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Family memory trips – children’s and parents’ planning of adoption return trips

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ABSTRACT
It can be argued that adoption return trips are a new travel industry. Today, transnational adoptive families make adoption return trips while their children are very young. The aim of such trips is to create positive links between the child and their birth country. Based on interviews with ten Swedish transnational adoptive families, this qualitative and interdisciplinary study sets out to explore how adopted children and their parents plan return trips. The analysis shows that both children and parents mobilise memories of places, people and heritage sites from the birth countries while planning their trips. In theoretical terms, the study draws on family tourism in combination with child studies and personal memory tourism. The article challenges the idea that adoption return trips are exclusively for the benefit of the adoptee and suggests that the family planning of adoption return trips makes them into ‘family memory trips.’

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Introduction
Adoption return trips, root trips or so-called homeland tourism for transnational adoptees is a growing travel sector. It is a new market segment for travel agencies that create specialised return-trip packages for families with adopted children, advertised as family tourism. In contrast to adoption return trips conducted by young adult adoptees, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (NBHW, 2015), as well as travel agencies specialising in such trips, recommend that adoptive parents travel as a family before adolescence. One of the arguments supporting this recommendation is the claim that adoptees will benefit from having their own image of where they come from before they begin to explore their identity (https://kinalotsen.se/kinaresor/aterresor/aterresa-till-kina/ ACS: 191021).

Sweden has a long tradition of transnational adoption (Lindgren, 2010) and for many years it had the world’s highest number of transnational adoptions per capita (Selman, 2002). The large numbers of adoptees who arrived in Sweden during the first wave of transnational adoptions became young adults during the 1990s. Adoptee organisations began to address questions related to adoptees’ origins, and increasing numbers of adoptees turned to adoption agencies for assistance in root searches (Lind & Lindgren, 2009). The television show Spårlöst försvunnen (Gone without a trace) began to be aired in Sweden in 2000 and further fuelled the interest in roots searches. Under the current recommendations, published by the NBHW, return trips are promoted as a means for adoptees to create links between their
past and the present and to increase adoptees’ self-knowledge (NBHW, 2015, p. 118). Similarly, the travel agency Kinalotsen (The China Pilot) promotes return trips to China as a means for the adoptee to acquire her/his own memories of sites and places of significance (www.kinalotsen.se).

The new ways of conducting adoption return trips as families with young children reconfigure what we mean by personal heritage travelling (see Timothy & Boyd, 2006). An adoption return trip often comprises visits to orphanages, meeting with staff and/or foster parents, visits to the birth city and visits to the finding place, in combination with visits to famous heritage sites and other landmarks. As a phenomenon, adoption return trips are a complex mixture of different ideas involving politics, colonial heritage, nostalgia, market values, family consumption, heritage sites, identity, ethnicity and education (cf. Powers, 2017). This places adoption return trips, we argue, at the intersection between personal heritage tourism and family tourism. Based on qualitative interviews with parents and children in ten Swedish transnational adoptive families, the aim of this article is to explore how family members reason and make decisions when planning adoption return trips to their children’s birth countries. As the analysis indicates that memories of the birth country constitute a recurring theme in the planning of these trips, we ask: how and why do memories become central to this planning? Which, and whose, personal memories are used, and why?

**Previous research**

While some tourism theories, according to Pau Obrador (2012), have emphasised the tourist as a social figure by foregrounding the notion of ‘the crowd,’ they continue to neglect relations of domesticity and reproduce a figure of the ‘detached’ tourist. He describes this as a result of how tourism has been theorised within social science, conceptualising the tourist as a universal subject (solitary, masculine), separated from material and social conditions. Several researchers have argued for the need to take into account a diverse and heterogeneous set of views on the concept of family and to bring the family into tourism research (Obrador, 2012, p. 417; see also Poria & Timothy, 2014). There is a lack of knowledge about how children and their families approach and use different kinds of heritage sites as part of their tourism experiences (Frost & Laing, 2017), even though families are a large tourism group today.

