Stories within Stories:  
The Role of Popular Culture in Life Narratives of Transracial Adoptees  

**ABSTRACT**  
This thesis dives into the different ways transracial adoptees compare their own life stories to fictive narratives from popular culture by asking the following research question: How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives? These stories can derive from movies, tv-series, books or even songs. Transracial adoption as well as popular culture have been discussed a lot in research, but they have rarely been combined. This study presents a new aspect on how adopted individuals can seek and find role-models, matching feelings and even representation by consuming popular stories. The theoretical framework encompasses psychological and sociological approaches on narrative identity, a discussion about transracial adoption as well as transracial adoption life stories and how popular culture is shaping imagination and human interactions. Furthermore, this study aims to contribute to the limited data available for adoption studies in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg. The data of this empirical study was collected through 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Through thematic analysis, this study found out that not every transracial adoptee compares their adoption with fiction although on varying degrees, everyone makes comparisons between real life and fiction, especially when one is younger. These comparisons can be of four different natures: connection to country of origin, comparison through physical resemblance, comparison through fictive adoption narratives and connection through emotion. All of these results confirm more or less existing adoption studies however the findings are of more positive connotation as most available research. This research provides thus innovative and fresh insights into the life stories of transracial adoptees by joining adoption studies and popular culture studies. It is additionally interlaced from both sociological as well as psychological studies. The asset of this study lies therefore in a new, cheerful and uniting approach that aims to demonstrate how meaning making is established through narratives from popular culture for transracial adoptee’s life stories and their construction of a narrative identity.  

**KEYWORDS:** Transracial adoption, narrative identity, adoption life stories, popular culture, Luxembourg
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1. Introduction

“Your story may not have a happy beginning, but that doesn't make you who you are.
It is the rest of your story, who you choose to be.”
- The Soothsayer, Kung Fu Panda 2 (2011)

As entertaining and visually stunning as it may be, the DreamWorks animated movie Kung Fu Panda franchise’s glory lies in its story-telling, especially when it comes to the theme of adoption. Set in a humanoid animal world, the panda Po tries to fulfill his destiny as a Kung Fu warrior and moreover, finds himself on a journey to discover his identity. Although raised by a goose and thus visibly different from his father in the first film, the indication of Po being adopted only surfaces in the second part of the trilogy, when Po is trying to find out who he is and where he comes from. It is in this moment, that his dad admits that Po is “kind of adopted”.

Growing up as a transracial adopted child in Luxembourg myself, I do not recall stories from popular culture that dealt with adoption specifically but rather tales, that generally talked about abandonment and not fitting in, which I could relate to when feeling lost or sad. There was Disney’s Tarzan (1999), who was raised by gorillas or Hercules (1997), who was found by his adoptive parents, but these were just small bits in which subliminal associations were necessary to confront one’s own emotions. Also, I remember a strong connection to Disney’s Lilo and Stitch (2002) in which Stitch, a genetic manipulated alien, is adopted by Hawaiian sisters Lilo and Nani. After facing adapting difficulties due to his upcoming, Stitch realizes that his aggressive behavior results from an innate feeling of loneliness that is only soothed when he develops a personal bond with Lilo. In the end, he reveals: “This is my family. I found it, all on my own. It’s little, and broken, but still good. Yeah, still good.” I have hold on to these words for a long time and started trying to make sense of how and why all these storylines especially affected me.

It comes to no surprise that fictive narratives about adoption still spark a high interest in me today. Upon watching Kung Fu Panda as a young adult, I perceived a certain subtlety and relatability to how adoption is portrayed in that franchise, which reveals all the different sides of how to deal with being an adoptee, an adoptive parent, but also described the view of a genetic parent. In emphasis to this, I went to see Lion (2016) which tells the story of Saroo, an Indian adoptee with Australian parents, who is looking for his birthmother. The movie depicts amongst other things the view of his adoptive parents and after watching this movie with my mother, it created a deep discussion and personal meaning making between the both of us.
This recurrence of plots in popular culture surrounding adoption in my own experience made me reflect upon how such stories can influence one’s life narrative and what roles these storylines take on in the construction of identity and life story. In the past, I had not particularly looked for other adoptees’ individual stories but focused more on movies and books from popular culture. Hence, the curiosity for this study arose and I started thinking that this fusion between adoption stories and popular culture was worth to address in research as well.

A lot of research has notably been done on transracial adoption, adoption narratives and about how adoption stories have affected other adoptees but there seems to be a lack in including stories from popular culture and how those can affect adoptees; studies focus more on comparing real narratives with each other (Homans 2006; Yngvesson, & Mahoney 2000), dismantling fictive and real stories (Homans, 2007) or how adoption is represented in popular culture (Clark 1998; Hübinette, 2005; Gailey 2005), yet there are no specific studies that link transracial adoptees with how they perceive narratives from popular culture when it comes to dealing with their adoption. Moreover, since a lot of studies concerning adoption have been conducted in the United States and other big European countries, notably Sweden, this study is interested in a rather unexplored country such as the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg.

This brings up the following research question: **How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives?** The aims of this research lie in unfolding how different life narratives of transracial adoptees deal with the fact of being adopted whilst using stories from popular culture. The interest consists of finding out in which ways the subjects of this study identify or empathize with characters, plotlines and other features from fictive stories that have marked them during their lives in relation to their adoption.

The relevance of this research lies in opening up new point of views on how popular culture shapes people’s life story, by filling a gap in the relation between popular culture and adoption studies. As both popular culture and adoption studies have been studied separately for most of the time, this study tries to connect both subjects that are of high symbolic value and meaning making when it comes to influencing individuals. In addition to this, qualitative studies concerning adoption in Luxembourg are very rare if existent at all which would allow this study to add information to the country’s limited available data.

Furthermore, adoption studies are mostly related to the department of psychology and drawing a link to sociology is necessary and of great value for future research and possible intertwining of different departments. It is important that adoption studies should not only deal with psychological traumas or ethnic/cultural identity crisis but matter more on a social scope and include transracial adoptees unique perceptions in the consumption of culture and popular
culture in general. The outcome of this thesis tries thus to fill yet another gap between the closely related subjects of sociology and psychology which, in an ideal case, could open new fields of research on the micro- and meso-level research.

Accordingly, this thesis will be presented in the following structure: First, the theoretical framework will provide a concise summary of previous research of the most central concepts encircling this thesis which are transracial adoption, adoption in Luxembourg, life narratives, adoption life stories and popular culture. Secondly, the research design will highlight the methodological choices regarding this study. To answer the posed question, this empirical study relies on in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with 11 transracial adoptees who grew up in Luxembourg. Thematic analysis enables afterwards to pull the data corpus apart and look across it to find themes that will deliver interesting insights. The results will be presented in the next chapter, going from overall findings onto answering the research question with the resulting sub-themes. Finally, this thesis will end on an in-depth conclusion and discussion.

2. Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework of this thesis dives into several topics, including transracial adoption, adoption in Luxembourg, life narratives, adoption life stories and popular culture. The goal is to present a clear outline of the concepts which encompass this study. In the beginning it is vital to start with a brief historical context upon transracial adoption and adding the small country of Luxembourg into this setting, since the core of the research lies in retrieving data from transracial adoptees that grew up in the said country. The framework will continue to take on narrative identity and adoption life stories; both theoretical concepts are defining characters of the research question posed and therefore important to understand in order to find answers. In the end, the concept of imagination and popular culture will be added as they round up the developed concepts of the research question and add the value of novelty in this particular research.

About Transracial Adoption
The first section of this theoretical outline will present the concept of transracial adoption through three different aspects: First, a historical context will be provided which will be followed by societal and identity issues that surfaced along with transracial adoption and finally end with explaining the difficulties in research concerning adoption studies.

“Adoption is one of the oldest social institutions” (United Nations, 2009, p. xv). Whereas adoption mainly happened to “preserve family lines or inheritance, to gain political power or to
forge alliances between families” (United Nations, 2009, p. xv) in the past, its purpose changed mid-19th century when the focus started to become the child’s well-being and the possibility of offering the child a better future (United Nations, 2009). Up until today, the purpose of adoption lies in the child’s best interest which governments around the world try to regulate accordingly (United Nations, 2009). Regarding the research of the United Nations (2009), over two hundred fifty thousand children are adopted every year. Although this seems a high number, it is still a rare phenomenon since for 100 000 children under 18 in the world, only twelve are adoptees.

International adoption, which also known as intercountry adoption, occurred relatively rarely until the second half of the twentieth century (United Nations, 2009). Nowadays however, international adoptions account for more than half of all adoptions in a lot of European countries (United Nations, 2009). Most children are adopted from poorer to richer countries (Selman 2002). The reasons behind international adoption are often “wars, poverty, lack of social welfare, and social upheaval” (Lee, 2003, p.714). People from affluent countries often file for adoption when they cannot conceive children of their own (Selman, 2006; Lee, 2003) but however, the United Nations (2009) have noted that also a lot of parents that already have children decide to adopt. The level of adoption is dependent both from the available children in poor countries and the demand for children in wealthy countries (Lovelock, 2000). Lee (2003) gives the example of India and post-war Korea where Americans adopted a lot of orphaned children.

Nevertheless, adoption has always faced emotional issues when it comes to the meaning of the traditional representation in the construction of the family image (United Nations, 2009), especially when it comes to transracial adoption, which is defined by Silverman (1993) as “the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families” (p. 104). Lee (2003) judges it as the most visible form of adoption because of the physical dissimilarity between parents and adoptee. In most of the cases, white parents adopt children with a different ethnic background who “are considered racial/ethnic minorities in this country” (Lee, 2003, p. 712). Therefore, a lot of third-world supporters see a new form of cultural appropriation and colonialism which connotates the children as economic supplies (Tessler, Gamache & Liu, 1999). On top of this, there has been a lot of discussion regarding international and transracial adoption where issues such as kidnapping, baby selling and forced labor needed to be faced (Lee, 2003).

In another way, transracial adoption breaks with the traditional family image in which blood and resemblance represent its pillars and consequently, the new-fangled family needs to build an identity for itself as for outsiders as well (Galvin, 2003). This process involves the creation of narratives that address “physical differences, choosing names, establishing family cultural identity, and preparing for identity challenges” (Galvin, 2003, p. 241). Lee (2003) talks about the transracial adoption paradox which deals with growing up with contradictory experiences
regarding one’s own ethnicity and the predominantly one around.

A lot of research in transracial adoption focuses on the ambivalence between ethnic and cultural identity. Lee (2003) reviewed research based upon transracial adoption and came to the conclusion that most of the studies “can be classified as descriptive field studies on either the psychological outcomes or the racial/ethnic identity development of transracial adoptees” (Lee, p. 715). His review concluded that transracial adoptees are well accustomed psychologically and deal in various ways in developing their racial and ethnic identity and “engage in a variety of cultural socialization strategies to overcome the transracial adoption paradox” (p. 728).

