is their entire life searching for a sense of belonging and loving and trusting relationships. But as soon as you bring money into that [relation], it can be damaged so quickly. So, both sides need to be prepared for each other and understand where they are coming from. It makes a lot of sense [to do] as we did, you know, also supporting reunions because ... yeah, if it is not a social worker [to support the reunion], it can really go wrong. [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

In this controversy, the complexity of the nature of inter-country adoption in Ethiopia becomes central. Inter-country adoption in Ethiopia is recognised by receiving countries as a practice of

closed adoption. Despite the law, in Ethiopia, it has been mainly assimilated to open adoption on a customary level. On a legal level, the Ethiopian government framed inter-country adoption as a closed adoption, but there is room left for potential openness in the relation within the triad adoptee – adoptive family – native family. That caused conflicting concepts and interpretations, including the termination of parental rights versus the openness for connection.

Nonetheless, issues arising from the prospect of a potential openness in adoption have not been suitably dealt with by both sending and receiving countries. As underlined by Abebech and studies focused on the open inter-country adoption process (Wright et al., 2021) between Taiwan and Australia, mediation is a pivotal element for openness in adoption. In the interest of all the subjects involved in the triadic relation, mediation amongst parties needs to be adequately addressed, structured, and economically supported to reach the best outcome. For the participant Abebech and the study of the scholar Wright on open or open-like inter-country adoption, the most vulnerable subjects are considered the native families. Their practical understandings and dynamics of inter-country adoption are left unheard and perceived as conditional to the adoptive families and adoptees' needs. As Abebech explained:

> I feel like lots of things you can tell, you can explain, but it is also really good, you know, when adoptees spend some time here, because it is just very easy to come, and be like "Oh, I know it all, or I am the victim here"... when, I think, the ones that we hardly ever hear about are actually the birth mothers, right? [Adoptee, November 2019, Addis Ababa]

When native families are heard, the attention is pointed chiefly to their feelings of grief and loss (Demissie, 2013; Alelign, 2011; Brittingham, 2010.). Parental distress is a central expression of their experience and should be a starting point to comprehend better native families' positioning and – past, present and future – expectations. Yet, the narrative and reflections surrounding inter-country adoption often do not further investigate this aspect apart from acknowledging the mental health and emotional issues that adoption may provoke. In these cases, it may become an obstacle to understanding parenthood in the absence of the child that native families experience and that adoption is not considered an event that ends with the transfer of parental rights. On the contrary, when the involvement of native families in inter-country adoption is addressed in terms of victimisation (Hailu, 2017), it undermines their agency. Besides, it prevents further actions pointed at balancing relations and investigating possible alternative services of support and mediation.

Chapter 9. Conclusions

Here [in Ethiopia] there are many of those cases[84]. (…) In the beginning they said nothing. And when they began to talk … (he says with a thin smile) We discovered many things from a guy who owned an Ethiopian restaurant in Barcelona. All the adoptive families went there. And these children, you know, when they were able to speak [Italian] they said like, "8463659, this is my [Ethiopian] mum's phone number, I want to call her. Because I must help her. I am here to help her" (he says with a thin smile). (…) These are harsh things. Especially for the promises, for the [Ethiopian] families who remain here [in Ethiopia]. Apart from the economic aspect (…), which is one of those things that can be collateral. From an Amhara point of view, [the expectation] is precisely to keep contact, receive information (…) and many people [adoptive parents] do not send any information. [Adoptive father, October 2017, Ethiopia]

This study aimed to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. The main finding is that, in the Ethiopian context, the native family does not see giving the child out for adoption and a clean break of the kin ties on equal terms. Rather, it prevails the understanding that inter-country adoption is intended to strengthen ties between the native and adoptive family and diversify family collectives' migration strategies. This circular interpretation of the child mobility clashes against the Global North legal and normative understanding, which entails a definitive and complete caesura between the person who has been adopted and her native family and does not entail the adopted person returning to her country of origin or keeping in contact with the native family. This contrasting understanding of adoption has several consequences on post-adoption, particularly concerning the native families who wait for the adoptees to contact them or return to "their homeland". This investigation tackles issues related to social justice, social reproduction, stratified reproduction, postcoloniality, and domestic and international mobility.

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[84] This participant refers to adoption cases of older children with one or more living relatives internationally adopted from Ethiopia.

9.1   A circular inter-country adoption story

This thesis is an exploration of the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. It explores the conceptual correlation between customary adoption praxes and inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. It identifies a cause-consequence relation between the choice to give children out for adoption, the subsequent expectations of reconnection, and its repercussions on post-adoption. The colonial burden of inequality and social injustice is the starting ground of this research, whose imperative is to recentre inter-country adoption on Ethiopia and look at it mainly through the experiences of adoptees and native families.

The goal was to comprehensively understand idiosyncrasies and expectations connected to Ethiopia's inter-country adoption and post-adoption. The methodological choice was thus to adopt an Ethio-centred approach, which privileged mostly native families, orphans, and adoptees, and overturned the mainstream interpretation of adoption as a Global North-led process.

Considering the methodological standpoint, the reader is invited to imagine inter-country adoption from the Ethiopian family's perspective: a phenomenon of child mobility in which an Ethio-descendant adoptee is supposed to start a new life in the Global North while, in Ethiopia, the native family preserves ancestral bonds of kin ties and expects a return, a reconnection. This study addresses inter-country adoption as a practice with a circular orientation rather than a linear succession of events ending with the mere conclusion of the child transfer. To stay true to this unfractured perspective of kin ties, the written form of this investigation is circular. It puts at the centre the epistemological and ontological understanding of adoptees who envisage re-approaching the Global South and those native families who have a circular understanding of child mobility: a practice that finds its conceptual end with a reconnection between native family and adoptee rather than with the physical transposition of the child in the Global North household. This research aims to explore these inverted intimate geographies of belongingness and kin-making of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

The first part of this thesis offers an overview of the theoretical backbone of the research. chapter One introduces the thesis' core elements, whilst

Chapter Two gathers the literature pertinent to position this investigation within the broader studies concerning orphanhood, adoption, critical kinship, and parental legitimacy. Such areas of knowledge are addressed as complementary and constitutive of different aspects of the adoption process as intended in the Global North. This chapter explores fictive kinship and its

interrelation with biopolitical logics of (il)legitimacy and notions of orphanhood – often overlapped with the idea of the absence of living parents. The central questions of this work were identified at the crossing points of the macro-themes that emerged from the literature review, which laid the foundation for this study. Moreover, it illustrates the epistemological, ontological, and axiological choices that guided the empirical and theoretical conduction of the research.

Chapter Three focuses on the (post)colonial feminist and deconstructive paradigms that favour the interpretative, ethnographic exploration of participants' knowledges. In addition, it presents the methods applied throughout the research: participant observations and qualitative interviews, combined with ethnographic and archival ethnography.