The sociality of the family and the dynamics between family members during family holidays has been acknowledged in a few recent studies. Among other things, the multiplicity of family holidays is noted; such holidays have various purposes and social meanings that come into being through ongoing negotiations between family members (Schänzel & Smith, 2014). In a study by Shaw, Havitz, and Delemere (2008), family holidays are described as bringing new sets of responsibilities related to the idea of family cohesion. The parents in the study express a sense of duty to improve family communication and interactions and to find enjoyable activities for all family members. Family holidays are thus connected to opportunities to strengthen the bonds within the family and to create positive memories for the future. In this sense, they can be viewed as purposive because they are conducted to achieve both short-term and long-term goals (Shaw et al., 2008; see also Shaw, 2008). This suggests that parental control and involvement in family holidays represent wider processes in which ideologies, ideas and traditional notions of the family are being done, an idea supported by Shaw (2008).

The purposiveness of family holidays is evident in adoption return trips, as will be shown in the analysis. Such trips can be described as a combination of ‘ordinary’ family tourism and personal heritage tourism as they are motivated by family togetherness (cf. Hilbrecht, Shaw, Delamere, & Havitz, 2008; Powers, 2017), as well as individual, sometimes conflicting, projects and tensions (Obrador, 2012) and personal and emotional attachments to distant places and times (cf. Timothy & Boyd, 2006).

In the limited research on adoption return trips, the family has often held a central position. Adoptive parents often play an active role in searches for their child’s birth family and in preserving contact with a birth or foster family (Wang, Chin Ponte, & Weber Ollen, 2015). In a recent American study, Jillian Powers (2011) joined three adoptive families with children aged eight to twelve years on
their adoption return trip to China. Powers argues that these trips are not conducted in order to heal a separation. Rather than the personal life history of the adopted child, what is at the centre of the families’ return trips is the adoptive family’s identity. Despite the parents’ explicit desire to integrate their child’s birth culture into their family, children and parents alike frequently distance themselves from what they perceive as typical of China or Chinese culture, thereby generating a stronger ‘we’ around the family’s shared American-ness (Powers, 2011, 2017).

In another American study involving five adoptive families of children from China, it is shown that the primary motive for the parents to make a return trip was that they hoped to receive more information from the orphanage about their child’s abandonment and/or preadoption life, to meet people who knew their child as a baby, and to give their children the experience of having the same ethnic appearance as the majority population (Chin Ponte, Wang, & Pen-Shian Fan, 2010). Several of these studies suggest that parents and children have different views and expectations of the adoption return trip. While the parents in a study by Barbara Yngvesson (2003), who accompanied Swedish adoptive families on an adoption return trip to Chile, expressed great enthusiasm, the children seldom talked about the trip as a ‘return,’ insisting that they were ‘completely Swedish’ (Yngvesson, 2003, p. 14). Similarly, in contrast to the parents interviewed in Iris Chin Ponte et al.’s (2010) study, the eight- to eleven-year-old children expressed concern about travelling so far from home, that the trip would be long and the food different. Overall, the children had a more ambivalent approach to the trip than their parents (Chin Ponte et al., 2010).

Like Margo Hilbrecht et al. (2008), who show that children ascribe different meanings to family holidays than their parents, and Malene Gram (2005, 2007), who has demonstrated the involvement of children in the decision-making regarding family holidays, this study acknowledges the active role of children in family tourism. Inspired by the manner in which children have long been recognised as agents in their own right within the interdisciplinary research field of child and childhood studies, this study is interested not only in the parents’ perspectives, but also in children’s (James & Prout, 2015).

Memories, heritage and tourism

To elaborate upon the reasons for going on adoption return trips, we draw on the cultural and heritage tourism scholar Sabine Marschall’s concept of personal memory tourism (2012, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017), which emphasises the need to focus on individual, autobiographical and episodic memories as generators for tourism. Accordingly, memories from both personal experiences and recollected events of the past motivate travelling. To ‘return’ is connected to a desire to relive positive memories, or to re-experience negative memories and loss. It can also be about finding answers and achieving closure (Marschall, 2015a; 2015b).

