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The Perspectives of African Immigrants in Sweden on Intercountry Child Adoption

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By

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mum, Madam Akuah Nketiah who passed away on 22nd August 2009. This is to remember her for her love and care. Her death was a painful blow particularly, as I was in the process of undertaking this research. This notwithstanding strengthened me to complete this work. Mum, you will forever be remembered.

Acknowledgement

Acronyms/Abbreviations	Meanings
ABSWAP	Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals
ACRWC	African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGD1	Focus Group Discussion with group number one
FGD2	Focus Group Discussion with group number two
FGD3	Focus Group Discussion with group number three
FGD4	Focus Group Discussion with group number four
FGD5	Focus Group Discussion with group number five
FGD6	Focus Group Discussion with group number six
ICA	Intercountry Child Adoption
LIA	Swedish Intercountry Adoption Intermediation Act
MEPA	Multiethnic Placement Act
MIA	Swedish International Adoptions Authority
NIA	Swedish Council for Intercountry Adoptions
NABSW	National Associations of Black Social Workers
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Abstract

The views of minority groups who speak on behalf of adopted children in Western countries like Sweden have relevance with regards to enriching the international adoption discourse; and to inform adoption policies in both sending and receiving countries. This study aimed at seeking the views of African immigrants in Sweden on intercountry adoption with the objective of bringing out the meanings they create on the major themes involved to enrich the international adoption debate and to inform policy formation. In all, twenty (20) participants who were grouped into Six (6) focus groups participated. There were mixed opinions on various themes involved. Some of their perspectives were consistent with previous political discourses on adoptions and others were not. These were discussed in the analysis accordingly. Contrary to international conventions, participants showed much relevance to intercountry adoption as against incountry adoption. However, there were predominant views in support of child adoption that is well regulated.

1. Introduction

The idea of families from the western world adopting children from developing countries in Africa for instance, has been challenged and defended on various platforms. A typical example is the case of American celebrity, Madonna's adoption of a Malawian baby, David Banda where it was criticized on grounds of disorganizing the child's bond with his biological family. In response to Madonna's adoption of Malawian child, World Vision's Child Rights Advisor, Philippa Lei commented that, "in a situation such as this when a child has family who are willing but not able due to poverty to look after the child themselves, taking the child out of their community and transporting them to another culture cannot be the best option for anyone involved" (Gold 2006). On the other hand, Adam Pertman, executive director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute; has asserted that more Americans are adopting from abroad, with more adopting underprivileged children from Africa. To him, both domestic and overseas adoptions are growing, and should be encouraged (Jacobson 2006 in LJ World News). The focal point of this study is on intercountry adoption. The debate on the current trend of intercountry adoption has been very contentious with varied opinions from different groups of people. Among some of the major themes in adoption debates in many different countries and in an international context has been the priority given to national adoption over intercountry adoption; and the child's right to preservation of his or her cultural and ethnic background (Lind and Johansson 2009).

In debates over adoption policies, the interests of other parties, than the members of the adoption triangle, most notably, the child's state of origin as well as the ethnic and cultural groups that represent the communities from which children are frequently adopted, have been an important factors to consider. In the US for instance, there has been considerable controversy over the fact that many African-American children were adopted by white families. The opinions of the African-American community, a group that claimed the belonging of 'black' children to their community, have had a considerable influence on adoption policies in the United States (Gaber and Aldridge 1994, Bartholet 1991, Chimezie 1975).

It is important to emphasise here that unlike United States where voices of groups like African-American community have been heard on adoption policies, much has not been

heard regarding African immigrants in Sweden on intercountry adoption. Studies on transnational and transracial adoptions in the west have been much concentrated in the United States and to some extent the United Kingdom associated with controversies. It should be noted that most of the transracial adoptions that in the United States are done within America as compare to Sweden where children of different race have been adopted from outside including African countries. This means an emerged controversy surrounding transracial adoption is over American children, not children adopted from other countries as pertaining to Sweden. With an increasingly heterogenic population in Sweden, with large immigrant groups from many of the countries or at least continents from which children are adopted to Sweden, there is the need for the voices of these groups of people to be represented. Therefore, the views of African immigrants as a group in Sweden on the practice of sending African children abroad for adoption is relevant to study. What are the notions of African immigrants on issues of culture, race, identity; the best interest of the child, and the international conventions on priority to national adoption over international adoptions?