Chapter Four is a context chapter or the preamble to the pre-adoption stage. This is a hybrid chapter that intends to contextualise and analyse community and family-based child-care praxes in Ethiopia. It argues that if we aim to talk about kinship in Ethiopia, it is necessary to move away from the interpretative framework of the nuclear family model to a more pervasive, collective, and persistent organisation of the kin ties. To support such a claim, this chapter follows a funnel structure to understand Ethiopian community-based forms of mutual aid, collective forms of kinship care, and practices of fictive kinship.

The second part of this thesis consists of four analytical chapters that mirror the chronologic experience of the different stages of adoption of native families in Ethiopia. Because of its Ethio-centred perspective, the chapters follow a logic of de-centring of the analytical subject. They deconstruct the intimate entanglement of kin ties and the biopolitical logics of child transfer from a (post)colonial feminist, cross-cultural perspective on inter-country adoption (see Figure 13).

Participants in this research included adoptees, native and adoptive families, intermediaries, residential childcare institutions, adoptive agencies, intermediaries, and key informants with established knowledge of child protection and relocation. Their venture through inter-country adoption has been categorised into three stages: pre-adoption, adoption, and post-adoption. The latter is further divided into two phases: reconnection and post-reconnection. Each chapter has been organised to display the material collected accordingly.

Figure 13: the circular narrative.
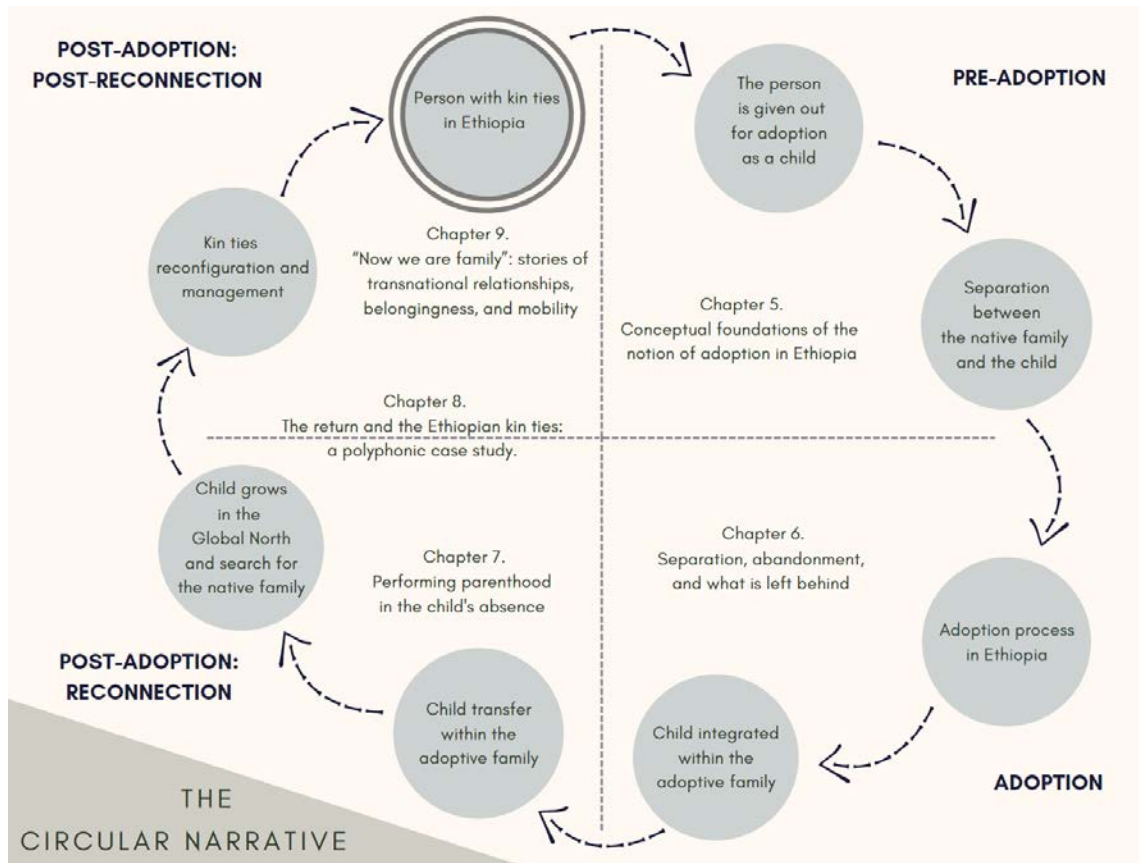
Chapter Five focuses on pre-adoption and contextualises concepts of separation and orphanhood within the Ethiopian context. The notion of abandonment emerges from participant observation and interviews as a category deeply misunderstood from a cross-cultural point of view. Parallelly, the orphan's classification is explored from a legal, linguistic, and relational point of view. Whilst, legally speaking, the act of abandoning is framed within specific criteria that reveal a lack of care and attentiveness towards the infant, the Ethiopian language has many ways to name the orphan child, which rarely wholly conform to the English definitions. This chapter also analyses the act of separation from a multi-dimensional and performative perspective. These findings emerged from participants' accounts and revealed subtle and yet recognisable differences amidst practices of child-native family separation.

Chapter Six explores the adoption stage and sheds light on the Ethiopian counter-narrative. When, from a Global North perspective, the adoption is concluded and the child is relocated with her adoptive family, from an Ethio-centred perspective native relatives wait for adoptees' news or return. This phase has also been labelled as parenthood in the absence of the child to underline that Ethiopian families did not consider their tie to the child to have ended.

This chapter uses ethnographic, archival analysis, interviews, and participant observation to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. Post Adoption Reports (PARs) are of crucial relevance for native families and therefore analysed in detail to explore the information they might provide. Moreover, this chapter investigates the alternative techniques native families rely on when the official post-adoption services fail to support their quest for information and contact with the adoptee. It points out that, in their early childhood, children are expected to incorporate bodily and social features, a socio-cultural 'footprint' that would give adoptees the psycho-emotional and practical input to look for their origins and native family after the adoption.

Chapter Five and Six also contain some considerations concerning malpractices in inter-country adoption in Ethiopia. This research had to deal with ethically problematics findings that resonate with Hailu's investigation concerning illegal inter-country adoption from Ethiopia (2017). Even though several efforts were made during fieldwork to quantify this trend, it was impossible to understand the size of the illegal activities concerning adoption as much as the number of native families who gave their children out for inter-country adoption with the intention to have them back. The difficulty in accessing such data relies on a simple fact: no private or public organisation has ever tried to quantify it.

Chapters Seven and Eight are both situated in the post-adoption stage and display two subsequent yet different phases: the reconnection and the post-reconnection.