Nonetheless, in terms of research, it is important to note that when it comes to available data concerning international or intercountry adoption, Weil (1984) noted that it was very difficult to find an even amount in both quantitative and qualitative information. Although a lot of research has been done in adoption studies, data concerning international adoptions, where children leave the country of birth, is frequently missing or just partly available (United Nations, 2009). A briefing of the European Union still underlines Weil’s (1984) argument and the United Nation’s study (2009) in 2016 by stating that the way information is gathered makes it problematic to understand the changes of effects and reasons behind adoption. Furthermore, there is no consistent or unified system of recording statistics concerning child adoption at EU level which is challenging when wanting to compare the countries’ data with each other (Adoption of children in the European Union Briefing, European Union, 2016). This is also important considering the data available for Luxembourg, the country in question for this research.

**Adoption in the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg**

Set in the heart of Europe, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg is a small country bordering to France, Belgium and Germany (Fehlen, 2002). Luxembourg gained its independence in the 19th century and has flourished from a poor agricultural to the second richest country in the world (Murdock, 2016). Luxembourg is one of the six core states which founded the European Union as well as part of the United Nations since 1945.

The legislation regarding adoption in Luxembourg is structured by the law of 13 June 1989 reforming adoption: The Article 343 of the law discloses that adoption is only permitted if it is to the advantage of the adoptee and if there is a valid reason behind it (The Official Portal of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2018). Any resident in the Grand-Duchy is open to adoption; she or he does not need to have the Luxembourgish citizenship. The national legislation of the adopter sets the required qualities for adopting and the conditions necessitated for being adopted are ruled by the national legislation of the adoptee, except if the intended adoption consults the adopter's nationality on the adoptee (The Official Portal of the Grand Duchy of
In addition to this, Luxembourg endorsed the Hague Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption which introduced the principle of dual subsidiarity (Activity Report of Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth Luxembourg, 2017). Dual subsidiarity means that for each child in need, one should first look to find a replacement family in the country of origin itself. As a result, the numbers of children who find an adoptive family outside their country of residence are falling (Activity Report of Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth Luxembourg, 2017).

Today, the Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth approves and controls services in the field of adoption; it supports the activities imposed on them (Activity Report of Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth Luxembourg, 2017). The activity report further reveals that in 2017, three adoption non-profit organizations were approved and contracted, each specialized by partner country: The Amicale Internationale d’Aide a l’Enfance (South Korea, Vietnam, India), Naledi asbl (South Africa) and the service of adoption from Red Cross Luxembourg (Bulgary, Burkina Faso, Portugal, Columbia, Slovakia and national adoptions).

Nevertheless, finding data from before 2003 on adoption in Luxembourg is very difficult. It can be noted that in 2003, 51 children were adopted from other countries (United Nations, 2009) compared to 2017 where 19 international adoptions have been finalized (Activity Report of Ministry of National Education, Childhood and Youth Luxembourg, 2017). Furthermore, according to the United Nations (2009), Luxembourg is amongst the receiving countries with the highest rates on international adoption. Furthermore, next to Belgium and France, 90 percent of the adoptions made in the country are of international nature.

Consequently, international adoption has touched a lot of Luxembourgish lives and has had an impact on the life stories of a lot of adoptees, adoptive parents and people surrounding them. This will be evident when revealing the life stories of Luxembourgish transracial adoptees in the analysis of this study. In order to make sense of this, it is vital to dive into the concept of narrative identity before talking about adoption life stories.

Life Stories and Narrative Identity

“When you ask people how they came to be who they are, and when you ask them to talk about the future, they typically tell stories” (McAdams, 2018, p. 361). It is throughout his studies on narrative identity that McAdams came to the conclusion that if identity was an image it would probably look like a story (McAdams, 2018). This chapter will introduce the concept of narrative identity and life stories, starting with Erikson’s work and the psychological approach and then
talk about the implements of social constructionism when it comes to narrative identity in sociology.

When it comes to the concept of narrative identity, one cannot omit the work of psychologist Erik Erikson. Erikson ([1950] 1963) was the first to integrate narrative forms in the conception of life when introducing the concept of *ego identity*, which revolves around the assumption, that important moments during a life are building different blocks which can be coherently put together into the right order. These building blocks integrate events turned into episodes turned into a life story. This idea resulted in the beginnings of narrative studies, that reach out in various fields of research, notably psychology and sociology.

Influenced partly by Erikson, the psychologist Dan P. McAdams (1985) developed a model which says that life stories have a *defining* character and that “identity itself takes the form of a story” (McAdams, 2001, p. 101). McAdams suggest that narrative identity results around the stories that make individuals who they are and create a notion of a felt identity. In his words, “the language of identity is the language of stories, narrative, drama, literature” (McAdams, 1985, p. 385).

Polkinghorne (1988), who studied narrative theories thoroughly, describes a “narrative” as a story either false or true. He continues by suggesting that narratives are constructed and understood through two types of human rationality: the narrative rationality or the other classical scientific rationality which is generally applied. The narrative rationality "understands synoptically the meaning of a whole, seeing it as a dialectic integration of its parts" (p. 35) while the other is used logically and mathematically and is used more frequently in science. He (1988) considers this a pity since he views that scientists should learn to analyze people like text rather than using general laws. In his eyes, it is crucial to comprehend one’s own narrative since it helps to interpret actions to afterwards connect personal actions with time which produces the creation of the narrative itself. Therein lies the true meaningfulness of human existence (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Narrative identity, from a psychological point of view, can thus be defined as an identity that is created around stories. “There exist numerous life stories, with each story corresponding to a recurrent context (i.e., a social role) relevant to the life in question” (Dunlop, 2017, p. 153). Moreover, a life story can never be finished product during one’s life (Dunlop, 2017), meaning that a life story is always a lifetime development (McLean, 2008). Dunlop (2018) proposed the Narrative Identity Structure Model (NISM) which goal it is to distinguish a form for narrative identity that integrates the big and the little stories. The little stories, such as being a mother or being a professor, all come together in the big story. A similarity to the sociologist’s Erving Goffman (1959) dramaturgical approach cannot go unnoticed, wherein social roles become
performances, where one displays certain behaviors that vary according to the social setting one enters. Although narrative identity has its roots in psychology, it can be found in other forms in social sciences, such as sociology for example.

Here, it is important to include the notion of social constructionism, which core idea is that people rationalize their experiences by forming models of the social world they inhabit (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). To put it into simpler words, social constructionism implies that many concepts are perceived as real because society has created them. Influenced by Mead, Schutz and Durkheim, social constructionists Berger and Luckmann supported this idea that it is the interactions between individuals in a society that create knowledge; a key idea to constructionism (Schwandt, 2013).

To illustrate this view in the context of this study, social constructionism suggests that the concept of identity is not created from inside an individual but rather from the social world he or she inhabits (Burr, 1995). Burr (1995), being influenced by Berger and Luckmann, suggests that the individual does indeed not create the social construction of his or her personality him- or herself, but is rather created by the embedded social context. The idea behind this, is that identity does not have a core in itself but is rather constituted by multiple factors and can have multiple facets, namely stories, around it. Thus, the idea of a narrative identity falls under the umbrella of the social constructionism paradigm.

Accordingly, forming narratives around one’s life is related to the conception, that social order relies to the capacity to narrativize moments (White, 1980). Narrative identity often starts being shaped during young-adulthood (Erikson, [1950] 1963; McAdams, 2001), because “childhood becomes the remembered past and adulthood the anticipated future” (McAdams, 2001, p. 103). Furthermore, McAdams (2001) argues, that Western societies start having expectations towards adolescents regarding their social circle, occupations and ideas. The emerging adult consequently starts “putting his or her life together into a culturally meaningful story” (McAdams, 2001, 103) to work on this integration.

The philosopher Pierre Ricœur (1991) states that “life is no more than a biological phenomenon” (p. 432) if it is not interpreted: It is the interpretation of fiction that gives life a new role, a new meaning. Moreover, he relates narrative to time experience, in which people organize their sense of the past as well as understand their potential future actions. In a sense, this resumes this section well since life stories are basically life experiences which are internalized and evolve with the time, thus creating an identity around an individual which gives him or her a sense of unity and purpose in life (McAdams, 2001). When it comes to transracial adoption life stories, there are interesting features that enhance a duality between stories and identities which will be discussed in the following segment.
Transracial Adoption Life Stories

Life stories are of psychosocial nature, which means they are created by the individual but also the cultural context surrounding him or her (McAdams, 2001). Every life story depends on the individual person concerned and the revolving circumstances rather than fix ideas about what is and what ought to be (Lees, 2017).

When it comes to life stories of adopted people however, there is more complex narrative to consider, given the difficulty there is to get to know one’s origins because there is a lack of information about the birth parents and the exact birth date and place (Homans, 2006). This problem of positioning oneself in one place or another forces adoptees to a “hard game of identity” (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000, p. 78). In addition, when it comes to transracial adoption, these children face an experience of feeling torn between two identities and two places (Yngvesson, 2003), and have difficulties to establish and maintain an identity within and outside of the family (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011). While growing up “both the fact of being adopted and ethnically different from most people leads adopted adolescents, in theory at least, to find identity tasks substantially more difficult” (Yoon, 2008, p. 73). In terms of research, Tizard (1991) mentions that most studies focus on choosing between adopted and birth identities rather than observe the level to which adoptees accept a mixed cultural identity.

Two concepts are important when discussing the identity of transracial adoptees: the transracial adoption paradox and the cultural racial identity model. The transracial adoption paradox proposes the discrepancy adoptees face because they share the culture yet not the race of their adopted parents (Lee, 2000). To illustrate this, Harrigan (2009) found out that while growing up, children share the same culture as their parents although “organically” not resembling them. This makes it difficult to find a sense of belonging given that adoptees need to figure out how they relate to both their racial and cultural identity and make it into a coherent whole. In order to understand these unique experiences and stories of transracial adoptees, Steward and Baden (1995) introduced the Cultural-Racial Identity model which analyzes the cultural and racial identity separately. This model is based upon Erikson’s work who also argued that identity must be incorporated within culture and form a “unity of personal and cultural identity” (Erikson, 1968, p. 20). The model developed 16 identity statuses to describe the identities of transracial adoptees (Steward & Baden, 2000) based upon their opinions, experiences and feelings of belonging. Most importantly, Steward and Baden (2000) suggest that “the Cultural-Racial Identity Model is the first theoretical model to separate cultural identity and racial identity” (p. 334) and focuses on the needs of those who describe themselves through various identities.