The opinions of African immigrants in Sweden can be argued to constitute an equivalent to the African-American community because race and colour have been significance attributes in adoption discourse. African-American or black children have been argued to belong with African-American or black adoptive families in America. Along the line of racial belongingness, African immigrants in Sweden just like their closest comparable group (African-Americans) could make similar claim that children from sending African countries 'belong' to them due to their shared racial background.

This study has brought to light the meanings African immigrants (as a minority group in Sweden who participated in the study) create on major themes in international adoption debate. Their perspectives have relevance with regards to enriching the intercountry child adoption (ICA) discourse and to inform policies in both sending and receiving countries.

2. Background of Study

This section will deal with the meaning of the concept of intercountry adoption; the general history of the concept with special focus on its existence in Sweden.

In this study, intercountry, international, transnational adoptions will be used interchangeably; whilst incountry and domestic adoptions stand the same. However, transracial adoption could either be intercountry or incountry adoption.

2.1 Intercountry adoption: Definition, meaning and history of the concept

According to the Law professor, Elizabeth Bartholet (who has written extensively on international adoption), international or intercountry adoption involves "the transfer of children for parenting purposes from one nation to another" (Bartholet 2007:152). She emphasised that intercountry adoption "presents an extreme form of what is often known as "stranger" adoption. By contrast, relative adoption refers to situation in which a step parent adopts the child of his or her spouse, or a member of a child's extended biological family adopts the child whose parents have died or become unable or willing to parent" (2007:152).

International adoption is a relatively recent phenomenon. It expanded slowly after World War II, until the 1970s, when the numbers increased dramatically (Adamec & Pierce 2000; Brodzinsky 2004, and Hubinette 2004 & 2006). World War II and the crisis after the Korean War did influence the quest for people particularly in the West to adopt children outside their countries as an initiative to 'save children'. Another frequent explanation for the increased interest in transracial and intercountry adoptions is that the number of white healthy infants available for adoption decreased in the 1960. However, some scholars are of the view that the change in attitudes towards people with different colour and origin has been a driving force (Gaber 1994; Ortiz & Briggs 2003). The liberal philosophy of assimilating people of different colours rather than discrimination on grounds of colour to enhance harmonious coexistence in multicultural society made transracial adoption favourable (Gaber 1994). To Gaber, a factor that led to positive attitude towards transracial adoption was "the notion that skin colour was irrelevant and that everyone was the same underneath – the melting pot theory of peace, love and flower power" (1994: 15). Nonetheless, this does not really address the question of willingness to adopt children from another country or for authorities to

provide the possibilities to adopt children from other countries as compared to the frequent explanations of shortage of healthy White children and distressed children during wars and natural disasters.

It is therefore argued that although intercountry adoption originated more than fifty years ago in the aftermath of World War II and the Korean War, the current trend of intercountry adoption is unprecedented (Adamec & Pierce 2000; Volkman 2003; Hubinette 2004; and MIA 2005). This calls for more studies for broader perspectives to answer important questions on this phenomenon.

2.2 Brief History of Intercountry Adoption: Special Focus on Sweden

The quest for intercountry adoption in Sweden was initiated by individual Swedes whose work abroad or personal contacts had linked them with children abroad who needed parents particularly during the late 1950s and mid 1960s and since then there has been a growing positive attitude towards adoption (MIA 2005). Since the mid-70s between 900 and 1800 children have come to Sweden every year. It is on record that there are an estimated 45000 Swedes from different parts of the World who have been adopted in Sweden (MIA 2005: 2).

The smoothness and positive attitude towards intercountry adoption[1] in Europe and for that matter Sweden began to be complex due to some underhand dealings unfavourable to children between sending countries and receiving countries; and the growing concern by adoptees to know their roots and its associated complications (See Lowe 1999; Yngvesson & Mahoney 2000; Samuels 2001; Fonseca 2002; Yngvesson 2003; Chen 2004; and Hubinette 2006). By the 1980s, it was recognized that this phenomena (ICA) was creating serious and complex human and legal problems. The lack of local and international legal documents to safeguard its process to avoid abduction, exploitation, and sale or trafficking in children; and other parochial interests of some individuals instead of adoption in the best interest of the child have been some of the problems. These problems led to the promulgation of the 1993 Hague Convention to ensure best adoption procedures (See The 1993 Hague Convention).