Chapter Seven focuses on reconnection and explores a case study that has been chosen to epitomise the re-joining of the adoptee and his native family. The story of Samuel is deployed here to reveal the polyphonic nature of inter-country adoption and the strategies that different actors (i.e., adoptive parents and adoption agencies) adopt to ensure that native families' physical and symbolical voices remain peripheral or unheard. From a geographical Ethio-centred perspective, this case study is a multi-layered account where the intricacy of inter-country adoption becomes evident, as well as the tight interconnection between the different stages of the adoption process. Built over interviews and participant observation, this case study is analysed primarily from the perspectives of this thesis's 'absent subjects', namely the adoptive families and adoptees.

Chapter Eight focuses on post-reconnection stories and elaborates on the experience of the actors involved through the entanglement of mobility and belongingness in the (un)making of cross-cultural, transnational kin ties. The perspectives of adoptees, native and adoptive families provide a different understanding of the cause-consequential relation between the

pre-adoption assumptions and the post-adoption outcomes. It also makes evident the reciprocal influence of different actors' understandings and choices in other participants' real lives.

Lastly, the current chapter summarises the main findings and analytical themes. In addition, it offers some practical considerations to tackle the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

9.2　　　Ground-breaking outcomes

This research's exploration offers a particular interpretation of adoption and post-adoption and explores overlooked perspectives to understand post-adoption relationships and the management of transnational, extended kin entanglements. The key contribution of this study aims to fill the existing gap in the literature concerning geographically located inter-country adoption's perception and beliefs and their entanglement with customary informal adoption. It also addresses the tensions arising from competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. Therefore, it offers the ground to change perspective on transnational, cross-cultural adoption, and post-adoption dynamics. Ultimately, it complements critical kinship studies with an innovative perspective. From this perspective, Global South and North experiences of adoption are not independent and left untouched one from the other. They are dynamic phenomena that intersect and create intimate entanglements before and after inter-country adoption. From this holistic point of view, this research also innovatively addresses the residential childcare institution as the first point of contact between different regimes of intimate and biopolitical family-making practices, and as spaces of transition and interaction. Eventually, the research holistically addresses the existent cross-cultural gap amongst different interpretations of formal fictive kinship and their practical consequences.

This thesis argues that there is a correlation between the customary and inter-country adoption understandings and practices in Ethiopia and that, in its application to inter-country adoption, kin bonds are not supposed to end. Based on the results of this study, this research offers the notion of circular narrative as a creative approach for framing the research problem and describing the temporal absence of the adoptee and the expected reconnection – either in terms of receiving information, having contact or meeting in person.

The circular narrative, mirrored by the structure of this thesis, finds its correlations with the anthropological concept of child circulation, which refers to arrangements that facilitate child

relocation between different families. The idea of a dynamic circularity works with the movement of children involved in inter-country adoption and the consequent transnational flow of tangible (people, goods, and images) and intangible (imaginaries, tokens, biopolitical regimes) elements entangled in the (un)making of kin ties. The deconstruction of the concept of kinship discloses its interactions, negotiation, and regulation. In addition, it positions its existence between customary practices, historical inequality, and global and local expectations. Lastly, it represents the relations of reciprocity that make the kin collective and extended.

The multi-dimentionality of kinship care in the kin mobility also emerges as differently framed from the standard care because it includes the spatial and interactional dimensions (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: multidimensional childcare and kin mobility.
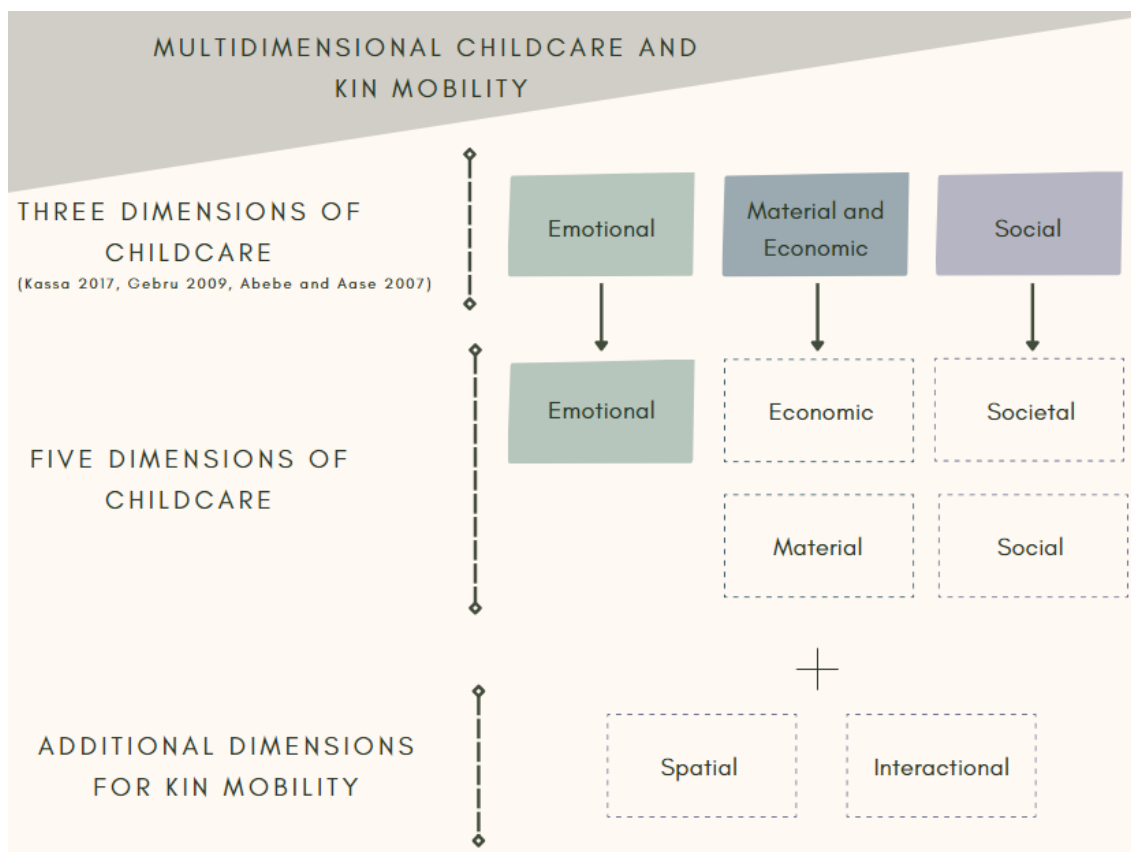
Elements highlighted by participants and an overview of the legal framework of inter-country adoption make evident that there is a convergence between inter-country adoption's legal interpretation and native families' practices. Particular attention needs to be reserved for article 4 of the adoptive contract, where the bond between the adoptee and the native family is said not to cease. The lack of implementation of this part of the document, which both

adoptive families and adoption agencies vision, highlights the lack of interest (or reluctance) of the Global North actors to honour, clarify or better understand the matter of the bonds with the native family. Several participants seemed doubtful about native families' adequate knowledge of the legislation concerning inter-country adoption. It is mainly argued that native families' literacy level, Amharic knowledge, and legal understanding would not allow them to access such content. However, participant observation and interviews with experts in child protection also highlighted that such an understanding of inter-country adoption is not limited to native families but extends to several areas of the Addis Ababa and Ethiopian population.