For most families with adopted children there is an immediate visibility, especially when it
comes to transracial adoption. Although most of the parents consider their adopted children as their own and don’t seem to ‘see’ the racial difference, people in their environment, including other family members or friends, often point it out and characterize them as being adopted (Harrigan, 2009). This leads to different procedures that intend to compensate for this presumed loss of identity and culture (Yngvesson & Mahony, 2000), subsequent from transracial and transnational adoption. In other words, adoption stories start based upon loss. A lot of adopted children feel loss because unlike usual birth stories, they lack their personal story (Galvin, 2010).

Hence, Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000) explain that conventional narratives of adoptees have gaps, which lead to *might-have-been-different* feelings and produce pieced-together stories, which results in seeking the feeling of completeness. To prevent their children from feeling too lost, parents try to incorporate adoption entrance stories, where they explain the how and why (Kranstuber & Kellas, 2011; Homans, 2007) which conveys a dual meaning (Yngvesson & Mahony, 2000) wherein the genetic parent gave up the child and helped parents who could not have children of their own for example.

But the notion of loss does not have to be connoted negativity or irreplaceability; Dorow (2006) and Yngvesson (2003) are amongst the scholars who believe that the adoptive identity represents the positive outcome of loss. Cultural and literary theorists who do not work in adoption studies have discovered that origins are mostly social fabrications (Homans, 2007) and this is now transcending onto adoption studies. Often, when adoptees go looking for their roots, they come to the realization that finding one’s origins does not make you ‘whole’ again (Yngvesson, 2003; Homans 2007). Homans (2007) underlines this when saying that identity can be created upon loss and sees this as a “valuable human achievement” (p. 64).

Although most available research in the beginning of adoption studies talked more about psychological changes or self-confidence rather than “the process by which they achieve an understanding and acceptance of their history and identity” (Freidlander et al., 2000, p. 188), this has changed over the past decade (Langrehr, Yoon, Hacker, & Caudill, 2015). Studies are focused on identity (Steward & Baden, 2000; Lee, 2003: Baden & Wiley, 2007) but also start to incorporate culture (Yoon, 2004; Harrigan, 2009; Langrehr et al., 2015) into their midst though when studying culture, it remains mainly related to the country of origin of the adoptees or their home country. This is no different regarding adoption life stories where studies mostly include adoption life stories from other adoptees or what-if-narratives. Here opens a window to include fictive narratives from popular culture and shed a light into how transracial adoption life stories can be affected in this context.
Imagination, Fiction and Adoption through the lens of Popular Culture

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum (2001) suggests that in order to understand oneself, the arts play a key role since different narrative artworks such as songs, film or books enable knowledge about emotion-histories which are hard to get otherwise. In other words, stories are of great value when it comes to understanding one’s emotional life because emotions, just like notions of self-identity, are narratively constructed.

Today, popular culture incorporates all these mediums which epitomize the values and the ideas of various large social groups and represent types of mass communication that are easily available (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000). In a sense, popular culture can be defined as mass-commodities that are meant to be mass-consumed or simply as cultural goods that are liked by many (Storey, 2016). In the past fifty years, the strict theoretical barrier between what was considered “high” and “low” culture has been broken down more and more and scholars have begun to acknowledge the similarities of both in social human practices (Mukerij & Schudson, 1991). Consequently, popular culture studies can be seen as a combination between cultural studies and communication studies and are vastly discussed and explored upon since the importance of the extent to which it affects people’s lives in Western capitalist societies has increased over the years (Strinati, 2004).

When it comes to the representation of adoption in Western popular culture, adoption started being thematized on television in the 1990s (Clark, 1998) and has been portrayed in various forms, such as soap operas and Hollywood films (Hübinette, 2005). Subsequently, researchers started to analyze the depiction of adoption in popular culture: Clark (1998) talks about the commodification of adoption in television which in her opinion “fuels the moral panic” (p. 84) and creates social anxiety instead of informing people and start a discussion. Gailey (2005), who examined the portrayal of adoptees in commercial films, found out that movies correspond to the politics of the time they were released in, and adoptive families are mostly represented in a romantic way. This romance is based upon resistance; accepting the child’s difficult past no matter what and creating real family ties despite not being genetically related (Gailey, 2005). In any case, these studies focus more on the representation of adoption rather than the examination of the adoptees’ point of views.

Having determined that popular culture is omnipresent in today’s society and discussing its portrayal of adoption themes, it also plays a big role in influencing one’s imagination and fantasies on an individual level. Therefore, stories from popular culture “may be used to join, teach, and challenge” (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000, p. 163) individuals which helps constructing one own’s identity and also understanding other people (Guy, cited in Thompson, 2007) with different identities. Besides, Thompsons (2007) also argues that popular culture can imprint and
mark one’s core values. According to Gottschall (2013), fictive stories create the look of stable identities and therefore shape imagination processes; they furnish order to reality. In other words, people use stories and narrative themes from popular culture as building blocks for their own narrative identity.

Everyone has favorite stories: stories from the past, stories in the present and certainly stories in the future; one collects new narratives during an entire life. In a sense, one confronts emotions like love, fear and hate with the help of imagination (Reijnders, 2015). Reijnders (2015) suggests that imagination is shaped from stories that have marked oneself; these narratives deliver personal meaning which is then incorporated in one’s daily life.

Referring to Caughey (1984), Reijnders (2015) mentions that daydreams and fantasies are usually about different relationships with real or made-up people. For adoptees, fictive stories frequently revolve around the desire for an origin narrative; they often imagine what their biological parents could be like and how their life story would have been different had they stayed in their country of birth. The creative power around this desire is of big value although it produces mainly fiction and not truth (Homans, 2007). The problem around their unknown birth stories makes them cope with it while turning towards these imaginative scenarios (Homans, 2006).

This encircles a narrative theme called the what-if which focuses on imagining narratives that could have happened. What-if narratives are often used during childhood and considered to be a positive outcome of imagination that allows children to play and create imaginative scenarios (Engel, 2005). For adoptees, it often entails dreaming about the relationship they could have had with their biological parents but also learning from fictive characters they can relate to as previously mentioned by Yngvesson and Mahoney (2000). In a sense, what-if narratives are based upon fantasies which allow life to be more tolerable and help coping with feelings of pain (Treacher & Katz, 2001). What-if narratives often incorporate fantasy and real aspects, they sometimes add characters from fiction and popular culture with real persons (Engel, 2005), making the imaginative aspect cross meta layers in different outplayed scenarios.

Hence, just like everyone else, transracial adoptees are influenced by fictive narratives, which help them make sense of the world. In a lot of cases, fictional characters teach the understanding of basic moral problems and the comprehension of new emotional situations; they reflect the reality of what we attribute as important (Vermeule, 2009). In some way, fiction is a “usable tool for conceiving of and connecting with a much desired but patently unavailable past” (Homans 2007, p. 67). Stories from books, movies and other media “create a rich associative imagination of the world” (Reijnders, 2015, p.3). This is further underlined by Treacher and Katz (2001), who suggest that when it comes to adoptees, they all use fictive
narratives to make sense of the confusion and gaps they experience in their personal life stories. Overall, this theoretical framework has provided insights into the various concepts that encircle the presented research question: How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives? It has offered an overview on transracial adoption, adoption in Luxembourg, narrative identity, adoption life narratives and finally with this last section, it has brought the notions of adoption, fiction and popular culture together.

The prospects of this research will certainly show how popular culture is embedded into the life narratives of transracial adoptees. Regarding existing theory, the expectations around this research are to find notions of loss and adapting difficulties for transracial adoptees and their identity. Although some studies have shown that loss does not need to have a negative connotation in the outcome, most studies suggest that it is indeed difficult to find own one’s narrative identity when there are gaps in the life story or a dichotomy between racial and cultural identities. Furthermore, the use of fiction to handle difficult adoption issues that encircle what-if narratives are likely to be found when interviewing the respondents. Central to this study is the fact that despite having tackled issues of adoption representation in popular culture, no study has yet combined personal meaning making when perceiving stories from popular culture as a transracial adoptee which will provide a notion of novelty into existing research.

3. Research Design
From an epistemological point of view, this thesis can be related to interpretivism. Since the research question for this Master thesis is: How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives? and there is no precise answer to this question but rather a variety of subjective opinions, this thesis will opt for an interpretative point of view in order to find out “how members of a social group interpret the world around them” (Bryman, 2012, p.31). Practically, this thesis aims to position prompted interpretations into a social scientific frame (Bryman, 2012). It is interesting here to note that this study also takes on a hermeneutic process when looking for “pattern recognition to draw conclusions about the meaning content of linguistic messages” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 7). One does not look for certain and necessary conclusions through hermeneutic perception (Polkinghorne, 1988) but rather find meaning to the life stories of each individual. Ontologically, the thesis can be drawn from constructionism, since it “embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman, 2012, p.36). In a way, it implies that social aspects, like adoption and popular
Consequently, this research is a qualitative one since it “emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2012, p.3): The interest lies in finding out meanings attributed to popular culture stories by transracial adoptees living in Europe. The collected data within this chosen social setting will demonstrate how the world is interpreted by their social surroundings (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, an inductive approach is appropriate to approach the “relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories” (Bryman, 2013, p.36). Narrative, adoption and popular culture studies are built upon big amount of theory and research history and it by looking across them, that answers can be provided in order to find new opinions and outcomes by connecting them.

**Research Method and Analysis**

The research method for this thesis are semi-structured in-depth interviews as they will deliver meaning to personal life stories. To use Polkinghorne’s (1988) words, the “study of the realm of meaning requires the use of linguistic data” (p. 7). To a certain degree, meaning is corresponding to language because ordinary language use “is able to carry meanings among people” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 7).

Since the research question is formulated open-endedly, semi-structured in-depth interviews are useful to collect data for this research, as they offer the researcher the flexibility of an open mind regarding the contours of his study (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, it is important in this thesis, that the order and the points of conversation of questions can differ, allowing also dealing with inconsistencies in the end. Hence, these interviews provide large flexibility while focusing on certain topics and are based on an interview guide which is built upon the conceptualization. This gives the interviewees a chance to have their stories unfold.

In terms of analysis, this thesis uses thematic analysis: According to Bryman (2012), thematic analysis focuses on looking across data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in order to find topics and themes, that will answer the research question. The resulting themes and probable sub-themes are based on recurrent ideas in the text which then can be applied onto the data (Bryman, 2012). Thematic analysis is useful and flexible when analyzing interviews (Bryman, 2012) and delivers in-depth and compound data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In a sense, it offers a tool for dismantling text and discovering clear explanations and their implied meaning from within (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Since the research question of this paper focuses on sensing the relation between fictive and
personal life stories, thematic analysis helps exploring the understanding and the signification of this idea (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In this sense, thematic analysis can be structured in various contexts which enables the analysis to be of strong nature (Bryman, 2012). For this thesis, thematic analysis is suitable because of its flexibility regarding an inductive coding scheme, seeing that the broad research question will offer a larger amount of data with different opinions that will be coded after familiarizing with it.