Memories rely on past experiences and are always situated, reconstructed and influenced by social and personal motivations (Marschall, 2015a). Personal memory trips are an extension of processes of remembering and can be conducted in order to share memories of the past with significant others (Marschall, 2014, 2017), to transfer and mediate memories, and to strengthen family bonds (Marschall, 2015a). Travelling with others, while sharing and narrating memories enables new ways to represent and reconstruct one’s identity and life history in relation to the present and the presence of others (Marschall, 2014).

Furthermore, the intersection between experiences and memories entails a time aspect and an intertwining of past, present and future. Remembering is always a new experience and, hence, memory trips, according to Marschall, are a ‘symbiosis between actual travel and mental time travel; they constitute both a type of reliving the past and a new experience that will in turn be remembered’ (Marschall, 2015a, p. 40).

Memories of the adopted child’s birth country play an important role in the planning of adoption return trips. The trips, we argue, can therefore be viewed as a form of memory tourism because it is about returning to sites that are important to both the adoptive children and their adoptive parents.
The children who participated in this study were two years old or younger at the time of their adoption. Their memories of their birth countries are therefore very limited. Research on family memories shows that the family environment, parental guidance and collective reminiscence teach children how to remember (Edwards & Middleton, 1988; Misztal, 2003). Our narrative environments thus influence the content, emotional tone and style of our memories (Misztal, 2003). Memories of experiences in early childhood can in that sense be said to be mediated within families from adults to children through oral stories and/or material artefacts (Marschall, 2015a; Misztal, 2003). Furthermore, in the planning of the adoption return trips, both parents and children may mobilise memories of the birth country by bringing them up in discussions about what to do.

Adoption return trips both intersect with and differ from other memory-driven forms of heritage travel, such as roots tourism, legacy tourism, genealogical tourism and migrant return travel. However, adoption return trips are not necessarily motivated by a quest for collective roots, memories, identity or history, neither are they necessarily about engaging in genealogical endeavours or visiting places associated with one’s ancestors (cf. Marschall, 2014). Instead, the trips are bound to individual memories and experiences that are not necessarily shared with others (cf. Marschall, 2012). Drawing on Marschall’s (2015a) research on personal memory tourism and its connection to personal heritage tourism, in combination with family tourism and child- and childhood studies, we suggest the concept of ‘family memory tourism’ in order to draw attention to the dynamics between parents and children, as well as the mediation and mobilisation of memories in the planning of adoption return trips.

Method

Participants

All the recruited families consist of ethnically white, middle-class or upper-middle-class single parents or heterosexual couples with children adopted from Asia, South America or Africa. During the original adoption trip, the families spent between one and eight weeks in the birth countries. The children in this study were adopted between 2000 and 2010 and the study includes 26 interviews with the children and parents of ten families from across Sweden (Table 1).

Of all transnational adoptions in the twenty-first century in Sweden, more than a third involve children from China (https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2018/altt-fler-adopterar-styvbarn/ACS:191021); therefore, families were recruited through travel agencies specialising in adoption return trips to China and the Swedish adoption agency Adoptionscentrum that mediates inter-county adoptions from more than 15 countries (https://www.adoptionscentrum.se/sv/Adoption/Lanerna/ACS:191021). Information disseminated about the research project invited all transnational adoptive families, regardless of the birth countries of their children, and also adoptive families that were not interested in making a trip. The ones contacting the PI for further information were, however, families planning a trip.

Research material – interviewing children, parents and families

This study is based on qualitative interviews carried out in 2015–2018 in the families’ homes. The goal was to interview each family twice; before and after the return trip. This article focuses on the before interviews, when the families were still in the planning phase. Family members were interviewed both together and individually. The aim was to gain a nuanced sense of how the planning of return trips is constructed, both through family dynamics and children’s and parents’ independence (Reczek, 2014). The interviews were based on themes such as: the family, family vacations, the planning of the adoption return trip, and money. The themes were intentionally left broad and open in order to invite the families to expand on them in relation to their reasoning about adoption.
return trips. Children and parents were asked similar open-ended questions, with follow-up ques-
tions to support the children (see Danby, Ewing, & Thorpe, 2011).