This study frames kin mobility in inter-country adoption through Scheper-Hughes and Lock's theorisation of the 'three bodies', which splits the perception of the body into the individual body, the social body, and the body politic. This thesis applies the three bodies' theory to ponder on Ethiopian adopted bodies' connections with native families and Ethiopia as social and legal entities. It uses it as a lens to investigate adoptees' mobility and belongingness in the intimate geographies of their transnational kin ties.

In brief, this thesis aims to stimulate a de-centred critical interpretation of inter-country adoption and explores the contested nature of this cross-cultural, comprehensive entanglement of private lives from a (post)colonial feminist perspective.

9.3   Practical considerations

This research does not intend to be a mere theoretical effort. In truth, it hoped to have practical implications for families and adoptees living within and against this adoption system. As such, the bottom-line question of this research might be framed as follows: moving from the (post)colonial narrative of adoption, families who are challenging the system with their agency and exploring post-adoption reconnections can bring about any change? Or are they destined to a marginal, unheard role in the inter-country post-adoption configuration?

It must be anticipated that at a para-institutional level, the change is already taking place. Associations and privates are already bridging in organised or autonomous forms the co-construction of heterotopic family ties and kinship. Intermediaries play a key role in this, and the presence of informal structures that allow adopted persons to reconnect is a sign that there is a demand to support families and adoptees in this regard.

At an institutional level, the MOWCYA maintains a positioning theoretically in line with international definitions of closed adoption whilst its implementation resembles more of a

hybrid version. To date, the ministry's activities are mostly projected in supporting native families and adoptees, even because, as argued by one participant, with the interruption of inter-country adoption there is no space left for issues related to a potential impeachment.

From an axiological point of view, this research's initial aim was to explore the competing imaginaries of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia. At this point, can the inter-country adoption process be questioned, influenced, or changed?

From a Global North's perspective, native families are still an 'uncharted territory'. The management of Global South claims concerning the adoption mainly relies on their silencing. When native families' voices are heard, an intricacy of stories and dynamics appears. Should these stories be addressed as unexpected, whilst in Ethiopia they have existed for a long time and have often been a reason of concern for native families since the beginning, as this research argues?

Sotiropoulos claims that a part of adoptive parents opts for on inter-country adoption because they have the possibility to 'remove the birth family from the equation' (2008), whilst Seymore (2014) argues that in the United States "International adoptive families are learning about positive outcomes of domestic open adoptions and hope to replicate those results in the international context". (Seymore, 2014, p. 167). Even though members of the adoptive family might be interested in reconnecting, in the Global North inter-country adoption is understood to be closed. For this reason, and probably for fear of opening a Pandora's box of emotional turmoil, unexpected new relationships to forge and claims to satisfy, native families' side of the adoption agreement has been largely left untouched. Steenrod's article (2021) on the legacy of exploitation in inter-country adoption from Ethiopia ends with some questions that, the author emphasises, represent legitimate adoptive parents' concerns and fears. For example:

> How do I tell my child that their Ethiopian parents, previously thought to be deceased, are living? How do I explain to my child that they were part of an adoption process with abduction and/or financial transactions? Who do I hold responsible for the exploitation that has occurred? Where is my culpability? Perhaps most importantly, how do I repair broken bonds between my child and their birth family, country, and culture? (Steenrod, 2021, p. 26)

Whilst this research cannot offer definitive answers, it might offer some context to adoptive parents' questions and suggest some practical considerations. It might pave the road for potential socio-culturally situated guidelines to support children and families in post-inter-country adoption and foresee to some degree dynamics and challenges of the reconnection's encounters. Such considerations envisage re/connection as an emotional process that might be smoothened by the presence of professionals trained to engage with respect and empathy with all the actors involved.

➔ The first consideration moves from the understanding that adoption is a life-long journey. Not just for adoptees and adoptive families, but often for native families too, because the choice to give a child out for adoption has evident repercussions on Ethiopian families. Adoptees and adoptive families who tried to reconnect shared the difficulty of planning such events because adoptive agencies tend to oppose such a choice. Other options to find support to reconnect might be found in Ethiopia or through word of mouth with other families who have already reconnected, know the process, and have trustworthy contacts.

➔ Residential childcare institutions and adoption agencies tend to address native families' post-adoption presence as a 'token' issue to remove or quiet, whilst the MOWCYA personnel struggle to make their voice heard and be provided with post-adoption reports. Moreover, this ministry does not seem to have adequate resources to systematically address native families' quest with a problem-solving-oriented approach because they have no counterpart in the Global North to plan any strategy with.

➔ Especially problematic situations tend to be silenced and left 'out of the radar' by organisations who operate in inter-country adoption. However, findings highlighted that the 'challenging knots' of adoptees' pre-adoption stories might directly affect adoptive families or adoptees who experience difficulties in their relationships, problematic behaviours and requests, and unexpected contacts from native families. Therefore, post-adoption data storage and analysis need to be revised for the best interest of all the members of the adoptive triad.

➔ Another element that pops out is that adoptees, native and adoptive parents have different concerns and needs when it comes to transnational post-adoption connection and reconnection, and such interests also have a socio-cultural, geo-political nature. Therefore, not all native families aim for a reconnection, and not all

adoptive families oppose it. For instance, in the study concerning open inter-country adoption from Taiwan to Australia, Wright et al. (2021) underline that in their case, native families were less interested in taking contact, whilst adoptive families showed more interest.

➔ Findings also showed an ethical paradox in reconnection from a Global North point of view. For adoption agencies and Global North's inter-country adoption commissions, opening a debate over reconnection means admitting that such a possibility exists and discussing on what ground it can be settled. Key questions need to be answered or at least taken into consideration: why did a native family give the child out for adoption? Was it because their case resulted from malpractices in the inter-country adoption process? Was it because they facilitated such adoption in the conviction that the child would return? Furthermore, why does a family want to reconnect? Implementing guidelines to facilitate and mediate contact among families might be seen as a threat to the Global North nuclear family model. On the other hand, the facilitation and mediation of the adoption process are also denied to the adoptive families who decide to re/connect.

➔ On a practical level, it is important to respect all parties' needs and ethical concerns when deciding if and how the reconnection might take place. This research's findings might offer some opening suggestions for a real dialogue on how to implement such support safely for all parties involved. For instance, some participants suggested that post-adoption reports might be used as a two-directional tool to provide the adoption agency with PARs from native families as adoptive families do with the MOWCYA. This way, adoptees and adoptive families might access visual and written information concerning their native families.