Sweden has played a significant role throughout history when it comes to conventions or laws bordering children's rights or the welfare of children and specific issues such as

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[1]This is not to say that Europe received intercountry adoption wholeheartedly from the beginning. According Cecilia Lindgren (2006), there were some negative voices in Sweden in the late 1960s in the debate over where Sweden officially should engage itself in intercountry adoption or not. These voices questioned whether it was in the best interest of the child to be moved to another country where his or her appearance would be different than that of the majority population; but they were quitted with the accusation of racial prejudice.

adoption both locally and internationally (see Adamec & Pierce 2000; MIA 2005; and Lindgren 2006).

In 1979, The Swedish parliament came with the country's policy on intercountry adoption regarding the best interest of the child. The official position of Sweden is that the preferences of the countries of origin concerning the child's future and the ability of Sweden as a receiving country to guarantee their security together should constitute the preconditions governing intercountry adoption (MIA 2005). Besides, The Swedish Council for Intercountry Adoptions set up in 1973 (NIA) and later known as Swedish International Adoptions Authority (MIA) in 2004, and the Swedish Parliament passed the Intercountry Adoption Intermediation Act (LIA) to regularise intercountry adoption. At the international level, Sweden has been active in the drafting and passing of the 1986 Declaration on Social and Legal Principles Relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with special reference to Foster Placement and Adoption; the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the 1993 Hague Convention all to protect the best interest of the child in adoption (MIA 2005).

In spite of increasing regulations on intercountry adoption, the phenomenon is becoming complex based on universal and relative notions on culture, identity, human rights and other related themes. In other words, the standpoints of scholars as the discussion will reveal hinge and reflect on notions of human rights embedded in the concepts of universalism and cultural relativism (see Howell 2006; and Reichart 2006).

This study is therefore based on notions of culture, human rights [children's rights] and attachment in connection with intercountry child adoption. To be precise, the theoretical framework of this study lays within the political discourse of the adoption debate as the review of related literature will reveal.

3. Review of Related Studies

There have been varied studies on intercountry adoption by different scholars over the years. The review of previous studies will be done in accordance with the following themes:

- ❖ Is adoption viewed in the best interest of the child?

- ❖ Is transracial adoption viewed to be in the best interest of the child?

- ❖ Is intercountry adoption viewed to be in the best interest of the child?

The above questions (themes) connect to major issues of debate in adoption, transracial adoption and intercountry adoption. In the political discourses on adoptions the best interest of the child principle (which is paramount in adoption policies) has been cited. For instance in analysing the best interest of the child and its application in Sweden regarding adoption(s), Judith Lind contended that "the definition of what constitutes the best interest of the child, made by authorities and organisations in sending as well as receiving adoption countries plays a power role" (Lind 2008: 9). The best interest principle is often cited in connection with significance of biological bonds, race, having one culture; and what constitute identity. These are very complicated issues. One ought to read between the lines to draw clearer differences from positions of scholars on transracial and intercountry adoptions. Hence, asking the above questions; and looking at how scholars have answered these questions will give clearer understanding on how issues concerning adoptions have been dealt with by researchers over the years.

3.1 Is adoption viewed in the best interest of the child?

Considering the above question leads to tension between scholars on what causes a child not to live with his or her birth family and what makes adoption a solution in the best interest of the child. Some researchers see the child's separation from his or her birth family as a consequence of dysfunctional family, whilst others point to structural factors such as poverty (Gaber 1994; Aldridge; 1994; Cohen 1994; Bartholet 2007; and Smolin 2007). Whereas some scholars argue that it is in the best interests of the child to assist birth families to stay together, others emphasize the child's right to protection from harmful environment. Hence call for the child to be placed in institutions or other families capable of given appropriate

care in safe environment (Smolin 2007; and Aldridge 1994). For instance, Jane Aldridge (1994) has critically analysed the best interest of the child in connection with same-race placement in transracial adoption. Aldridge suggests that "at the end of the day the responsibility of those involved in the adoption process is to make sure that the child is placed speedily with the most appropriate family available – a process that demands open minds to ensure an open door to the child's future" (Aldridge 1994: 200). On the other hand, Smolin is of the view that many homeless children in some parts of the world call for structural change and better welfare system in those countries to help poor families cater for their children in their own natural environment rather than capitalizing on their level of poverty to compel them to relinquish their children for adoption particularly to other countries (Smolin 2004 and 2007). Hence Aldridge's view on what is the best interest of the child in adoption differs significantly from that of Smolin. Whereas Aldridge emphasizes the child's need of a family, Smolin emphasizes the structural effects of adoption programs on the possibilities for birth parents to be able to keep their children.

