

They Were Never a “Blank Slate Baby”

Transnational Adoptees and their Navigation of Grief

Meghan Willis

*I miss you more than I
remember you.*

New York Times Bestseller

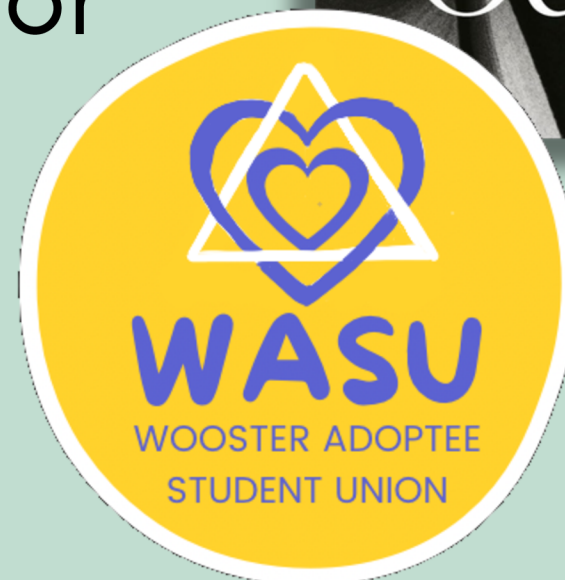
On Earth
We're
Briefly
Gorgeous

A Novel

Ocean Vuong

272

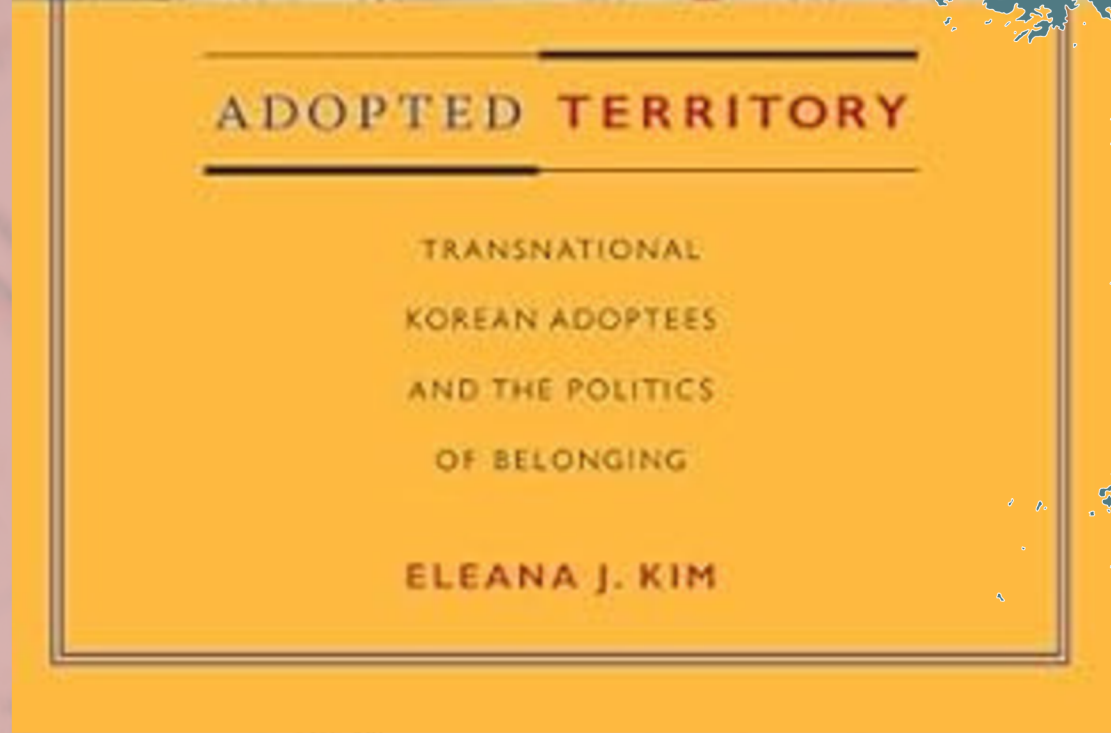
- Searching for adoptee community
 - Personal experiences with grief
- Volunteering/interning for adoptee-related organizations
- Courses at Wooster



What is international adoption?



- 300,000 children worldwide
 - Peaking in 2004, 22,884 adoptions (King 2019)
- Various sending and receiving countries
- Origins in South Korea
- Causations: war, poverty, lack of social programs
 - Rise of need in Western countries



What I learned

- Lack of literature about adoptees and grief
- Variety of social stigmas
- Omittance of adoptee voices



The image shows the cover of the book 'Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief' by Pauline Boss. The title 'AMBIGUOUS LOSS' is prominently displayed at the top in a serif font, with 'AMBIGUOUS' in black and 'LOSS' in a larger blue font. Below the title, the subtitle 'LEARNING TO LIVE WITH UNRESOLVED GRIEF' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom left, the author's name 'PAULINE BOSS' is printed, with 'PAULINE' in blue and 'BOSS' in red. The background of the cover is a photograph of a doorway leading to a room with a wooden chair. The door is slightly ajar, and the chair is silhouetted against the light from the room.