➔ Another support that might be provided is structured cultural and linguistic mediation conducted by trained personnel. The personnel might facilitate and mediate connection and reconnection. However, it might also train native and adoptive families on the possibility of being contacted and provide them with guidance on how to proceed after contact, protect themselves from the risk of fraud or inappropriate behaviour, and protect their privacy. Moreover, trained personnel might introduce the idea that cross-cultural communication can result in misunderstandings and explain how to be clear about boundaries and establish positive interactions. Even in this case, it is not self-intuitive for adoptive and native families to know about and benefit from

the help of trained personnel. Wright et al. (2021) observes that this service has been mainly refused by Taiwanese birth mothers, who found it too painful to deal with.

➔ Participants (particularly adoptees and adoptive families) often reported a lack of gatekeepers in accessing residential childcare institutions, police stations, and villages of origin. It might be argued that families might be facilitated in their search and reunions with assistance from adoption agencies and national social services. It must be noted that these adoptive families were looking for something different from a general 'return to their Ethiopian origins' and did not find the support they needed in such services. Indeed, this research also pointed out that the search for the native families (as the search for the adoptive families) might takes years, multiple visits to key places, and several informants. Adoptive families reported that adoption agencies, from which they expected support and backing, often were the first to discourage them in their research from its very beginning. However, findings also showed that post-adoption services are crucial for the adoption triad (adoptee, native and adoptive family) that intends to reconnect. Relevance was also given to services focused on emotional and material support and connection during post-adoption. Participants underlined that reconnection might also have positive outcomes in terms of mental health and positive racial identity, thus supporting transracial adoptive families with cultural socialisation. Moreover, adoptees also expressed the potential benefit of owning their personal, intimate adoption story rather than having to deal with the generic Global North narrative on adoption from their country of origin (Kim, 2010).

9.4   Limitations and opportunities for future research

This study has three major limitations, which may offer equal opportunities to investigate further inter-country adoption from an Ethiopian, or Global South, perspective.

First, participants of this research engaged with different adoption agencies, which have different backgrounds and missions concerning inter-country adoption practices. As the research focused on reconnection and adoption agencies were reticent to participate in such a study or had shut down their activity in the country, the data collected did not allow a thorough exploration of different institutional contexts or views on transnational adoption. An investigation of the institutional adoption apparatus in Ethiopia might allow a more nuanced

understanding of differences between adoption agencies and different Global North countries' procedures and guidelines concerning child protection.

Second, this study intended to provide an overview of the phenomenon and analyse its characteristics. As such, participants were all involved in established or attempted reconnections but had heterogeneous situations and backgrounds. In some cases, it was possible to engage with the whole adoptive triad whilst in others the 'adoption story' resulted fragmented because it was narrated by one or two members of the adoptive triad. A qualitative study with only matched cases would allow interpreting more accurately the post-adoption scenario. Moreover, a study involving native families from a specific geographic area or adoptees from the same Global North country might offer further insights on inter-country adoption's understanding from a more localised socio-cultural point of view.

Third, figures or data concerning the size of the native families' reconnection phenomenon were unavailable. It would be interesting to investigate the diffusion of the understanding of inter-country adoption as a circular event and differentiate rural and urban contexts as well as regional specificities through a quantitative study on the population to draw figures on the significance of this phenomenon.

Another potential opportunity for future research envisages a revisitation of Global North's assumption starting from this new framework. How does reconnection influence adoptees' racial identity in the Global North, their self-esteem, their relationship with their adoptive milieu, and their idea of themselves and their future? How does reconnection influence adoptees' relationships with other reconnected adoptees or adoptees that do not intend to reconnect? Which discourses and imaginaries of belongingness are generated by encounters between persons who lived similar experiences but have different wishes?

9.5 Current situation in Ethiopia

Since the end of the fieldwork in 2019, Ethiopia has been crosscut by multiple tensions, international events and even wars. The Covid-19 global epidemic reached Ethiopia in the spring of 2020. Even though the government declared a state of emergency (SoE) to intensify control and prevention of the spread of COVID-19 in the country, recommended norms (social distance and hygiene practices to minimise exposure) were almost impossible to implement

for the population because of the lack of access to proper WASH[85] facilities and essential supplies. Moreover, the most significant part of the population's daily activities is impossible to be postponed because of the day-by-day living conditions.

In Autumn 2020, during the global pandemic, the civil war between the TPLF party (Tigray People's Liberation Front) and the federal government broke out, leaving over 6,000 unaccompanied children and some 720,000 displaced (UNICEF, 2021). Civilians moved to refugee camps beyond the South Sudanese border and other areas of Afar, Amhara and Tigray, and some internally displaced population returned to their homes. The internal mobility of the country is exceptionally high, and the social services have been put on a hold. The conflict had a devastating impact across Northern Ethiopia, decimating the livelihood of communities and destroying public infrastructure and essential services (OCHA, 2022). Civil unrests are also occurring in the Amhara, Afar and Oromo regions.

It is unclear yet what impact this general situation of instability had on post-adoption reconnection or its effects on the implementation of domestic adoption. The final recommendation of the research is thus to take forward this study to understand how Ethiopian native families, adoptees and Global North adoptive families have been affected by this current turmoil, to shed light on how child mobility and post-adoption dynamics adapted to such international politics and humanitarian crises.

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[85] Infrastructures supporting water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH).

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Appendices

Appendix A. Acronyms

This appendix provides a table (Table 4) of the acronyms deployed in this thesis.

Table 4: list of acronyms.

LIST OF ACRONYMS		
	ACPF	African Child Policy Forum
	ARENA	Adoption Resource Exchange of North America
	ICA	Inter-Country Adoption
	IIWW	Second World War
	IMF	International Monetary Fund
	MOWCYA	Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs
	NATs	Niños, Niñas y Adolescentes Trabajadores (Working Children and Adolescents' Movements)
	NCFA	National Conference For Adoption
	SAPs	Structural Adjustment Programs
	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
	WB	World Bank (International Bank for Development and Reconstruction)
	PAR	Post-Adoption Report
	SNNPR	Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region
	OSZSF	Oromia Special Zone Surrounding, Oromia Region

Appendix B: Inter-country adoption from Ethiopia: figures

This appendix provides figures concerning inter-country adoption from Ethiopia between 1989 and 2009 (Table 5) and the percentage of children adopted from Ethiopia during 2003-2013 (Table 6).

Table 5: figures of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia.

INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION FROM ETHIOPIA

(International) **Adoption Ratio**:

No. of adoptions per 1000 live births (Selman, 2009, 2015a)

Crude (International) **Adoption**:

Adoptions related to the population size (Selman, 1989, 1999; Pilotti, 1993)

* Based on adoptions to 10 receiving countries (Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK, USA).