The key issues in relation to whether adoption is viewed in the best interest of the child concerns the structural effects of adoption on the readiness of countries to support birth families; and the other concerns adoption as a solution for the individual child in relation to other alternatives. Thus, whether adoption is viewed in the best interest of the child is a question of the value of biological family bonds versus permanency of adoptive family. It is also a matter of family's rights to freedom from state intervention versus the child's rights to the protection of the state. For instance, in some countries such as the United Sates of America, adoption is a vital part of child welfare measures, whereas in Sweden the main solution for children who cannot live with their parents is foster care.

Michael Freeman (1997) has critically assessed the best interest principle of the child with practical cases like the famous 'Zulu Case of 1996 where the child (Sifiso) became more attached to a psychological parent than the biological parent. But in the process where the child should be placed, the courts ordered that in the best interest of the child, Sifiso should live with the biological parent in South Africa. Eventually, the move as ordered by the courts became fiasco since the child preferred to live with the psychological parents as opposed to biological parents in South Africa. Consequently, Sifiso returned to the psychological parents in the UK in his own interest. In view of the complexity of the famous Zulu boy case and similar other cases, Freeman cautioned that *the best interest principle* should be handled carefully in an attempt to promote the rights of the child. Otherwise, instead of safeguarding

children's rights it will be inimical to many children due to how it has been narrowly put in practice (Freeman 1994: 381-384). A Similar view has been expressed in the work of Stephen Peskind (2005) which called for legal institutions and agencies working on children to handle the best interest of the child carefully by embracing all views necessary since social and psychological needs of the child among others are various, complex and unpredictable that looking at one side of the coin will invariably harm the child in the long run. So to what extent could the best interest be upheld in adoption process without crippling the child's right as a whole? In a nutshell both the best interest principle and the rights of child are equally ambiguous terms therefore leading to different interpretations. These complexities call for more views (particularly from people who have links with the children involved) rather than solely depending on legal or philosophical interpretations on what causes a child to live with his or her family and what makes adoption as a solution in the best interest of the child to enrich adoption theory and practice.

3.2 Is transracial adoption viewed to be in the best interest of the child?

Assessing this question as a theme will give a clear picture on how issues of race and cultural identity in connection with adoptions have been discussed. In other words, how have researchers answered the question of if there is a difference between adopting a child of different race and being racially matched with adoptive parents? What has been claimed to be more important by various researchers: racial matching or the permanency of an adoptive family regardless of their race? If there should be matching, should it be done in accordance with race or in accordance with the child's personal experiences of culture? Is the child's right to his or her culture regarded as protecting the best interests of the child or those of the ethnic group which the child is claimed to belong? According Volkman (2003) transracial adoption has become complicated as compare to the past due to increasing emphasis on matching.

> Questions of belonging, race, culture and subjectivity loom large in the discourse of transnational adoption. In the past, adoption across borders was assumed to be straightforward: A child travelled to a new country and stayed there but the trend has changed. Today adopted people – children or adults – are expected, or at least invited, to explore their multiple identities: to retain a name, to imagine their birth families, to learn about "birth cultures", perhaps to visit birth country" (Volkman 2003: 2).

Bartholet has also argued that race has been an important factor to be considered by many prospective adoptive parents (Bartholet 1991). As she emphasised, "you don't just get at the end of one general child line when you're doing adoption. There are a lot of lines, each identified by the race, disabilities, and age of the children available, together with the length of wait and the difficulty and cost of adoption" (1991: 1169).