All the data has been coded and analyzed with the help of Atlas.ti. After reading and re-reading the corpus data for the first times, coding approaches from grounded theory were used in order to find themes. Taking specific structures from grounded theory are not unusual in thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) since it is problematic to “to isolate the specific conceptual foundations of the method” (p. 387) and parallels can be located in various approaches such as notably grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). For this thesis, open coding and focused coding were of essence in order to derive themes. The first phase of open coding entailed spontaneity and helped to have fresh insights into the data while using short and simple codes (Charmaz, 2006) while reading the transcripts for the first time. The second phase of focused coding concentrated on specific aspects of the data through an analytic code in order for the data to make sense. Comparing data to data a focused code was developed to shed light on different points of views. The code book for open coding can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E shows the example of a code tree formed from focused coding.

When re-arranging and organizing the many codes, the themes were constructed upon a global theme, organizing themes and basic themes. This procedure is commonly used in both thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) and grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). These variations of themes were put together as in Attride-Stirling’s paper (2001): basic themes as assumptions that place together a cluster of signification in the form of organizing themes. All the organizing themes are represented around a global theme, which build an umbrella over the entire data.

**Sampling Method and Sample**
The sampling method for this thesis is a non-probability snowball sampling, as the goal is to find people of relevance to the research and through find other valid candidates (Bryman, 2012). Participants in this study are all transracial adoptees of legal age, that grew up in Luxembourg. As people in the researcher’s social circle are also transracial adoptees, it is with and through them that interviewees were found. It can be discussed that researchers should not interview individuals close to them since it is considered important to distance oneself to the studied subjects in order to deliver unbiased opinions (Yuan, 2014). Yet, such a sampling benefits from a
more comfortable setting since there is already a relation established between interviewer and interviewee, even if this is only through a mutual contact. This familiarity evokes enough trust between the researcher and the participants through which the gathering of rich data is facilitated, especially when it comes to in-depth interviews (Reijnders, 2015).

The interviewees were contacted through Facebook Messenger, as it is less personal than a phone call but also less official than an email. In this case, Facebook Messenger provides a balance between formal and informal communication without overstepping personal boundaries which is important regarding the subject of the interview since it was important not to scare off or offend potential interviewees. Thus, initial contact was made through a message in Luxembourgish that can be translated as followed in table 3.1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Message sent to interviewees on Facebook Messenger in Luxembourgish</th>
<th>Translated message in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Hallo [Virnumm],
Merci am Viraus,
Ioanna. | Hello [first name],
(I got your contact from [first name] and) I hope it is okay to write you. For my Master thesis, I am looking for people who would be interested in participating in an interview concerning pop-culture and adoption. That is why I wanted to ask if you would want to take the time and answer some questions? This would last for about an hour and revolve around you and fictive stories. Do you also know some people who would maybe be interested in sharing their opinion on this?
Thanks in advance,
Ioanna. |

(table 3.1: initial Facebook Messenger message)

From the 15 asked, 11 agreed to participate in this research while others could not contribute due to temporary or geographic circumstances; no one refused to participate in this study because of personal matters. 11 interviews were conducted between March and April 2018 and lasted approximately around an hour (see Appendix A). All the interviews were conducted in Luxembourgish as it is the mother tongue of all interviewees and thus helps preventing important information being lost in translation.

Hence, the interviewees in this research are all adoptees that grew up in Luxembourg and have the Luxembourgish national identity. For the purpose of this study, their general information can be summarized by country of origin, country of current residence, age, gender and profession (see table 3.2).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>National identity</th>
<th>Current place of living</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Beyren, Luxembourg</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>salesman in alimentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Ottange, France</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>educator for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Nancy, France</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Medicine student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Grumelange, Luxembourg</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>teacher in high-school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Wilwerwiltz, Luxembourg</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>computer scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Rameldange, Luxembourg</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>English teacher in high-school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Heffeningen, Luxembourg</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>educator for children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Karlsruhe, Germany</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Music Journalism student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Luxembourg City, Luxembourg</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>vocational training student in Audiovisual Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z.</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Reuler, Luxembourg</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>temporary worker at a bakery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Luxembourgish</td>
<td>Nancy, France</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Sports student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coincidentally, six men and five women participated in this study. Interviewees are between 20 and 33 years old and have their roots in South Korea, Brazil, India or Peru. The interviewees are therefore all of legal age and in the stage of young adulthood, having traversed childhood and teenager phases to provide in-depth information upon their upbringing. One of the interviews happened to be with the brother of the researcher but proved to be similar to subsequent interviews, consequently eliminating a possible bias approach. The countries of origin vary since the interest of this study lies in overall transracial adoptees and is not fixed to one particular country. The same applies to gender which was not a specification beforehand and is hence completely random.

Interviews were conducted in various places with the importance lying in the comfort of each interviewee. Some preferred a skype interview whereas others were completely fine with being interviewed in cafes, at home or at a mutual friend’s place. None of the interviewees felt uncomfortable during the process of being interviewed and all of the interviews turned out to be
friendly, open and relaxed conversations. Interviewees were provided necessary information on their privacy in oral and written form. To protect the interviewee’s privacy, the interviewees will be referred to with abbreviations in this thesis. Most of the interviewees signed the consent form after the interview while only Z. did not find it necessary and found her oral consent to be sufficient. There were two consent forms sent and signed because the first version had a spelling mistake in it, yet most of the interviewees signed the first version. Both consent forms can be found in their blank form under Appendix B.

**Conceptualization and Operationalization**

The core concepts of this thesis are transracial adoption life stories and narratives from popular culture. Transracial adoption life stories can be defined as a story of identity based upon racially different parents and children, relating thus Silverman’s (1993) definition on transracial adoption as “the joining of racially different parents and children together in adoptive families” (p.) and McAdam’s (2001) on narrative identity stating that “identity itself takes the form of a story” (p. 101). The definition of narratives from popular culture is based upon Polkinghorne (1988) and defined as true or untrue stories from popular tales expressed in Music, Film or books.

Supplementary to this and for the purpose of intelligibility, racial identity refers to identifying oneself to a particular race whereas ethnic identification is meant to reflect upon how one identifies oneself “as a member of a national or regional (e.g., Latin American) group” (Freidlander et al., 2000, p. 196) and cultural identity defines oneself with “having a sense of shared customs, attitudes, and values with a particular group” (Freidlander et al., 2000, p. 196).

Moreover, the use of story maps is helpful when getting to know stories about one’s interviewees (Richmond, 2002). According to Richmond (2002), who used story maps for narrative analysis, the map gives “a shape to individual stories and allows for a more penetrating analysis in relation to the objectives of the research” (p.5). This aspect can be considered as a useful tool when creating the interview guide to connect certain aspects with each other afterwards. Via parts of his developed model, the questions of the semi-structured interview are founded upon the past, the present and the future. Dividing the interview guide allows deeper insights into the participants’ life stories (see table 3.3). The resulting interview guide can be found under Appendix C.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic 1: adoption life story</th>
<th>Topic 2: popular culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dealing with adoption</td>
<td>favorite stories growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during childhood</td>
<td>up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reflexivity

In terms of reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge that as a researcher, one will always be marked by one’s own socio-cultural context during the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Recognizing one’s own cultural manners and expectations form an attitude towards the research approach which involve the researcher as part of the world being studied (Draper, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to “weave reflexivity into the analytical framework” (Yuan, 2014, p. 100); I am fully aware that this study is of very personal nature and that it concerns aspects of my private life since I am also a transracial adoptee. I cannot deny that this research has private motives too in discovering other adoptees’ life stories and working through my own. Nevertheless, this does not impact the reliability of this study because to avoid possible subjective bias to the minimum, my personal involvement tried to be as neutral and as open as possible by not stirring my interviewees into certain directions through an uncluttered interview guide and by reviewing my findings with my supervisor.

Furthermore, the sharing of foremost personal and sensitive information has to be taken into account regarding the interviewees. Some might not have asked themselves questions concerning certain topics in the interview therefore there is a possibility that some issues are stirred up along this process. That is why, shortly after conducting the interviews, I re-contacted each participant to make sure that they are emotionally doing all right concerning the interview. All the interviewees suggested that the interview was interesting but not personally challenging. If the opposite case had occurred, I would have offered some help such as talking through sensitive topics that they encountered and maybe suggesting that they should talk to someone close or getting therapeutic help.

Additionally, it is central to note that interviewees only share what they want to, and assumptions can only be made with the data gathered and underlying suppositions cannot be taken into consideration since they would involve an amount of personal bias. In other words, I only relied on what was said in the interviews and tried to keep my personal opinions and suppositions to a minimum. In this sense, honesty is an essential principle from both sides when working with close interviewees (Yuan, 2014). That is why, to create a solid researcher-participant relationship, I followed Yuan’s approach (2014) by finding an equilibrium between respect and informality. Although sometimes conversations derived into chit-chats, I managed to
regard my interviewees mostly as participants with the help of my interview guide and its semi-structure proved helpful in terms of flexibility.

4. Results
Throughout every phase in his life, N. has always felt like an outsider. When he was younger, this feeling often resulted in loneliness and anger, leading to what he calls self-destructive behavior but as he grew older, he found a way to be at peace with himself and now even sees the fact of being different as an enormous asset. When it comes to stories from popular culture, he remembers above all movies that he could empathize with during his teenage years. He identifies with plotlines on an emotional and spiritual level which help him finding parts of himself in the fictive narrative. Repeating that he is not like most other people and taking pride in his being now, he has much to express, a lot of thoughts and opinions and they are more far-reaching than only the interview questions. Whenever he talks about his life, it sounds like a movie itself and although I cannot see his face nor his gestures through the phone, I can feel the eagerness and the enthusiasm in his voice when he exposes his life story to me. His laugh is contagious and his strength is undeniable. His story is one amongst ten others that I had the fortune and the pleasure to listen to while conducting this research.