Video recording was the preferred tool for documenting the interviews as the such recordings 
facilitate seeing; who says what in groups, emotional and non-verbal accounts, and which objects 
are being talked about when (Sparrman, 2005). This was of particular relevance since some of the 
participating children were very young and most children and parents integrated family photographs 
and objects from the birth countries into the interviews. These things also allowed the children in 
particular to take control of and introduce topics to the interview discussions (see Danby et al., 
2011; Epstein, Stevens, McKeever, & Baruchel, 2006; Thomson, 2008). For the PI, the objects became 
crucial for understanding which memories were mobilised and how when talking about the history of 
the adoption trip. However, not all families wanted to be video recorded. In these cases, an audio 
recorder was used. The PI spent between three hours and entire days with families, which gives 
the interviews an ethnographic character, especially because they are also supplemented by extensive 
field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). The recorded interview material amounts to nine h of 
video and 20 h of audio recordings.

Table 1. Participating families, number of before and after interviews, pseudonyms, birth country of the adopted child, age of 
target children and siblings at the time of the adoption and when interviewed.

| Family | Country      | Number of meetings | Target child's name, adoption age/ age during interview | Sibling's name, age during adoption of the focus child/ age during interview | Parents' names mother (M) Father (F) | Number of interviews with children | Number of interviews with parents | Number of interviews with family | Total |
|--------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1      | South Korea | 2 (before/ after trip) | Måns 1 year/ 8 years | Jens 3 years/ 10 years | Yvonne(M) Hugo(F) | 1 | 3 | 0 | 4 |
| 2      | China       | 1 (before trip)    | Julia 1 year/ 9 years | No siblings | Diana(M) Adam(F) | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 3      | Ethiopia    | 2 (before/ after trip) | Jacob 6 months/ 7 years | Iris 2.5 years/ 10 years | Caroline(M) | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4      | China       | 2 (before/ after trip) | Simona 1 year/ 8 years | Not present | Jill(M) Gunnar(F) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 5      | China       | 1 (before trip)    | Alma 1 year/ 8 years | No siblings | Helena(M) | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 6      | Ethiopia    | 1 (before trip)    | Emil 7 months/ 6 years | Stella 3 years/ 9 years | Carina(M) Kent(F) | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 7      | China       | 2 (before/ after trip) | Astrid 1 year/ 6 years | Fredrik 9 years/ 15 years | Gunilla(M) Göran(F) | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| 8      | Colombia    | 1 (before trip)    | Minna 6 months/ 12 years | Marcus 0 year/ 7 years | Vendela(M) Tommy(F) | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| 9      | China       | 2 (before/ after trip) | Filippa 1.5 years/ 13 years | Not present | Louise(M) Karl(F) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 10     | India       | 1 (before trip)    | Stina 2 years/ 8 years | No siblings | Elisabeth(M) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total  |             |                   |                          |                          |                        | 8 | 11 | 7 | 26 |

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As has already been emphasised, children and parents were approached in similar ways when being interviewed. We look upon interviews as social and cultural constructs, made up of the institutional, discursive and interactional setting where they take place (Spyrou, 2016). This approach takes into account how children, parents and the interviewer individually and collectively construct the adoption return trip by talking about it. The focus is thus on the interaction rather than on inner emotional processes. To conduct interviews with children includes dwelling methodologically and ethically on aspects of asymmetry between the adult interviewer and the child, giving enough space for children to express themselves, and listening to their silences. In our case, we also let the children decide where in the home they wanted to be interviewed, who they wanted to be interviewed with – some children preferred to be interviewed together with a sibling or a parent – and when they wanted to stop the interview (cf. Reczek, 2014). The key feature is that children are social and cultural actors in their own right. Influencing as well as being influenced by the world they live in. In this study, we therefore start from the position of understanding children as already competent actors (see Canosa & Graham, 2016; Spyrou, 2016).