Consequently, racial matching has been a prominent goal in countries that have a large number of domestic adoptions and an ethnically heterogeneous population. According Volkman, until the middle of 1970, when the "open adoption" movement was born in the United States, Adoptive parents were pressured to create "as if" biological families. These practices were premised on forgetting of a child's past, especially on the erasure of birth parents (Volkman 2003: 3). Slaughter (2009) elucidated that children are seen as 'belonging' to their parents in the "American vision of the family" but to Navajo families "children are not just children of parents but they are children of the clan . . ." A child is said to be born for his father's clan and members are expected to take care of each others' children (Slaughter 2009: 228). This position deepens the consideration of race and identity of children and family of origin in transracial adoption. It calls for people of the same lineage to maintain the bond and cultural backgrounds of their offspring or family ties from one generation to another. Hence, it would be difficult for groups which believe in preservation of their culture to put a child in an environment or under the care of another person which has different cultural background.

Some researchers like Chimezie (1975); and groups such as the American National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) and the British Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals (ASBWAP) argued in support of same-race adoption in the second half of the 1970s. The above mentioned groups in particularly have referred to transracial adoption as a form of cultural genocide (Bartholet 1991). To them transracial adoption constituted an attack upon the black community and that it harmed black children by denying their black heritage and the survival skills needed for life in a racist society (see Bartholet 1991:1180). This was also reflected in the position of Chimezie that it is ideal to place the child to a family of his own family background. Thus, black children should be under the care or adopted by black families (Chimezie 1975:296). In their study, Rebekah Snow and Katherine Covell highlighted that Aboriginal groups in Canada have maintained that aboriginal children should be placed in aboriginal homes or communities rather than

under the care of non-Aboriginal families. In some instances, Aboriginal leaders ordered not only for the placement of their children to be in Aboriginal families but also called for the repatriation of Aboriginal children already placed in non-Aboriginal foster cares or families to their communities (Snow and Covell 2006).

Nonetheless, other researchers are against a prioritization of racial matching. According to Ivor Gaber (1994), it is an undeniable fact that ethnicity and culture cannot be isolated in matters of transracial adoption, but they should not necessarily be more influential than any other important factors. This is due to the fact that there is no conclusive research that children adopted by people of different ethnic background will by all means encounter problems of identity or prejudice later in life. Hence, both concerns of birth parents and ascertainable concern of children should be analysed alongside the capabilities of adoptive parents (Gaber 1994: 37). Similarly, Cynthia Mabry has analysed the position of the 1994 Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) on transracial adoption together with examination of state statutes and policies to show why race continues to be an important factor in transracial adoptions. She argues MEPA's prohibition of delay or denial of adoption based on race, colour and national origin of the child or adoptive parents and other racial classifications could survive strict analysis. The Act gives opportunity for children in need to be adopted based on the capabilities of adoptive parents rather than on grounds of racial matching. In light with that Mabry further discussed ways in which states and agencies could easily evaluate prospective adoptive parents' capabilities to care for and nurture African-American children (Mabry 1996; Mabry and Kelly 2006; see also Andre 2007).

Moreover, the emphasis on race in intercountry adoption has made Angela Mae Kupenda use a hypothetical story of a black couple seeking to adopt healthy, white babies to argue that interracial adoption is not a demand for black children to be treated differently from other children awaiting adoption, but for black children to be treated the same as all children awaiting adoption (Kupenda 2006). Moreover, the significance ascribed to race in matching with regards to adoption has been critiqued by Bartholet (1991). According to Bartholet studies provide powerful evidence that the delays in placement and denials of permanent adoptive homes as a result of race placement policies in intercountry adoption are seriously harmful to children and see racial matching policies as being at variance with laws regarding race discrimination (Bartholet 1991: 1225-1226).

According to Eekelaar, it is natural that adults should be deeply concerned about the cultural context in which their children grow up because they see it as part of the children's own interest (Eekelaar 2004: 178). However, Eekelaar pointed out that the evidence on the effects of children's exposure to different cultures indicates that it would be erroneous to think that it is harmful for children to be exposed to a variety of cultures in their upbringing. But, cautioned that raising a child in a multicultural environment augur well in a tolerant society (2004: 190-191). Notwithstanding the call for racial matching, some researchers have argued that children should be making their own choice in determining their cultural identity. Hence the call for adoption policies to allow children to have full access to information about their birth parents and place – more particularly the child maintaining and understanding his or her culture and heritage (Snow and Covell 2006: 116; Ronen 2004: 57-59; Eekelaar 2004: 190). A similar concern has been expressed by the Swedish Intercountry Adoption Authority. Adoptive parents are advised to help their children to develop a positive self-image to confidently adjust to their new country [Sweden] in their own right (see MIA 2005: 10-11). It is important to note that having access to information about the birth parents does not really equal to the individual child determining his or her own cultural identity. The emphasis is on the acquisition of cultural identity through personal experiences rather than by and through birth or the birth parents (Eekelaar 2004).