** Numbers calculated from data on states of origin in statistics provided by the receiving states of Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, UK, USA.

*** By rank in 2005.

ADOPTION RATIO AND CRUDE ADOPTION FROM ETHIOPIA

YEAR	ADOPTION RATIO*	SOURCE
1989	<0.1	Selman, 2002
1995 [crude adoption**]	13th out of 17	Selman, 2002
1998 [crude adoption**]	10th out of 18	Selman, 2002
1998	0.17*	Selman, 2002
2003	0.3***	Selman, 2012
2004 [peak year in 2003-2007]	0.93**	Selman, 2009
2005	0.56***	Selman, 2012
2007	0.95***	Selman, 2012
2009	1.5***	Selman, 2012

Table 6: children adopted from Ethiopia in percentage.

NO. OF CHILDREN
ADOPTED
FROM
ETHIOPIA

PERCENTAGE OF AFRICAN CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM ETHIOPIA (SELMAN, 2015B)	
YEAR	%
2003	37%
2006	56%
2009	70%
2011	61%
2013	45%
TOTAL	59%

Appendix C: Participant information sheet (English version)

Canterbury
Christ Church
University

Inter-country adoption from Ethiopia: shaping families and ties to their kin.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

A research study is being conducted by Chiara Costa, a postgraduate student at the Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU).

Background

This qualitative study explores the phenomenon of inter-country adoption from Ethiopia to Italy in the framework of international laws, investigating Ethiopian informal adoption practices and child circulation to understand strategies and contradictions of new families' formation process.

What will you be required to do?

Participants in this study will be asked to share their personal and professional knowledge and experience of the investigated phenomenon with the researcher.

Procedures

You will be asked to participate in a qualitative interview <or> in a focus group <or> in drawing and role-playing activities.

Feedback

Participants involved in the research will be made aware of the results. Moreover, it will be offered access to any publications I might release as a result of the research.

Confidentiality

All data and personal information will be stored securely within CCCU premises per the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University data protection requirements. Only Chiara Costa can access data. After completion of the study, all data will be made anonymous (i.e. all personal information associated with the data will be removed).

Deciding whether to participate

If you have any questions or concerns about the nature, procedures or requirements for participation, do not hesitate to contact me. Should you decide to participate, you will be free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

Any questions?

Please contact Chiara Costa **(institutional contacts).**

Appendix D. Customary fictive kinship praxes: definitions and descriptions

This appendix consists of a descriptive explanation of six Ethiopian fictive kinship practices. Such praxes emerged from fieldwork, interviews, and literature review, except for *harmahodhaa*, illustrated by Aredo and Chala (2019) as progressively declining and therefore not tackled in this appendix.

The following list intends to provide the reader with linguistic and socio-cultural information for a situated understanding of this study.

Yegudifecha lij

The most known customary adoption practice in Ethiopia is *guddifaachaa*. In fact, it would be more accurate to differentiate *guddifaachaa* and *mogaassaa*, which are two similar but distinct expressions of Oromo fictive kinship, as explained later. For conciseness purposes, if not specified otherwise, these practices are referred to using the word *guddifaachaa/mogaassaa*. Historically part of the Oromo kinship system, *guddifaachaa/moggassaa* gained notoriety amongst other ethnic groups of the region because it was also used as a system of expansion and incorporation. Conquered and neighbouring ethnic groups were annexed to the Oromo by becoming social descendants. The use of symbolism related to mechanisms of filiation reflected in the kinship assimilation process, thus recognising to the new members social inclusion, relationship of power subordination and interdependence typical of intergenerational relations (Blackhurst, 1996). The Oromo notion of peoplehood is based on blood and social kinship (Jalata, 2010). Its notoriety contributed to its diffusion in other parts of the country and made the Afaan Oromo word *guddifaachaa* of everyday use in the current Amharic to determine both the Oromo customary informal practice and the domestic adoption in Ethiopia. In light of its popularity and peculiar historical use, *guddifaachaa/moggaassaa* is cited in the literature concerning domestic adoption, Oromo history, and anthropological accounts of the Oromo filiation system. However, its complexity, local variations, and the general paucity of data concerning this practice (Jalata, 2010) made it problematic to find an updated and unanimous description that accords with first-hand information and various literature accounts. Duressa (2002), Negeri (2006), and Dida's (2017) studies from the University of Addis Ababa are the only research that offered a recent in-depth

socio-cultural insight on Oromo fictive kinship practices. As such, they are cited by other authors (Bodja and Gleason, 2020; Ta'a, 2016). Their investigations illustrate *guddifaachaa/mogaassaa* as internally diversified and sensible of certain flexibility. Comparing recent and dated works, a few conflicting points following Blackhurst's reasoning (1996) may be interpreted as the reflection of the co-existence of public-political and private-domestic components. Their likely different weight in practice according to the social context may define one component as dominant. However, almost all authors report fairly consistent versions of four elements that are the most relevant to the extent of this study.

Firstly, contrary to sources where *guddifaachaa* is referred to as a unique practice (Bodja and Gleason, 2020), it has several traditional differences related to the level of belongingness and existent relation amongst the adopter(s), the biological parent(s) and the adoptee. Indeed, there are *guddifaachaa* notions that refer to intra-family or intra-group adoption, like the adoption of a child between two wives of the same polygynous household; adoption amongst family members up to the third generation on the father line; or adoption amongst Oromo clans' families or communities, with several variations according to the closeness in genealogical line[86]. Others refer to adoption performed with 'outsiders' – i.e., a different ethnic group (Negeri, 2006). The child's transfer from one family to another is sealed by a ceremony whose location's spatiality reflects the 'blood proximity' between adopter and adoptee. The main difference is between *guddifaachaa* and *mogaassaa*. These terms are used interchangeably in English, even though their meaning and application differ. *Guddifaachaa* (also referred to as *ingubisa*, *gubifaca* within the Borana Oromo group), with the root *guddi*, *gubbi* referring to caring and nurturing practices of both fostering and adoption (Haberland, 1963), means "bring up" (Hebo, 2013). *Guddifaachaa* is practised for adoption from the same clan, performed amongst members of the same extended family or clan to formalise the definitive inclusion of a child in a new family unit.

Conversely, *mogaassaa*, which Blackhurst (1994) reconnects to the Tulama Oromo word *mogshe* (meaning "namesake"), is more related to the adoption of a child[87] from another

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[86] Another distinction interests *guddifaachaa rakoo* and *guddifaachaa dhaloota boondaa*, and the difference refers to the adoption agreement: in the former, it takes place before the birth of the child; in the latter, after birth (Dida, 2017).