The analytical phase was initiated by transcribing all the interviews. This was followed by thematic analysis involving a repeated reading of the transcripts and a manual coding of the data. With the use of visual representations such as thematic maps, the codes were later sorted into themes such as memories, motives and money (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We then identified the following memory themes across the data: Memories of the adoption trip – parents as memory mediators and mobilisers, Children’s mobilisation of memories, and the creation of New memories of the birth country, and New family memories. The aim has been to work from the bottom up, staying close to the interview material, whereas later work has also been abductive. To illustrate each theme, we use extracts from individual interviews.

**Planning family memory trips**

**Memories of the adoption trip – parents as memory mediators and mobilisers**

As we will show, the adoption trip, i.e. the trip that the adoptive parents undertook to their child’s birth country when they first adopted their child, plays a significant role when family members talk about how they plan their adoption return trips. So does the fact that parents have adult memories from these visits. We begin by discussing an interview example (Example 1) that illustrates the manner in which memories of the adoption trip enter the discussion when planning the return trip.

The interviewer is sitting in the living room of the family home together with seven-year-old Jacob, who was adopted at the age of six months, his mother Caroline and Jacob’s approximately ten-year-old sister Iris. During the interview (Family 3), the family shows albums and other objects collected during the adoption trip. They discuss what Jacob wants to see and do during his return trip.

Example 1

Caroline: Yeah, yeah what else do you want to do in Ethiopia then, Jacob?
Jacob: To eh, to eh that those people
Caroline: Where we stayed? And visit them again?
Jacob: Yes, by that flower and fake lion.
Caroline: Yeah, they have such a nice garden
Jacob: Yeah
Caroline: Of course, you’ve seen that on photos and film
Interviewer: What was that, then?
Caroline: We stayed in Addis so there are many, one could say, guesthouses, so it’s usual to stay at those. It becomes more like some kind of a bed and breakfast.
Jacob: We didn’t even need to pay for it, that was what was so good. So we don’t have to rent anything and pay.
Caroline: Yes, but we did pay.
In this example, Caroline states that Jacob has seen the things he is describing in the family’s photos and films of the adoption trip. She seems to offer this information as an explanation for how Jacob, who was a baby at the time of their stay at the guesthouse, can remember these things. This suggests two things: that the adoption trip constitutes an important source of memories of the birth country, and that the memories of that trip, and hence the birth country, are mediated from parents to children.

In many adoptive families, the date on which the parents received the child into their care, ‘gotcha day,’ is also commemorated (Seligmann, 2013). During an interview with Yvonne, mother of a boy adopted from South Korea, she explains that the family celebrates ‘Korea Day’ each year at the time when their adoption trip started and ended. The celebrations involve bringing out the South Korean flag, eating traditional Korean food, listening to music that Yvonne bought during the adoption trip and looking into and talking about their son’s ‘country box,’ which contains objects from South Korea. She emphasises that the day serves to commemorate, not only their son’s origins in South Korea, but also the entire family’s sojourn in the country during the adoption trip (Family 1). Yvonne’s account of her family’s celebration of Korea Day serves to illustrate both the manner in which memories of the birth country are mediated by the parents to their son through various cultural artefacts, and the representation of the adoption trip as a memorable event in itself. Similarly, parents speak fondly of people they met, places they visited and hotels they stayed at during the adoption trip, and many express a desire to return to them during the adoption return trip because these places constitute an important memory site in the history of their family (Families 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

During the interviews, only three children stated that they think they have memories of their birth country. The remaining children answered: ‘I don’t know’ to almost all questions concerning their birth country. Parents, however, have adult memories that were acquired during the adoption trip. Through their selection of pictures, stories and objects, parents determine what counts as memorable or not (Misztal, 2003). The fact that memories of the birth country are mediated to children through their parents’ documentation of places and events and the collection of material objects during the adoption trip can be argued to give parents the prerogative of remembering (Edwards & Middleton, 1988; Misztal, 2003). In Example 1, we can see how Caroline undermines Jacob’s claim to remember details of the adoption trip in several ways: by claiming that Jacob’s memories are not really his own, but mediated through family photos and films, by claiming that his recollection that the stay at the guesthouse was free of charge is incorrect, and by claiming that his mobilisation of the low cost of the guesthouse is irrelevant – an irrelevant part of the memory of the guesthouse, and/or irrelevant in the planning of the return trip. Children whose memories of the adoption trip diverge from those of their parents are therefore automatically at a disadvantage. Hence, the memories of the child’s birth country that are mobilised in the planning of the return trip are not only, or even primarily, the child’s, but the adoptive parents’.