The issue of culture, race and identity in intercountry adoption has been very contentious and the debate seems to be unconsciously revolving in a continuous cycle. Cohen (1994: 48) has assessed different historical accounts on models and theories regarding race and identity as the driving forces for the debate on transracial or intercountry adoption. Moreover, he sees the current debate on racial matching in transracial adoptions as a repeated version or re-emerging of old ideologies on race and identity during civil rights movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Cohen therefore concluded that there is the need for greater understanding and sensitivity to the complexities of individual life histories so that decisions can be made on a case-by-case basis, rather than some general rule of thumb regarding issues of race, identity and culture (Cohen 1994: 74).

The discussion of race and racial matching in adoption shows conflicting views on whether a child has a culture by and through birth or whether it is acquired. The arguments of racial matching and the tension must be regarded in light of the treatment of people with different colours in history. Thus, in discussing racial matching consideration should be given

to history and its violations of ethnic groups' rights to their children. For instance, many minority groups such as the Indian tribes in America and the Aboriginal groups in Canada had been denied their group rights to their children (See Slaughter 2009; and Snow and Covell 2006). Hence, the historical violations of the rights of minorities to practice their culture have been a major motive for minority groups to involve themselves in the debate over transracial adoption.

3.3 Is intercountry adoption viewed to be in the best interest of the child?

The relationship between international adoption and domestic adoption in sending-countries has been a central concern in international conventions that seek to protect children's interests and to regulate international adoption. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1993 Hague Conference's Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect to Intercountry Adoption argue that an ethical adoption policy should privilege domestic adoption over international adoption. That is, whenever this is feasible within a reasonable period of time (See in particularly Article 21b of the 1989 UNCR; and Article 4b of the 1993 Hague Convention).

It is however important to question the grounds on which consideration is given first to national adoption over international adoption. On what grounds is incountry adoption prioritized over intercountry adoption? The International Conventions on adoptions give priority to national adoption over international adoption; and with much emphasis on the preservation of the child's right to his or her culture as a means to serve the best interest of the child (See The 1989 UNCRC; and 1993 Hague Convention). The UNCRC as an international instrument on the rights of the child prioritised incountry adoption over international adoption for the purposes of the child's rights to the preservation of his or her culture. The child's culture has been linked to or traceable to the child's biological family or the country of origin (See Articles 8, 29 and 30 of the 1989 UNCRC). These Articles are also further emphasised on in the 1993 Hague Convention. Looking at the various articles enshrined in the international conventions, the child's culture is defined by his or her adherence to the culture of the family or the community he or she comes from. For instance Article 30 of the 1989 UNCRC states that "In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture…" The convention calls for the

preservation of the child's rights to his or her identity which borders on religion, national or ethnic descent. The 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry adoption also calls for the child's right to family to ensure adoption in the best interest of the child. It places emphasis on the recognition of principles set in other international instruments, like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the United Nations Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and incountry and intercountry adoptions.

In spite of priority to incountry adoption over intercountry adoption, the later has grown significantly. Johnson Kay's study on *international politics and domestic adoption in China* touched on whether incountry or domestic adoption should be given priority over intercountry adoption (Kay 2002). Kay demonstrated how social forces encouraged domestic adoption in China in the 1980 and 1990s and that has created today's popular culture in China that "allows for the use of adoption in the construction of the family and approximation of popularly imagined family ideals" (Kay 2002: 386). Kay however, maintained that when children become available for adoption, priority is now given to international adoption over incountry adoption though China has gradually tried to shift towards maintaining Hague Convention of given priority to domestic adoption over international adoption. Situations such as poverty striking conditions, marginalization of unwed mothers and their offsprings coupled with lack of effective domestic laws to effectively regularize incountry adoptions in many countries particularly developing ones have paved way for intercountry adoptions to serve as an alternative and it is flourishing (See Yngvesson 2000; Fonseca 2002 & 2003; and Bartholet 2007).