[87] The *gaada* system establishes five age groups from childhood to adulthood of eight years each. Members of each group have specific roles and function to perform during each gaada (Jalata, 2010). The childhood phase comprises two gaada; therefore, the childhood stage lasts sixteen years (Ta'a, 2016).

Oromo clan[88] or neighbouring ethnic groups. In both cases, the child becomes genealogically part of the annexing Oromo clan, thus acquiring their ancestors and contemporarily losing any ancestral tie with the previous family's member. This lineage dis-connection process is part of the Oromo annexation technique to integrate new members through the notion of belongingness to advance in their internal expansion in the region[89].

Secondly, *guddifaachaa* is not universally irreversible. When the adoptive ceremony occurs, adopters commit to raising and treating their new child as a biological one. This binding agreement must be honoured by fulfilling the child's privileges and – social, economic, lineage-related, and emotional – rights. In case of neglect, abuse or mistreatment denounced by the child, the biological parents or the community, the agreement may be rescinded, and the child must be returned to the previous family unit. This aspect becomes more relevant when we consider that in the *guddifaachaa* is usually the adoptive family who offers to adopt the child. The offer may be an action moved by kindness (i.e., when it concerns orphans, as illustrated later on in this section) but usually indirectly encompasses the strengthening of relational ties between biological and adoptive parents and the satisfaction of adopters' needs. Therefore, the biological parents are agreeing to the adopters' request and making them a concession – with the condition of seeing their child's needs and status conditions satisfied.

Thirdly, *guddifaachaa* – as well as other fictive kinship practices – has the implicit objective of keeping as many children as possible within a specific extended family, clan, or community. Where *mogaassaa* had the double objective of 'oromising' and expanding possession through relation strengthening, *guddifaachaa* has the implied goal of keeping children, a key asset for the collectivity, in proximity to their community. As already presented, *guddifaachaa* is practised to a certain degree amongst extended family members. Consequently, even though children and their biological parents' genealogical relation ceases, it does not seem to be any prohibition for the biological parents to know about children's life, meet the adopters and the

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[88] This delineation of the use of *guddifaachaa* or *mogaassaa* for Oromo – non-Oromo clan annexation is not homogeneous in descriptions; it is unclear if it depends on belongingness or variations according to areas and time.

[89] Ta'a mentioned that "they assimilated only people of Cushitic origins like themselves and those of Omotic" (Ta'a, 1984, p. 182). Conversely, Negeri (2006), cited by other Addis Ababa University research (Ta'a, 2016; Demissie, 2013), wrote about "Amhara, Gurage, Wolayta, Silti and other ethnic groups who reside with Oromos of the areas. Then again, whose locality is adjacent to the adopting family clan or further are taken for *moggaasaa*" (Negeri, 2006, p. 47). Other studies also include Amhara amongst the ethnic groups involved in kinship assimilation, thus including not-Cushitic languages (Clamons, 1995). This information enforces what was stated by other authors (Jalata, 2010) about the difficulty of reconstructing the Oromo kinship system due to its flexibility.

child, and be part of his life. After all, as already stated, one of the objectives of *guddifaachaa* is to strengthen social ties and relations amongst the biological and adoptive family units, a relation that comes with an enhancement of mutual support and social connections. The condition is that the child is not supposed to know he has been adopted and who are his biological parents. When this point cannot be satisfied – considering the child's age when *guddifaachaa* takes place –the child is asked to consider biological parents as close kin and vice versa. This difference between the notions of relatedness and belongingness is outlined in Negeri's explanation of conversations that occur between biological parents and the adopted child when the child is adopted but refuses to live with the adoptive family: "you are their child; we are relatives" (Negeri, 2006, p.57).

Lastly, even though *guddifaachaa* has been described as a practice sensible of flexibility in adapting itself through time, it partially made changes to adapt to current situations. *Guddifaachaa* is oriented initially to secure the lineage, strengthen relations amongst families, and provide protection and security by assuring the re-productive capacity of the family through the introduction of new members. Indeed, as underlined by Negeri (2006), children are assets for childless couples who intend to secure the inheritance of properties, the patrilinear lineage, assure the continuity through a successor; to strengthen the family because their resources and affection demand a more prominent family to show social and economic status. Even though these points remain the principal reasons for adopting, during the time and the increasing number of OVC, the trend changed, and the cases of children adopted through *guddifaachaa* because vulnerability to social and economic situations increased (Dida, 2017). Moreover, a few informants reported that *guddifaachaa* is not practised as it was decades ago. There is increasing support for the adoptee's right to know about their adoptive history. During the fieldwork, this idea was often accompanied by accounts of children who got married to their biological family members or who 'lost their mind' when they discovered the truth about their origins. These accounts, whose veracity is not verifiable, have the task of supporting the theory of informing children about their actual origins.

The four points mentioned above are essential to this study. They show that dissimilarly from other authors like Bodja and Gleason (2020), who stated that *guddifaachaa* "represents all the major aspects of the conventional understanding of adoption as defined in international conventions" (Boja and Gleason, 2020, p. 49), this study suggests a substantial difference in international understanding of fictive kinship, and *guddifaachaa*, when looking at relations amongst the subjects involved, particularly the adults. As explained by Blackhurst, "Western

rationale for fostering is usually child welfare whereas in Oromo (…) it is just as much parent welfare or intergenerational linkages which are at issue" (Blackhurst, 1996, p. 241).

Ergifata

A few authors referred to a fostering practice named *ergifata* (Haberland, 1963; Ta'a, 2016). Registered within the Oromo Borana, it differs from *guddifaachaa/mogaassaa* for its temporary nature. Indeed, *ergifata* does not contemplate incorporative aspects of adoption. The child is hosted within a family unit, who may be members of the extended family. The hosting family members become his principal caregivers and have the responsibility to nurture and raise the child, who is temporarily transferred under their care until he reaches the age to join the biological family again. The child holds social obligations of reciprocity and contributes to the household by carrying out activities concerning both domestic chores and activities outside the compound. Even in this case, transferring a child from one family to another is intended to strengthen relationships and ties in-directly amongst them and support a redistribution of human resources to support both biological and foster families in their reciprocal needs. There is very little literature about this fostering practice, even though it is well established and practised.

Yemadego lij

Madego is widely known amongst the Amharic population and in other Ethiopian regions. It is the literal translation in Amharic of the Oromo word *guddifaachaa*; yet, the childcare and kinship relation implied in the meaning of *madego* significantly differ from *guddifaachaa* because the former refers to temporary child custody whilst the latter envisages a more permanent transfer.