**Children’s mobilisation of memories**

Although parents recurrently and across the empirical material assume authority over the mediation and mobilisation of memories from the birth country, this does not mean that children do not personalise memories or argue for their version of the past, as illustrated by the example with Jacob (see Edwards & Middleton, 1988). The three children who said they thought they did remember things from their birth countries, Jacob, Filippa and Minna, all contributed with their own mobilisations of memories of their birth countries in the planning of the return trip. In the interview with 13-year-old
Filippa (Family 9), she mobilises the memories of her birth country that she finds most relevant in the planning of the return trip by claiming that she has memories of the place independent of her parents. Filippa was eighteen months old when she was adopted from China. She says that she thinks she remembers her foster mother. When asked if she remembers anything specific, Filippa describes how she started to cry because her foster mother cried. This is a memory of an experience that is not shared with her family. In the planning of the return trip, she mobilises this memory to suggest events for the family trip. Answering why she wants to make a return trip, she says: ‘I think it would help me in some ways as I’ve thought a lot about my biological parents. I know I won’t be able to meet them, but it would be fun to meet my foster family’ (Family 9). The most important place for Filippa to visit is her birthplace and the place where she met her adoptive parents for the first time; she also wants to go shopping and visit a zoo. The planned visits to heritage sites are her parents’ wishes, according to Filippa. Filippa’s responses indicate that she is interested in supplementing what she argues to be her personal autobiographical memories with new experiences of her birth country and the people and places constituting her personal history (cf. Marschall, 2012; see also Timothy & Boyd, 2006).

When twelve-year-old Minna, adopted from Colombia (Family 8), was asked about her family’s plans for the trip, she mentioned various activities, such as visiting a famous restaurant where one can bake pizza, visiting Bogotá, shopping, and drinking coconut milk. Minna was four months old at the time of her adoption; however, she returned to Colombia with her parents to adopt her younger brother when she was about five years old. This means that she has autobiographical memories of Colombia. Minna says that she remembers almost everything from her brother’s adoption trip. For the planning of her return trip, she is interested in re-experiencing things that she and her family did during her brother’s adoption trip and visiting her own personal memory sites. Answering what she longed for the most, she said that she wanted to visit her orphanage and, if possible, the hospital where she was born.

Jacob, Filippa and Minna all mobilise their own memories of their pre-adoption past in the planning of a return trip to their birth country. They do not necessarily highlight the same things as their parents, and the three of them mobilise memories of different kinds of events and experiences. Furthermore, the fact that they do mobilise memories that they claim are their own distinguish Jacob, Filippa and Minna from the other children who were interviewed for this study. The variation in parents’ and children’s mobilisation of memories serves as a reminder of the varying purposes and meanings ascribed to adoption return trips that come into being through ongoing negotiations and collaborations, and must be acknowledged (cf. Schänzel & Smith, 2014).

**New memories of the birth country**

Jacob’s mother says that one of the main reasons why they want to visit Ethiopia is that she wants Jacob to have new, positive memories, which will be his own (see also Families 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; cf. Powers, 2017). In line with current recommendations aimed at adoptive parents, the parents in this study explain that they want their child to have a positive connection to her/his birth country (Lind, 2011; Lindgren & Zetterqvist Nelson, 2014). In this sense, by initiating and planning the adoption return trip, parents not only assume the role of mediators of memories from the adoptive trip, but they also serve as facilitators to create new memories of the birth country (cf. Shaw et al., 2008).

Furthermore, when planning to create new memories for their child, parents frequently draw upon their own positive memories of the adoption trip. Gunnar, father of eight-year-old Simona, adopted from China (Family 4), for example, explains that he wants to visit all the ‘nice places,’ e.g. famous heritage sites, that they visited during the adoption trip in order for his daughter to have the same positive experiences of her birth country as he and his wife have.