In the beginning of each interview, one of the first questioned asked was: “What were your favorite stories when you were a younger?” Later on, the same question was asked about preferred stories in the present. Whenever they were asked upon their beloved stories in the past or present, every one of the interviewees had to pause, think for a moment and then their eyes lightened up, their voices got powerful, and they fondly remembered stories which they cherished and collected all the way through their lives that somehow conveyed special messages or meanings to them. Eleven people have unwrapped their life stories and although there have been many differences amongst their favorite stories and point of views, one thing remains absolutely clear: Being adopted is far from only being a sad and torn thing, especially when it comes to the consumption of popular culture. Still, this study reveals a lot of reasons why its participants enjoy certain stories and characters and what meanings they attribute to them based upon the fact of being adopted.

Therefore, the following chapter will dive into the findings that answer the posed research question: **How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives?** The analysis of this
study has proven to exhibit fruitful results that will be discussed thoroughly: Starting with a presentation of the overall findings, continuing with the established global theme and ending with an in-depth description on the organizing themes. For readability purposes, the global theme has been renamed into main theme and the resulting organizing themes into sub-themes in the next paragraphs.

**Overall Findings**

In summary, findings from this study are from a varying degree; ranging from very subtle to very strong connections between fiction and personal life. Every interviewee has different opinions: Some rarely attribute fictive stories onto their life stories whereas others have strong implications between their life stories and fiction and of course there are some scattered in the middle. The results present that not everyone of the interviewees appropriate stories from popular culture as part of their personal life narratives, especially when it comes to the topic of being adopted.

When it comes to dealing with the fact of being adopted, all of the interviewees mention to have no issues at the moment. Most of the interviewees never faced problems concerning their adoption while others recall times in their childhood and/or teenage years. Bagley and Young (1980) mention that often transracial adoptees’ problems get smaller the older they become which can also be confirmed in this research. The problems that some interviewees faced in the past arose around the transracial adoption paradox which makes it tough to be ethnically and racially different from their environment (Lee, 2003); they talk about not fitting in or hating the looks strangers gave them. Others, such as M. or C. talk about the uncertainty revolving their background story: M. blames her adoptive parents and C. sees it as a personal journey he has to face.

According to the majority of the interviewees, the most pertinent questions about adoption they receive from people in their surroundings are: “Would you like to go back?” and “Would you like to meet your ‘real’ parents?” It is mostly along such questions raised by others that interviewees fall into what-if scenarios and every interviewee without exception, mentions at least one what-if narrative. Most of them associate it to how it could have been worse in their country of origin and how lucky they feel for growing up in Luxembourg; they are all grateful to the chance they were given and a lot of them thank their adoptive parents and families.

More than half of the interviewees also suggest that they consume fictive narratives mainly for entertainment; to dive into other worlds and to distract themselves. As far as comparing stories from popular culture non-related to adoption at all, the findings show that stories from popular culture as used for personal interest, comparing interhuman relationships or finding
role models. Personal interest relates to cinephiles who find themes such as computer-science and science-fiction of high yet only informative relevance. Others mention interhuman relationships when watching series or listening to songs where certain situations occur that are relatable in their own lives, but none linked to adoption related subjects.

Nevertheless, in regard to comparing stories from popular culture with their personal life narratives and the fact of being a transracial adoptee, there are several ways in which the interviewees draw affinities from fictive to personal narratives. This overarches the analysis through a main theme and will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

Main Theme: Adoption and Fiction

The results that focus on the research question: **How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives?** can be put under the umbrella of the main theme that is adoption and fiction. The structure of this theme can be organized through four sub-themes that are based upon basic themes which originated during the coding process (see fig. 4.1).

(fig. 4.1: global theme/main theme)

Based upon the organizational chart, one can accordingly deduce four sub-themes: connection to country of origin, comparison through physical resemblance, comparison through specific adoption narratives and connection through emotion.
These four themes cannot be ranked in importance and have an equal relevance. Hence, the presented order of sub-themes can be classified as from broad to specific or to put it in other words, from a meso to micro point of view: Starting with depicting a connection to the country of origin and a comparison through physical resemblance to moving on to more specifics such as comparisons through adoption narratives and finally, to the most personal sub-theme which is a connection through emotion. Subsequently, the organizing themes will be elaborated.

**Sub-Theme 1: Connection to country of origin**

All of the interviewees came to Luxembourg as little children and only a few have visited the country they were born in. P. has been to Peru several times, B. from South Korea traveled to his country of origin once as well as the two sisters who were born in India and N. who was born in Brazil. The others all wish to go in the future while M. has no interest in visiting Brazil at all and Z. is afraid of visiting Brazil because she doubts it will match her expectations. Nevertheless, most of them find a link to their roots when encountering fictive narratives set in their country of birth either through the setting or the depiction of its culture.

Often the participants felt drawn more to a fictive story when it was set in the country of origin however this occurred commonly during childhood. This is close to the concept of places imagination (Reijnders, 2010) wherein places represent “physical points of reference, such as objects or places” (p. 40) and enable to create a symbolic boundary between ‘real’ and ‘imagined’ world. By watching these stories, the interviewees were able to imagine the place where they came from. P. recalls watching the animated movie *The Emperor’s New Groove* (2000) set in Peru and describing how accurate the drawings are to the original sites in Cuzco. As mentioned before, he traveled a lot with his family when he was younger and has visited Peru on several occasions. Parents often try to make their children learn about their country of origin, often resulting in a more intellectual than emotional interest (Bagley & Young, 1980). P. has developed both these connections, partly because he feels a personal bond to the South American lifestyle. Similar preferences are also made by other interviewees; A. for example, who is adopted from India, says she and her sister D. preferred to watch something Indian rather than something from a different culture. They used to watch *The Jungle Book* (1967) and Bollywood movies a lot which put them into the physical and cultural set of India. Although D. says that it is not an accurate representative of India, she really enjoyed them as a child because of the music.

Imagination as an emotional link to the country of origin is furthermore used when seeing a portraying of the culture; sometimes with a positive perspective, though other times with a more negative approach. Some bonds are very minor, such as rooting for the national sports team or following lives of specific celebrities: B. roots for Korean players in table tennis and soccer world
cup tournaments while M. was interested in the Brazilian model Gisèle Bündchen. Yet, adoptee from India, D. talks of a much stronger feeling, a “wow-moment” when she first saw *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) which connected her emotionally to India and its culture:

“[...] the beginning, with the children living on the streets. Because I saw myself in the same situation and some children, especially the girl, Latika. As a child, she reminded me extremely of myself as a child. Well, the same optically but also how she behaved, how she was.”

D. was in awe during the movie and felt a sense of pride while watching it. To her, it was important that societal issues, such as poverty in India, were shown on the big screen. Moreover N., who was born in Brazil, had a strong connection to the story of *City of God* (2002), especially because it was set in Brazil. N. used to show the movie to his friends to demonstrate where he comes from. Brazil has always been “omnipresent” in his life and according to him, it has always been a part of him. On the other hand, M., who is also an adoptee from Brazil, refuses to watch this movie and even movies that are set in Brazil in general. There is a feeling of being torn behind this which she explains in these words:

“I don’t know because I feel 50/50 and then 50 percent is mine but then again, I am so Western European, and I do not have a fucking clue about it [...] I also grew up with the mentality to be identified by that or to negatively associate myself with that.”

M. mentions the duality that transracial adoptees have to deal with when their racial identity is not the same as their cultural identity. A research by Freundlich & Lieberthal (2000) has shown that adoptees who are confronted more to discrimination during adolescence “to experience a range of conflicting emotions regarding notions of race and ethnicity” (Lee, 2003, p. 719). This applies to M. but also N., who often were picked on because they did not look Caucasian. Every other interviewee mentions that they have been targets of racial slurs, but they never attributed a lot of importance to it. To deal with physical issues when being adopted is discussed further in the next sub-theme.

---

1 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote:
“[...] den Ufank, mat de Stroossekanner. Well ech mech an der selwechter Situatioun gesinn hu, just manner al. Ech hu mech an der selwechter Situatioun gesinn a verschidde Kanner, also d'Meedchen, d'Latika. Als Kand huet mech extrem u mech erënnert als Kand. Also, d'selwecht vum Ausgesinn hir a wéi et sech beholl huet, wéi et war.”

2 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote:
“Ech weess net well ech mech dann aver esou 50/50 fillen an dann ass 50 Prozent esou mäint an anerssäits sinn ech esou Western European an ech hu keng fucking Anung dovunner. [...] Ech sinn och mat der Mentalitéit opgewuess domat identifizéiert ze ginn oder mech selwer negativ domadder ze associéieren.”
**Sub-Theme 2: Comparison through physical resemblance**

Often, adoptees forget that they do not look like most people in their entourage (Harrigan, 2009). This is not different in the case of the interviewees. B., for example, often forgets that he is Korean, and C. repeatedly refers to himself as a “real Luxembourger”. This also reflects their preferences when it comes to narratives presented in popular culture; they do not pay attention to physical appearances and do not seek for characters who look like them. Others on the contrary search for characters in stories that resemble them physically. Either these characters become favorite characters in a story or they are given extra attention to. In all cases, there is a feeling to find representation and identification in popular culture through looks.

Subtle and light associations can also be found in this organizing theme, as L., born in South Korea, is always positively surprised when she sees an Asian portrayed on screen. Others, such as K. and M. had stronger wishes to see fictive characters that resembled them while growing up. During his childhood, K. often looked for Asian characters in fictive narratives. He would look up to characters such as Mulan or Jackie Chan and adapt them into his personal life story. When mentioning Jackie Chan, he remembers an old memory from high-school:

> “As an example, Rush Hour [...] I could always link this to being in class [...] When I was 16, we had a black guy in our class [...] and I was sitting next to him, as an Asian of course and we used to make jokes, always related to Rush Hour.”

Furthermore, K. intentionally looked for Asian representation in Western European culture which, according to him, was always so predominantly white. It appealed to him to see “how as an Asian, one could fight one’s way through modern culture.”

M. has the same feeling and talks about how difficult it was for her to find someone she could relate to in fictive stories based upon looks, especially during childhood and teenage years when she became increasingly interested in the Gothic scene. She mentions that she often felt as a side-kick to her friends who fulfilled the ideal of beauty; they were pale, had dark hair yet bright eyes. As a child, she could identify with Carmen, from Bizet’s opera (1875), because she was “a relative strong character and also had the Latina-touch.” Today, she thinks, even if

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3 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „Zum Beispill am Rush Hour […] dat konnt ech êmmer esou e bësse mat der Klass verbannen [...] esou mat 16 Joer, do hate mir êmmer sou en ee Schwaarzen an der Klass [...] an ech souz nieft him, eben als Asiat a mir hunn eben de Geck gemaach, êmmer sou mam Rush Hour verbonnen.”
4 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „wéi een sech esou als Asiat konnt eben an der moderner Kultur duerchboxen“
5 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „e relativ staarke Charakter halt och Latina.”
unconsciously, that this is why she was drawn even more to that character. It is also significant to mention D. again and her strong feelings towards the depiction of Latika’s character in *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). Thus, representation is a key concept when it comes to finding similar looking characters in stories but also when it comes to find a connection towards fictive adoption narratives as an adoptee.