In literature, occasional use of the word *madego* (from the Amharic word *midjja*, "hearth") has been detected as the participants in this study employed it. Interlocutors talked about *yemadego lij* as a practice that encompasses the notion of caring, nurturing and fostering, thus making *yemadego lij* the "child of the hearth" (Hannig, 2017, p. 34). *Madego* also relates to the verb *masadeg*, "to raise" (from the verb *madeg* "to grow"), the practice of temporarily growing a child within a family unit that is not the one of origin. Even in this case, the child retains her ties with her ancestors and family of origin and never stops being part of it. This practice takes place within the extended family of community of reference and answers to the need to

redistribute children to support numerous families and children in vulnerable conditions and strengthen relations amongst families of origin and adopters. The *yemadego lij* is situated within the Amhara childcare and kinship system, based on reciprocal obligations amongst individuals and relatives (Levine, 2014); therefore, even in this case, performing child circulation is the expression, reason, and result of the strengthening of collective social relations.

Madego is also cited in the literature concerning early marriage. *Yemadego gabicha* (the marriage of the child) envisages the relocation of young girls (Guadie, 2010). In this practice, performed mostly in the countryside, *yemadego gabicha* gets married, moves to her husband's household, and is raised as an integral member of her in-law's family. In the *yemadego gabicha* practice, the girl becomes part of her husband's household but does not lose her tie with the family of origin and their ancestors. Participants reported that *yemadego gabicha* does not live in a condition of servitude and is under the custody of her family-in-law. However, women in the countryside had to contribute to the family unit by carrying heavy tasks (i.e., domestic labour), and children could be given an excessive workload. Therefore, given gender work redistribution, their living conditions have been described as dissimilar to the maids but essentially trying.

Yetut lij – Yemar lij

Participants mentioned *yetut lij* and *yemar lij* practices. In his study based on adoption cases from the Ethiopian Ministry of Justice concerning customary adoption, Beckstrom (1972) summarises the main features of this practice. Called *yetut lij*[90] (child of the breast), or *yemar lij* ("child of honey") from *tut-metabat* (meaning "breastfeeding"), it refers to an Amhara fictive kinship practice. It has been interpreted as the Amhara version of the Oromo adoptive practice *guddifaachaa*. The name is derived from the ceremony, which develops around a honey pot. The adoptive parent dips a thumb, or the breast, in the honey to then offer it to the child to be sucked. The figurative reproduction of the nursing act symbolises the complete social assimilation of the child within his new family unit. In this case, it is the biological parent to approach a person s/he wants to strengthen linkages with and asks to become the adopter (Desalegn, 2014). As for the *guddifaachaa* ceremony, biological parents take part in the

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[90] *Yetut lij* has also been used to name a godchild practice that does not contemplate the complete assimilation of the child (Baquele, 1971).

ceremony, and their consent is necessary to seal the agreement. By joining the adoptive family, the child obtains the right to be maintained, become an heir, and not be discriminated against by her siblings.

As with *guddifaachaa*, the relationship may be severed by both parties. The adoptive family might request the agreement's recission if they demonstrate there is a good reason, "such as the failure of the child to care for the parents in times of distress" (Beckstrom, 1972, p. 148). This excerpt reveals one more time the mechanisms of reciprocal and intergenerational obligations and related social norms set in motion within family groups.

Other sources describe *yetut lij* as a fostering practice in some areas of the Northern part of Ethiopia (Gelaye, 1998); however, it is unclear which kind of relationship exists between the foster parent and the child: "the foster child (son) is expected to use his own kin terms of address with his foster father and vice versa. Culturally, thus, both are assumed to be real relatives, real kin, so that they have to perform various rights and social obligations" (Gelaye, 1998, p.81). The adoptee is not necessarily supposed to live with her adopter(s).

Yekiristina lij

Kiristina is a notion that refers to the relation of parenthood that a person may forge with a child. For a child to become *yekiristina lij*, a person needs to approach a family and offer to produce a pact of solidarity by becoming *yekiristina abbat* or *yekiristina enat* of the child. According to Desalegn (2014), the person has to participate in the child's baptismal ceremony. During the ceremony, the godparent-to-be makes an oath to take appropriate care of the child's personal and religious upbringing, pledging to do co-parenthood. The tie is "almost as strong as a blood relationship, manifested by the inability of a godchild to enter into marriage with children of the godfather" (Orlowska, 2006, p. 247). This bond does not expect the child to go living with the godparent. As Negeri (2006) underlined, nowadays, the bond between the godchild and the godparent articulates its practical expression through the tangible experience of mutual socio-economic support, to the point of being considered by the members practising it more for its economic features than its religious nature. The tie created through this religious-based fictive kinship practice has been defined by Nelson (2013) as ritual kin and is expected to establish a permanent kinship bond that bond all the members of the adoptive triad – the godchild, the godparent, and the biological parents (Orlowska, 2006). Indeed, the joint responsibility of nurturing and caring for the child extends to participation in social and

ceremonial events, labour assistance and economic benefits' obligations that entail all the subjects involved to mutual support in case of need (Gelaye, 1998). The *kiristina* filiation does not have to be practised strictly inter-ethnically (Jordan et al., 2011). Christening in Ethiopia is also meant to strengthen and expand kin relationships amongst groups and individuals who do not share blood ties, as also argued by participants of this research.

Qenja

Qenja is a temporary fostering practice that considers child relocation for labour and socialisation purposes. In their study, Kassa and Abebe (2016) problematise the child labour topic by exploring this practice of child circulation, which comprehends both socio-cultural and economic coalition and interdependence in livelihood strategies. Kassa and Abebe's research is the only source of this practice in the Northern area of Ethiopia. Their study took place in the Amhara region, which is the reference for the information concerning his practice. The word *qenja*, etymologically linked to the Amharic verb *meqenajet* (meaning "teaming", "forming an alliance and/or coalition"), refers to an agreement between the family of origin of the child and the hosting labour-deficit family. The agreement, which could be in written or oral form, expects an exchange between a child's collaboration in labour activities and a monetary or in-kind payment. Children involved in this practice are boys between 8 and 18 years old, depending on when they are considered fit for labour, and the duration of their stay may vary from one to several years, according to families' agreement and economic conditions. *Qenja* is of particular interest because its features of agricultural labour redistribution, as underlined by the authors of the study, it has been framed by international organisations and Ethiopian media as the expression of child exploitation and slavery. However, the study underlined that *qenja* boys are relocated for several socio-cultural reasons, ranging from socialisation and disciplining reasons to skills transmission through practice. The research underlined families of origin value and prioritised child's safety. The risk of mistreatment connected to community ties' weakening is confronted through the replacement in many cases of the oral agreement with a written one, which is expected to safeguard children's well-being better.

In *qenja*, collaborative and positive relations and behaviour between the fostering and original families are central to determining the conditions of mutual support and consequent relational tie strengthening. A relationship of reciprocal trust is a bond between the family of origin and the hosting one, thanks to visits and occasional reciprocal support. The relevance of *qenja* as a means of child socialisation is also demonstrated by the fact that *qenja* boys' families do not

always have to cope with economic vulnerability; conversely, *qenja* is practised and promoted amongst children of better-off families.