Vendela and Tommy, the parents of twelve-year-old Minna and seven-year-old Marcus, adopted from Colombia (Family 8) say that they want to re-experience all of the nice things they did during the two adoption trips; for example, meeting with people they know, and visiting an amusement park.
and coffee plantations. These are places and people they hope will generate new positive experiences and memories of the birth country for their children, which Vendela and Tommy describe as particularly important because ‘there is of course a lot of shit in Colombia like the FARC guerrillas and dope’ (Family 8).

Yet another mother, Helena (Family 5), says that she wants to generate positive memories of the birth country for her eight-year-old daughter Alma, who was approximately one year old when she was adopted, and has very mixed feelings about her birth country, China. According to Helena, Alma’s memories of China circle around the fact that she was abandoned there. Rather than being a reason for not making the trip, however, Alma’s negative feelings have made it important, according to her mother, to create new positive memories (Family 5). All of these ways of reasoning show how orientation and meaning-making intertwine past and present actions with future plans (cf. Marschall, 2015a).

A distinctive feature of parents’ accounts is the underlying responsibility for making their child’s experience of the birth country a positive one, regardless of the conditions. The efforts made can be compared with the purposiveness of family holidays described by Shaw et al. (2008), as it becomes evident that, for most parents, the adoption return trip is not only associated with the possibility of generating ‘new,’ positive memories for their children, it is also connected with other long-term goals, such as providing their children with an opportunity to create a positive connection with their origins (cf. Shaw et al., 2008).

**New family memories**

In her explanation of why their family is planning a return trip to China, six-year-old Astrid’s mother says: ‘we’re going back to China so you too can see the land you were born in. You don’t of course remember very much, you were, like, pretty small when we picked you up. So that’s why we’re, like, going there again’ (Family 7). Like most of the families in this study, Astrid’s family went on tourist sightseeing as part of the adoption trip programme. The motive for travelling to China now is to give Astrid the opportunity to see her birth country ‘too,’ just like the rest of the family did then. Astrid’s mother uses Astrid’s young age and lack of memory of China from when she was adopted as a motive for planning the trip.

Some of the children also addressed the difference between their own experiences and memories of the birth country and those of their parents. In the interview with Jacob, Iris and Caroline, Jacob weighs the time spent in his birth country Ethiopia against conscious memories of the country. In the example, interviewer Johanna has just asked Jacob whether he thinks it will be fun to visit his birth country.

**Example 2:**

Jacob: Mm, but mum thinks it’s more fun
Caroline: Do you think I will find it more fun?
Jacob: Yes, because you haven’t even been there for a long time, I was there longest
Caroline: You were there longest, it’s true
Jacob: Still, I haven’t seen many things. You’ve seen more. I wasn’t even allowed to go.
Caroline: No
Jacob: I wasn’t even allowed to go for one day
Caroline: No, you were of course a little baby. And then you were a little sick.
Jacob: Nope, now I’m not a baby any more
Caroline: No, now you’re big, then you can of course see things
Jacob: I was only allowed to be in the house half a day
Caroline: But now you’ll see. (Family 3)

By claiming that the planned return trip will be more fun for his mother because she has not spent as much time in Ethiopia as he has, Jacob can be said to claim that he has the strongest bond to the country. However, by adding: ‘Still I haven’t seen many things. You’ve seen more,’ he turns his parents and older sister into the family experts on Ethiopia. It is as though Jacob is trying to
make sense of the fact that his parents and older sister have seen more, and possibly know more, about his birth country and his past. Now that he is ‘not a baby any more’ his mother assures him that he too can experience these things.

In a similar manner, Gunilla, the mother of six-year-old Astrid, states, a bit jokingly, that Astrid is more concerned about the fact that she did not get to visit the Great Wall like the rest of her family, than the fact that she has not been in her mother’s tummy like her brother (Family 7). In family photos taken during the trip to this Chinese heritage site, Astrid is missing. Hence, her reported wish to visit the Great Wall of China seems to concern not only the urge to visit one of her birth country’s most important landmarks, and thereby to gain the same experiences and memories as the other family members, but also to create a place for herself in those family memories. The Great Wall here becomes a generator, not for recalling or re-experiencing memories, but for creating new ones and strengthening family bonds through the mobilisation of old family memories (cf. Marschall, 2015a, 2017; see also Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Shaw et al., 2008).