**Sub-theme 3: Comparison through fictive adoption narratives**

When it comes to transracial adoption, a lot of adoptees forget that they have been adopted until someone points it out and marks them as being adopted (Harrigan, 2009). While for some of them, this is painful, others have a more laid-back attitude. The interviewees in this research do not particularly search for fictive adoption stories; coming across such stories is usually by coincidence, if it happens at all. When asked if adoption is underrepresented in popular culture, most of them say it should be talked more about while a few do not find it to be of utter importance. Nevertheless, a lot of adoptees are happy when finding adoption story lines in fiction and can relate to them. Identification and representation are again key factors that influence this comparison, as well as empathy.

Adoption is rarely a leitmotif in popular culture and is often depicted through a side-story (Gailey, 2005). This provides to be meaningful for some of the interviewees though, such as S. whose favorite character was Monkey D. Luffy from the Anime *One Piece* (1997-) in his childhood. Luffy grew up as an orphan, was raised by his grand-father and has a brother who does not share the same blood. S., who also has an adopted sister, could identify with him since “this was not his real family, but it became a family, like he also had been adopted.”

K. shares a similar connection between fiction and personal life: As an early *Star Wars* enthusiast, he talks about finding out about Luke Skywalker’s background in his childhood:

> “There is Luke Skywalker who lives with his uncle and his godmother [aunt], he is practically also adopted, and I could find a connection towards him because I am also adopted, not from the own family but it stays adoption.”

In K.’s eyes, it was just a beautiful detail in the franchise and did not influence him more than empathize more with Luke. Later however, in his teens, K. drew yet again a link between his

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6 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „[…] dat war net seng richteg Famill, aver et ass zu enger Famill ginn, esou wéi wann en adoptéiert vuer.“

7 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „[…] do ass eben de Luke Sywalker, dee wunnt bei sengem Monni a bei senger Giedel, hien ass jo praktesch och adoptéiert vun hinnen an (.) mat him konnt ech mech och esou bëssen a Verbindung setzen well ech jo och adoptéiert sinn, net vun der eegener Famill mee et bleibt awer Adopthoun.“
adoption life story and a fictive one when he discovered the TV-series *Smallville* (2001-2011). The series spins around the origins of Superman who is also in some way adopted when he arrives on Earth from the planet Crypton. At this moment, K. was more interested in how the superhero managed these feelings.

Furthermore, the results of this study reveal that the interviewees who have always been very at ease with adoption rarely seek fictive adoption narratives. This has to do with lack of interest but also lack of representation. B., L., P. and A. were amongst those who never put their adoption life story into question. B. says he would go watch a movie about adoption but could never identify with it since these stories habitually circle around adoptions that go wrong or adoptees who have problems. Research has also shown that adoption stories in pop culture have a tendency to show the tragic and depict adoptees as troubled personalities (Gailey, 2005; DelRosso, 2015). Similarly, D. also has a problem to rely her personal adoption life story to fictive adoption stories which do not reflect her opinion: She remembers seeing *Lion* (2016) but not being personally touched by it given that, unlike the movie’s protagonist, she never wanted to find her biological parents. A. says that a lot of times she forgets that her parents do not look like her to the degree that upon watching *Kung Fu Panda* (2008) she did not realize that the main character was a different species than his father. When asked if she knew stories about adoption, L. mentions Tarzan being raised by apes but never needed to make link towards adoption. Besides, she thinks that adapting adoption stories into pop-culture is a sensitive matter since it is easy to hurt and offend people; it should only be done by someone who shares a similar experience.

Then there are those who love seeing adoption on screen and find the stories empowering. Z. says that she goes to see every movie about adoption that comes out and loves to hear other stories, fictive or real because in her eyes, the representation is important and can benefit others, especially when they face difficulties regarding their adoption. In a way, these movies make her empathize with other stories as well as reflect upon her own. Likewise, M. finds such stories inspiring too, particularly when the adopted characters prove to be strong and bold like for example in the *Pacific Rim* (2013; 2018) installments:

“In the new movie, which came out now, she [the adoptee of Japanese origin] is still partly in it because she has a high position in the program and her half-brother [who is black] comes back into the program as well. And one can see that nothing is different to them and then there is a scene with a picture, but I do not want to spoil anything
[laughs], but on the picture you see the three of them together [with the dad], which is really cool. But it is also so good because it is such a cultural clash.”

She was thrilled when adoption was part of a story arc in a science-fiction movie instead of what she calls a typical “happy picture-perfect family” movie. C., who is rather insensitive when it comes to applying fictive narratives onto his personal life has a soft spot for adoption stories. When encountering such a story, he says that he feels touched by it because adoption will always be a part of him. These storylines affect in on a very personal basis and expose him to inner emotions. Those feelings will be discussed even further in the last organizing theme.

**Sub-Theme 4: Connection through emotion**

It is through the representations in culture that feelings are shaped into scenarios (Reijnders, 2015) thus help reflecting upon personal emotions through fictive narratives. In other words, culture is outlined in plotlines, characters and places and it is upon this scheme that our imagination constructs similar links when confronting inner feelings. The recurring feelings in this sub-theme are emotions of loss and feeling as an outcast.

There is always a part missing when adoptees reflect upon the traditional family image: the early beginning from which they have very little memory if at all. Hence, stories of adoptions often feel like they start with the feeling of loss (Homan, 2007). This feeling makes the adoptees feel incomplete (Yngvesson, 2003) which some of the interviewees connotated as sad. When S. encounters stories that involve orphanages, he finds likeness to his own adoption life story. Even though he has gaps in his memory and does not remember his short time in the orphanage, he can imagine how it felt:

“I can imagine how it is, maybe I could not imagine it before, how it is, [being put] from one family to another, grow up in a home [...] and never meet one’s real parents.”

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8 freely translated quote from Luxembourgish: „An deem neien Deel, deen elo erauskomm ass, do ass hat och nach mat dran zum Deel, well hat och eng héich Positioun am Programm huet a sään Hallelebrudder könnt dann och zeréck an de Programm. (...) an et gesiitt een, dat guer nääischt anescht fir si ass an dann ass eng Zoen mat enger Foto mee och wéll elo nääischt spoileren [laughs] mee op der Foto gesiitt een déi Dräi dann zesummen, wat mega cool ass. Mee och well et och esou e kulturelle Clash ass, ass et esou flott.”

9 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „[…] ech ka mir jo och virstelle wéi dat ass, dofir virdrun konnt ech ma dat villiécht net virstellen wéi dat ass, vun enger Famill an déi aner, an engem Heem opzewuessen, a seng richteg Elteren ni kennenzeléieren.”
S. is generally attracted towards action but also looks for sorrow related storylines. As a child, he explored stories that surround this feeling and for example contained “a protagonist losing his parents, or he grew up alone in an orphanage.” He thinks that his unknown past has shaped him and that is why he can subconsciously identify himself with these stories. Other presentations of loss can be presumed from the family transnational adoptees ‘leave behind’. Often this loss represents deep sadness. D. used to listen to a lot of songs about absent fathers apologizing to have left and as a child, she often wished to have any relation or connection towards her birth father. N. makes a similar assumption when he talks about why he could empathize with Simba from *The Lion King* (1994) when he was a child: He never found out who his biological father was and had a difficult relationship with his adoptive father when he was younger which resulted in making him feel a lack of “emotional or maybe spiritual” guidance. That is why he was amongst other, drawn to Mufasa, Simba’s father for being such a righteous role-model for his son. N. underlines that he is just making suppositions about his childhood feelings but suggests:

“And when his dad died, of course he was on his own then. And I would say, you know, that this is something that appealed to me, yes. That he was on his own and that I felt this on an emotional level too.”

This strong feeling of being alone has accompanied N. for a long time and is emphasized here by the loss he felt because in his eyes, he lacked a strong father figure. Although others, such as C. for example, do not feel sad about it, there are parts missing of his life story when C. talks about watching movie scenes related to adoption:

“Next you think it’s just a stupid movie but why does it still move you? Because then you start reflecting about: Where do I come from? How did that go? And then it becomes somehow emotional and you think: ‘How lucky I am!’ and sometimes you think: ‘What if?’ [...] Of course, one can identify oneself a little by the life story a little, yes.”

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10 freely translated from Luxembourgish quote: „[...] d’Haaptpersoun verléiert seng Elteren oder en ass ganz eleng opgewuess an engem Orphelinat [...]”

11 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „[...] emotionell oder villäicht spirituell gesinn [...]”

12 freely translated from the Luxembourgish quote: „[...] A wou säi Papp gestuerwen ass, war hien natierlech op sech eleng gestallt dann esou. An ech géif soen, weess de, dass dat eppes ass, wat mech ugeschwat huet, jo. Dass hien eben op sech eleng gestallt war an, dass ech dat op enger gewëssener emotionaler Ebene eben och gespuert hunn.”

C. who is normally not easily moved by fictive narratives finds himself surprisingly touched by scenes of adoption because it raises questions about bits of his past which he cannot fully remember and the what-if narrative and gets his imagination into speculations. Yngvesson (2003) underlines this by suggesting that adoptees often undergo a feeling of being pulled between double identities and locations.

When strangers point out optical differences to adoptees, these “regain visibility” (Harrigan, 2009, p.644). For a lot of adoptees, this merely means to explain that they are adopted but for others, it makes them feel ‘different’ which for some evoke feelings of sadness (Freidlander et al., 2000). This is shown by interviewee D., N. and M. who found comparison in outcasts from fiction as a child or teenager. D. recalls a moment from her childhood when she twisted her hand upside down, so that the lightness of her palm was revealed instead of her more tanned skin; she wanted to look physically like her mother. Upon reflecting on this, she finds a connection to her favorite story from childhood; a classic Luxembourgish tale (De Wonnerstaer [the wonderstar]) that talked about family and included parts of Hans Christian Andersons’ Ugly Duckling. She feels the connection between feeling “different from others because [she] looked different” but adds that this was probably done subconsciously and that it is only now in retrospect that she can make this association.