AMBIGUOUS
LOSS

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH
UNRESOLVED GRIEF

PAULINE
BOSS

Theory

- Critical Adoption Studies,
Ambiguous Loss,
Transnationalism
- Considering race,
gender, class
 - Migratory experience

Methodology

- Nine participants
- Young age at adoption
 - Pre-memory formation
- Gender and geographical region

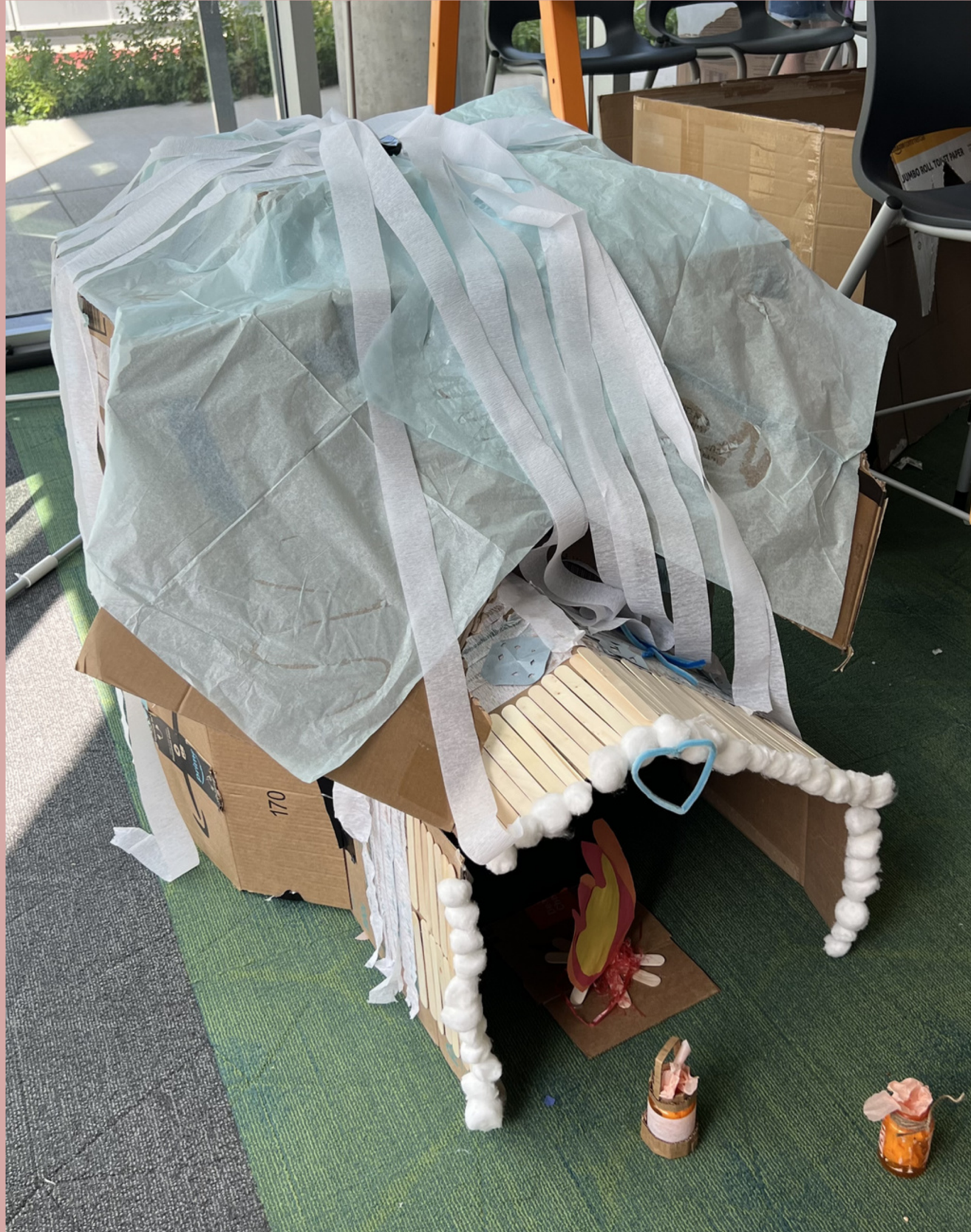
Participant Name	Age	Gender (Self-Identified)	Ethnic/Racial Background (Self-Identified)	Age at Adoption
XT	21	Female	Chinese	9 months
Annabelle	22	Female	Chinese-American	16 months
Joy	25	Female	Asian	6 months
Hugo	29	Cis male	South Korean	~6-8 months
Hannah	23	Female	Asian American	10 months
Daisy	26	Female	South Korean	8 months
A.F.	25	Female	Korean American	9 months
Emma	31	Female	Vietnamese	3 years old
M.	21	Female	Asian/Kazakh	11 months

Analysis & Discussion

- Grief woven throughout the results
- Main themes:
 - **Normative family**
 - Color-blind utopia
 - **Blank slate baby**
 - Adoptee agency



Future Work & Conclusions



- Ethnographic research at adoptee camp
- Larger age range
- Gendered expectations of grief
- Wider geographical range of adoptees

Thank You!

*Dr. Zareen Thomas, SOAN Department,
my adoptee community*