**Concluding discussion**

Family adoption return trips have become a specialised travel industry. By studying the planning of adoption return trips by families in practice, this article shows that this is a truly interdisciplinary research field. Adoption return trips have hitherto received little attention in tourism research, and adoption research has rarely turned to tourism studies to understand the practice of adoption return trips. By combining theories from both these research fields with personal heritage tourism, personal memory tourism, family tourism and child studies, it has become possible to explore how the planning of adoption return trips by families is performed by children and parents together.

Three important outcomes are identified through the analysis: (1) a heterogeneous approach to key theoretical concepts during the process: family, memory and return; (2) the importance of whose memories are the focus of the planning and, finally, (3) the implications of seeing children as social and cultural actors in themselves.

Our concept of family memory tourism is an outcome of combining a heterogeneous concept of family with personal memories, roots, homeland, child agency and the process of sharing memories with significant others. Central to children’s and parents’ planning of the trips are memories. Parents, as we show, are mobilising their own memories from the adoption trip to the birth country by showing their children photographs and retelling stories about the visits. In this way, parents are mediating their own autobiographical memories to make sense of and create expectations about the trip both for their children, and for themselves (Marschall, 2015a; Misztal, 2003).

Family memory tourism argues for a heterogeneous concept of family (Obrador, 2012). To generate this, we need to unpack the concept into parts like: parent, father, mother, child, son, and daughter (Lind, Westerling, Sparrman, & Dannesboe, 2016). This facilitates the exploration of family dynamics and who influences whom in the process of planning an adoption return trip. Parents might seem to be privileged and more purposive in the planning of these trips (Shaw et al., 2008), and they do have an impact on their children. However, the memories mobilised by these parents are strongly linked to their positive experiences of becoming a parent and/or a family. In this way, the memories mediated to their children are situating the return trip within broader emotional and personal (parental) processes of nostalgia. This is not explicit in the analysis; rather, it is embedded in the choices of returning to the same hotels and tourist sites as during the adoption trip.

Through the interviews, it becomes evident that parents perceive their children’s memories of the birth countries as limited, performed or even non-existent due to their young age at the time of the adoption. However, by accounting for children as social and cultural agents, we identify how they challenge and influence their parents. The planning of the trips by families thus emerges as a dynamic motion of mutual compromises and collaborations between children and parents, with the outcome that ‘return’ is not necessarily the same for parents and children. Children do not return
to relive earlier memories in the same way as their parents (Marschall, 2015b), and this is why returning primarily reveals itself to be an adult parental project.

The analysis shows how heterogeneity is key in family memory tourism. It intertwines the past, the present and the future through a symbiosis of mental time travel and actual travel (cf. Marschall, 2015a), a mixture of memories, family-making and individual purposes. As pointed out by Shaw (2008), family tourism is also an outcome of ideological processes delineating how families are enacted through travelling (cf. Lind et al., 2016). However, a fluid concept of family is not enough to account for this; tourism research also has to distinguish between families and the importance of the position of the child in adoption and family tourism.

Notes

1. Similar age recommendations are described in the family tourism literature (see Shaw et al., 2008).
2. Not all families have been interviewed twice due to private issues, the rescheduling of trips and not replying to the request for the follow-up interview.
3. The research material also consists of: family travel diaries from return trips, photographs taken by the PI and interviews with two Swedish travel agents.
4. The study was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board of Linköping University (Reg. no. 2015/34131) and follows the general ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017). Children were given their own information letters and consent forms.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

The data can be found at Department of Thematic Studies – Child Studies, Linköping University, Sweden, only on special grounds through the corresponding author [J.G].

Ethical review

The study was approved by the Regional Ethical Review Board of Linköping University (Reg. no. 2015/34131)

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