The feeling of being an outcast has followed N. throughout his whole life. Along with that, melancholia is a feeling that has always accompanied him. Both have been difficult feelings to manage when he was younger, leading to violent outbursts in childhood and adolescence and the use of drugs at a very young age. N. says that adoption has been the main cause for which he felt different, especially as a child when he would be “special” and “extra” on the one hand but often cast aside from others on the other hand. In his youth, he and his friends watched a lot of movies depicting drug use with its highs and lows and N. says that he had always needed a personal emotional link to fiction in order to watch something. Furthermore N. states that even if adoption issues started these feelings, he thinks that it also has a lot to do with his South-American temper, which makes him not want to conform into certain societal roles. Returning to his vital link to *City of God* (2002) that was revealed earlier in this analysis, he sees an anti-idol in Zé Pequeño, the main character of the film:

> “Of course, Zé Pequeño has reminded me of myself; already as a kid, he would always hang out with the big guys, but he was also someone who basically always had to

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4 freely translated from Luxembourgish quote: „[…] aneschters gefillt hunn wei anerer well ech anescht ausgesinn hunn.”
integrate himself and later did his own thing and destroyed himself and was also lonely which means Zé Pequeño was someone, that I could somehow... I don’t want to say that I empathized with him, but he was something like an anti-model basically, an anti-idol. Like: ‘Look, if you don’t find another way to deal with your energies and emotions you will end like him.”

N. has worked a lot through his issues in the past years and today, he says that he sees things clearer and melancholia as well as being different have become part of his journey and have a more positive effect on him.

As previously mentioned, M. had difficulties in balancing her ethnic and cultural identity while growing up and, similar to N., felt influenced by feelings of melancholia. She found this well reflected in Tim Burton movies, notably Edward Scissorhands (1990):

“All Tim Burton film ass och definitiv an der Kategorie vun Influenz mat dran. Grad Edward Scissorhands ass och a la: Komplett ausgeschott, du bass net dat nämlecht mee du wëlls dozou gehéieren an et ass genau dat! Dee Film passt do zu honnert Prozent dran.”

This feeling of not belonging really nagged on her, principally when it came to develop her identity. In a very singular way to deal with this, she decided to change her name, based upon fictive characters. She mentions that 90% percent of her surroundings only call her by her self-given name. Since she always admired strong female characters, it is no surprise that her new name comes from such a woman, namely Morgan Le Faye from the re-writings of The Mists of Avalon (1983) by Marion Zimmer Bradley:

“She makes her own decisions for herself, whatever others might have made for her before and I think this mirrors the thing with adoption a little. To go my own way, there has always been this pressure because I’ve often been told: ‘You are adopted, you were very lucky in life, you have to do it better than all the others!’ And I was like: ‘I don’t give..."
a shit.’ I don’t want to be top of my class, I just want my peace and quiet. And then my grades went down because I completely refused to be pressured into that role.”

M. had enough with proving that she deserved the life she had. Overcompensating is a recurring behavior of adoptees, especially when it comes to minimize their racial differences (Langrehr et al., 2015). This is intensified through the awareness that their life would have been very different in their country of origin (Freidlander et al., 2000). This is no different to the interviewees who nearly all mention that they feel fortunate to have the life they lead now, and this discussion often circulates around what-if narratives.

Finishing this chapter on a positive note is Z.’s point of view on being different: Being one adoptee amongst the first generation of adoptees in Luxembourg, she always knew that she was not the same as the others but never found it to be a negative aspect in her life. When she was a child, she liked Dumbo (1941) a lot because he was different and he could fly. She does not mention the bullying that he had to undergo but praises Dumbo’s friend who tells him how remarkable it is to be different. She thinks that she can draw a comparison to herself now, since she knew that she always looked unlike the other children. Z. describes this in the following words:

“Well I’ve always known that I was different because clearly, I looked different. But I have always enjoyed that a lot and I have always been proud of that because yes, it is awesome to be different.”

Z. takes pride in being different and always has. Whenever asked what being different made her feel during various times in the interview, she answered with the words “super” and “thrilling.”

This ends the analysis chapter which tried to disclose in detail how transracial adoptees compare their life story to stories told in popular culture regarding adoption.

17 freely translated from the Luxembourghish quote: „Also ech wousst, dass ech ëmmer aneschters wier well ech aneschters ausgesinn, ganz kloer. Mee ech hunn dat ëmmer ganz flott fonnt an ech war ëmmer ganz stolz doritwer well dat ass jo super, aneschters ze sinn. [...]”

18 freely translated from the Luxembourghish word „spannend”
5. Conclusion and Discussion

“You gotta let go of that stuff from past, because it just doesn’t matter!
The only thing that matters is what you choose to be now.”
- Po, *Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011)

*Kung Fu Panda 2* (2011) circles around Po having to find inner peace in order to acquire great power which could help him defeating the film’s antagonist. While he has been told that he is adopted, he cannot get his head around it and needs to find out more. During this quest, Po often questions his identity and suffers from feelings of loss and not belonging. Finally, Po finds inner peace when he recognizes and recollects his past and assimilates it into himself. Although Po found out all the details of his background, this research has shown that not every adoptee needs to have all the answers to feel complete. Besides, just like the example of Kung Fu Panda’s adoption narrative, this research aimed to create a fusion between popular culture and adoption stories.

Hence, when answering the research question posed at the beginning of this thesis: **How do transracial adoptees, who were raised in Luxembourg, compare stories from popular culture to their personal life narratives?** this research has shown that despite not always looking for specific adoption plots in fiction, there are other subtle underlying ways in which transracial adoptees compare stories from popular culture with their own adoption life narratives. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not every interviewee finds comparisons between adoption and fiction, especially when he or she did never face problems regarding their adoption. Furthermore, most comparisons were drawn during childhood and teenage years, a period in which identity processes are formed and constantly changing and in which individuals are starting to piece their lives together to create a profound cultural story around them (McAdams, 2001).

Having conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 11 transracial adoptees, the four resulting comparisons can be summarized in four themes: connection to country of origin, comparison through physical resemblance, comparison through specific adoption narratives and connection through emotion. All these comparisons can be linked to each other and are sometimes intertwined since they often revolve around topics regarding cultural, racial and ethnic identity matters.

There are connections made to the country of origin wherein some respondents liked watching animated movies that were set in these countries such as *The Jungle Book* (1967) in India and *The Emperor’s New Groove* (2000) in Peru. Additionally, there is a link to the portrayal of the culture from these countries that conveyed meaning to some interviewees on
where they come from, like Brazil’s City of God (2002) and India’s Slumdog Millionaire (2008). It is to be noted that one of the interviewee did not want to watch City of God (2002) since she feels torn between both parts of her cultural identity.

This is also shown through the need to find characters in fiction who looked similar. Some interviewees looked for Asian representation on screen because they felt the need to see personages that had similar physical traits, while others were just simply positively surprised when someone from their racial group was portrayed in popular culture.

When being asked about fictive adoption narratives, the opinions and feelings varied amongst the interviewees: Most of them do not seek adoption narratives in popular culture because they do not find it of importance or are not interested in them while others don’t feel like they are portrayed accordingly; often this revolves around scenarios in which the adoptees are troublesome characters. Other interviewees however do like fictive adoption stories because they are touched by them and it makes them deal with inner emotions. To them it is important to have such depictions because it helps other adoptees as well as their entourage, such as their family and friends. Furthermore, upon being asked about the representation of adoption in popular culture, most of them mentioned that it was underrepresented and should be talked more about while others did not care and a few did say that showing adoption is a sensitive topic that should not be discussed easily.

Dealing with adoption is not always easy and this is shown when people associate personal feelings with narratives from popular culture. Here, the interviewees talked about a feeling of loss and a feeling of being different and not fitting in. When watching stories that deal with loss, it usually revolves around the unknown namely the unknown memories from a foster home, or the unknown birth father. Some interviewees mention a feeling of melancholia that accompanied them on their life paths. This is frequently displayed through feeling like an outcast. One interviewee suggests that she found characters that would soothe this feeling while another interviewee took a life lesson from an anti-hero in a movie. These are personal issues that were mostly present during childhood and adolescence but nowadays, every interviewee feels at ease with his or her adoption story. Nevertheless, one interviewee has always been happy being different and finds pride in it up until today.

A lot of links can be made to existing theory when looking at the exposed sub-themes, especially when it comes to facing dualities in identity development as a transracial adoptee (Freidlander et al., 2000; Lee, 2003; Harrigan, 2009) as well as mentioning feelings of belonging and loss (Yngvesson & Mahoney, 2000; Yngvesson, 2003; Homans 2006; Homans, 2007). Besides, these results seem to confirm Dermer and Hutchings (2003) view that narratives from popular culture can challenge oneself as well as shape imagination processes (Gottschall
Transracial adoptees thus use characters, plots and themes from popular culture to build their own narrative identity. Although Yngvesson and Homans both mention an optimistic outcome of loss, when it comes to positive connotations of adoption, there is a clear lack of existing research to compare results. Howe and Feast (2000) suggest that 53% of adoptees reported adoption to be a positive experience and correspondingly, all the interviewees in this research described their adoption as something enriching and not having problems with that part of them in the present which is rarely to be found in other adoption studies.

Furthermore, this thesis stumbled upon some unexpected findings which would be interesting for future research. One example regards the significance of one’s name which two interviewees found of great importance. Galvin (2003) mentions that a name can either connect or dissociate an adopted child from their country of origin. Furthermore, parents of adopted children often struggle between giving a new name or keeping the birth name (Elmhorst, 2000; Galvin, 2003). As names are important because they are the most personal thing we have to the outside world and our surroundings define us through our first name, future research might want to dig a little deeper into what meanings adoptees attribute to their given names.

Another interesting finding is that, contrary to an existing British study (Howe & Feast, 2000), the majority of interviewees do not want to meet their birth parents. Only one interviewee mentions that she wants to go look for her birth mother. In Howe’s and Feast’s (2000) research, only 17% were non-searchers. This might be a coincidence in the sample provided in this research, yet it would be interesting to redo such a study to see if results have changed over the years or in-between countries.

This research has provided new and fresh insights into the life stories of transracial adoptees by combining adoption studies and popular culture studies. It is furthermore interwoven from both sociological as well as psychological studies. The strength of this study lies thus in an innovative, optimistic and uniting approach that aims to show how meaning making is enabled through narratives from popular culture for transracial adoptee’s life stories and their construction of a narrative identity. On the other hand, this study has of course some limitations: First, the amount of data collected is not as significant on a larger scale since only 11 interviews were conducted due to time restrictions. Furthermore, sampling in Luxembourg is limiting since it is a small country and research is often more focused on studying adoption in larger populations. Then again, this study contributed to qualitative data collection about adoption to this country as well as shed some insights into adoption perceptions in a small country.

All in all, it was of high significance to present a somewhat light-hearted study because most of the studies encountered deal with mostly pain, sadness, identity issues and loss regarding adoption. Nearly every adoption study has a burdened shadow floating above itself and...
additionally, in most of the cases, the data gathered is from opinions of adoptive parents or analyses of representations in popular culture, yet not from the views and thoughts of adoptees themselves. This study wants to do the exact opposite in presenting a more positive and light view on adoption studies and more importantly in sharing the opinions of adoptees only.

On a personal note, when starting this thesis, my expectations were to find a lot of sorrow, traumatic experiences and torment based upon existing research and representation in popular culture. The results are very different however and present a more positive and encouraging view on transracial adoption. Even though these negative feelings are surely present, they did not overtake the life narratives of my interviewees but made their life stories stronger.

In conclusion, we are more than just transracial adoptees with tragic (and I say this word with a pinch of irony) background stories; we all grew up with the joy and sorrow that comes along with finding oneself and we all watched, read and consumed stories throughout our lives, just like everyone else in the end. And that does not mean that we cannot acknowledge that adoption is and will always be a part of us. We might have a lot of questions but not all of them need to be answered in order to determine who we are and who we want to become as individuals.
[Acknowledgements]

To all the interviewees that contributed to this study by opening up to me and unfolding their stories.

To my Brother,
who always proved me that blood does not define family bonds.

To my Dad,
who can make me feel at home everywhere.

To my Mum,
because home has always been and will always be wherever she is.
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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview duration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Duration of interview</th>
<th>Location of interview</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S.</td>
<td>40 min. 24 sec.</td>
<td>Beyren, Luxembourg</td>
<td>April 4, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K.</td>
<td>45 min. 37 sec.</td>
<td>Luxembourg City, Luxembourg</td>
<td>April 5, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>65 min. 59 sec.</td>
<td>Echternach, Luxembourg</td>
<td>April 6, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.</td>
<td>51 min. 45 sec.</td>
<td>Wiltz, Luxembourg</td>
<td>April 6, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>68 min. 45 sec.</td>
<td>Wiltz, Luxembourg</td>
<td>April 6, 2018</td>
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<tr>
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<td>65 min. 03 sec.</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 17, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>67 min. 30 sec.</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 20, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.</td>
<td>66 min. 24 sec.</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 21, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.</td>
<td>63 min. 14 sec.</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 21, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z.</td>
<td>46 min. 00 sec.</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>April 22, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.</td>
<td>64 min. 42 sec.</td>
<td>Phone-call</td>
<td>April 25, 2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 h. 45 min. 25 sec.</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B: Consent Forms

[Image of consent forms]
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:
Ioanna Madenogu | Ioannayunjoo@gmail.com | +352 691 316 720

DESCRIPTION
You are invited to participate in a research about adoption and pop-culture. The purpose of the study is to understand how stories and popular culture help coping with adoption.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,
- the questions of the interview will be related to stories from popular culture and adoption

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a voice recorder for the interview.
You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

RISKS AND BENEFITS
As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using pseudonyms in my research paper. I will use the material from the interviews exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

TIME INVOLVEMENT
Your participation in this study will take approximately 1 hour. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

PAYMENTS
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

PARTICIPANTS’ RIGHTS
If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS
If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact – anonymously, if you wish—[contact person in the dept., faculty or university]

JOINING THE CONSENT FORM
If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you do not need to sign this form in order to minimize risk and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name Signature Date

I prefer my identity not to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study.

Name Signature Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.
Appendix C: Interview guide

Past
Adoption
Question 1: Could you tell me a little bit about yourself?
Possible sub-question: Where were you born?
Question 2: Could you tell me about your childhood?
Possible sub-question: Where were you born?
Possible sub-question: When did you arrive here (or the country you grew up in)?
Possible sub-question: How was it growing up in relation to being adopted?

Popular culture
Question 1: What were your favorite stories when you were a younger?
Possible sub-question: What moved you in these stories?
Possible sub-question: What was important to you about stories?
Possible sub-question: Did the stories affect you and your life? How?
Possible sub-question: Do you see a link between these stories and being adopted?

Present
Adoption
Starting question: How does being adopted play a role in your daily life?
Possible sub-question: Why does it have this little/big importance?
Possible sub-question: Why does it make you feel happy/neutral/sad?

Popular culture
Question 1: What are currently your favorite stories, movies, books?
Possible sub-question: Why are you moved by those specific themes?
Possible sub-question: Did the stories affect you and your life? How?
Possible sub-question: Do you see a link between these stories and being adopted?
Question 2: What do you think when you see a story about adoption:
Possible sub-question: How does it make you feel?

Future
Adoption
Starting question: How do you think adoption will influence you in the future?
Possible sub-question: Would you adopt children yourself? Why (not)?

Popular culture
Question 1: Do you think more stories about adoption are important in popular culture? Why (not)?
Question 2: Will you tell your children your favorite stories?
Possible sub-question: Do you think these will affect their lives? How?

**Appendix D: Codebook: Open Coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Description (if needed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action in stories</td>
<td>genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adoption and stories</td>
<td>when adoption and fictive narratives are mentioned together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adoption preference for the future</td>
<td>interviewee talks about adopting future children or decides against it</td>
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<tr>
<td>anger</td>
<td>feeling described of interviewee</td>
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<td>Anime</td>
<td>genre</td>
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<td>Arielle</td>
<td>fictive character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>background</td>
<td>interviewee’s introduction, how he/she presents himself</td>
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<td>based upon real story</td>
<td>stories that are adapted by real ones</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Bollywood</td>
<td>film Genre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brother Bear</td>
<td>film title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen (Bizet)</td>
<td>opera Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of God</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>Comedy in stories</td>
<td>genre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison based upon interest</td>
<td>interviewee compares topic in fiction with interest in personal life</td>
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<tr>
<td>comparison personal life story to fictive</td>
<td>interviewee compares his life with fiction narrative</td>
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<tr>
<td>story</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison through a feeling</td>
<td>interviewee compares his feelings with the feelings that fictive story displays/makes him feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison through a sense of place</td>
<td>interviewee compares the narrative story setting with a setting that is personal to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison through physical resemblance</td>
<td>interviewee compares himself with a character in fiction that looks like him</td>
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<td>country of origin</td>
<td>where the interviewee is born</td>
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<td>identification through having a sense of shared customs, attitudes, and values with a particular group</td>
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<td>Dan Brown</td>
<td>author</td>
</tr>
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<td>de Wonnerstaer</td>
<td>film title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designated Survivor</td>
<td>series title</td>
</tr>
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<td>dive into another world</td>
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<td>Dragonball</td>
<td>Anime series</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drive</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dumbo</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward Scissorhands</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>Entertainment in stories</td>
<td>genre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eragon</td>
<td>book and film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>ethnic identity</td>
<td>identification as a member of a national or regional group</td>
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<td>facing adoption as a child</td>
<td>interviewee’s perception of dealing with adoption during childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facing adoption as a teenager</td>
<td>interviewee’s perception of dealing with adoption during youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>facing adoption in the future</td>
<td>interviewee’s perception of dealing with adoption in the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>facing adoption in the present</td>
<td>interviewee’s perception of dealing with adoption now</td>
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<tr>
<td>Famill Wibbelmaus</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>family image in stories</td>
<td>stories that deal with depicting family life</td>
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<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>genre</td>
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<td>favorite stories as a child</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite stories as a teenager</td>
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<tr>
<td>favorite stories in the present</td>
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<tr>
<td>fear</td>
<td>emotion described by interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling out of place</td>
<td>emotion described by interviewee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings towards stories</td>
<td>interviewee’s emotions when encountering stories, what it makes him/her feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fictive companion</td>
<td>character of fiction who is present in interviewee’s life during some time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goth</td>
<td>genre</td>
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<tr>
<td>identification through stories</td>
<td>how interviewee identifies himself through stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence from stories</td>
<td>how interviewee is influenced through stories</td>
</tr>
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<td>interest in culture of country of origin</td>
<td>how interviewee explores country of origin</td>
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<td>Jack Sparrow</td>
<td>fictive character</td>
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<td>Jackie Chan</td>
<td>actor</td>
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<td>JungleBook</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>JungleBook 2</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>Lars the polar bear</td>
<td>fictive character</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lion King</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lord of the Rings</td>
<td>film and book title</td>
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<td>Loss in stories</td>
<td>emotion that is presented in fictive narratives</td>
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<td>Luffy from One Piece</td>
<td>fictive character</td>
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<td>main attraction in stories as a child</td>
<td>what was the interviewee’s favorite aspects in stories during childhood</td>
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<td>main attraction in stories in the present</td>
<td>what is the interviewee’s favorite aspects in stories now</td>
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<td>Marvel</td>
<td>film company</td>
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<td>Mrs Doubtfire</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>Mulan</td>
<td>fictive character, film title</td>
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<td>Nebel von Avalon</td>
<td>book title</td>
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<tr>
<td>not too serious but strong character</td>
<td>trait of character in fiction</td>
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<td>opinion on adoption</td>
<td>interviewee’s personal opinion about adoption in general</td>
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<tr>
<td>physical difference towards adoptive parents</td>
<td>when interviewee mentions that he does not look like his parents</td>
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<td>plot twists</td>
<td>mention of plot twists in stories</td>
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<td>Pocahontas</td>
<td>film character, film title</td>
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<td>Power Rangers</td>
<td>fictive characters</td>
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<tr>
<td>relation to adoptive parents</td>
<td>how interviewee and his adoptive parents get along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to birth parents</td>
<td>how interviewee feels towards birth parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>relation to country of origin</td>
<td>interviewee’s views on country of origin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to home country</td>
<td>interviewee’s views on Luxembourg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to possible siblings</td>
<td>when interviewee mentions possible blood siblings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relation to siblings</td>
<td>how interviewee relates to his existing siblings, fellow adoptees or not</td>
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<tr>
<td>representation of adoption in popular culture</td>
<td>interviewee’s view on the representation of fictive narratives that talk about adoption</td>
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<td>role model character</td>
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<td>feeling described by interviewee</td>
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<td>sadness in stories</td>
<td>depiction of sadness in fictive stories</td>
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<td>Smallville</td>
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<td>depiction of problems in society in fiction</td>
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<td>stories that deal with adoption in fiction</td>
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<td>suspense in stories</td>
<td>genre</td>
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<td>talk about adoption</td>
<td>when interviewee talk with people about their adoption/when others mention adoption towards interviewee</td>
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<td>Tata Dillendapp</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Emperor's New Groove</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<td>the importance of a name</td>
<td>interviewee mentions importance of a given name and the impact it has on a life</td>
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<td>Vas vis et deviens</td>
<td>film title</td>
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<tr>
<td>what if narrative</td>
<td>when interviewee mentions what could have happened had she/he stayed in country of origin or how else his story could have unfolded</td>
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<td>Zockerlily</td>
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**Appendix E: Code-Tree Example**

![Code-Tree Example Diagram](image-url)