Nevertheless, Smolin sees intercountry adoption as having long term structural effects on a country's child welfare system. In attempt to answer the question of whether intercountry adoption is effective, appropriate, or an ethical response to poverty in developing nations, Smolin elucidated that, "rather than contributing positively to an effective family or child welfare system, intercountry adoption has the potential to distort whatever system is already in place" (Smolin 2007:451). Thus, intercountry adoption has been criticized on grounds that it further weakens already fragile structures in many developing countries and its inability to halt those gender and class relations that caused children to be separated from their birth parents. In Smolin's view many intercountry adoptions capitalize on the vulnerability of the sending families. So rather than helping poor families to keep their

children it capitalizes on poor people to relinquish their children to be adopted to another country. Contrary to Smolin's position, to Bartholet, the argument that "children are best served by remaining in their community of origin are based on extreme romanticism, without any grounding in the available evidence and without support in common sense" (Bartholet 2007:180). Bartholet further advanced her point by stating that "opponents argue that children might be placed in in-country foster care and in that way benefit from remaining in their country and culture, as well as possibly linking them with their birth family; but foster care does not exist to a significant degree in the sending countries and the poor countries of the world – overwhelmingly the homeless children of the world are living and dying in orphanages and on the streets" (Bartholet 2007:181).

The issue that intercountry adoption serves as a stumbling block to the development of incountry adoption has been critiqued in that it in the process brings money or create opportunities for money to be trickled down to sending countries and their orphanages. For instance, Bartholet believes that intercountry adoption has a lot of positive impact particularly to poor families of sending countries (Bartholet 1999 and 2007). Also, during a Harvard hosts debate on transnational adoption, Bartholet cited that intercountry adoption system exposes the world to injustices and detrimental situations in other countries such as gender discrimination. She agreed that poverty is a driving factor behind women's choice to put their children up for adoption; she said she did not believe that the adoption fee motivates women to give up their children. As she asserted "money given to biological parents by adoptive parents rarely makes the difference in the choice whether or not to give up their child." (Parthasarathy: in Harvard Crimson Online Edition).

The controversy over whether intercountry adoption is in the best interest of the child to many researchers is partly the making of international conventions on adoptions. In fact, the vexed relationship between intercountry and incountry adoption in the legal and policy realm is discussed in the study by Claudia Fonseca (2003) which highlights discrepancies between global legal frameworks and local understandings and practices (Volkman 2003: 4). The posture of international conventions on incountry and intercountry adoptions vis-à-vis children's rights (particularly rights to culture) has been challenged by some scholars on various grounds. Thus, the problematization of 'culture' in relation to children by international conventions on children's rights and related issues like intercountry adoption has been criticized by some scholars (See Bartholet 2007; Ronen 2004; Smolin 2004 &

2006). For instance, Ronen (2004) has criticized the position of the UNCRC on the child's right to culture and identity by referring to specific articles such as 7, 8, 9, 29, and 30.[2] Ronen's work concerns domestic custody cares but the critique of international conventions on the right of the child is relevant in discussing transracial intercountry adoption particularly in light of the child's right to his or her culture. To Ronen, the UNCRC explicitly failed to answer certain critical questions relating to which culture a child should enjoy especially children of multiple identity (Ronen 2004:159). Also, the study by Eekelaar revealed that it is not wrong for children to be exposed to different variety of culture in their upbringing (2004:190 & 191). Hence given priority to domestic adoption in the name of recognizing the child's rights to his or her cultural background (usually link to culture of biological families and national origin) will not necessarily grant the child a culture or identity in his or her own right.

From the foregoing, it can be noted that there are different opposing views on whether intercountry adoption serves the best interest of the child. The child's right to culture and identity has been an overarching issue in intercountry. The study by De Johnson has analysed different opinions on intercountry adoption. He noted that there are mixed opinions within the international community regarding the phenomenon and that the concerns centre in two broad areas: sensitivity toward preservation of family and culture and whether the process has sufficient integrity to act in the best interests of children and birth parents (Johnson 2005). Children's right to preservation of their cultural background has been used not only as an argument against transracial incountry adoptions but also to legitimize the privileging of incountry over intercountry adoption (Lind and Johansson 2009).

In this section, I have reviewed some of the related studies on adoption, transracial adoption and intercountry adoption. The discussion so far shows conflicting views on what is in the best interest of the child, about the significance of biological bonds, about significance of race, about the significance of having *one* culture, and concerning what constitutes identity. Whilst some researchers see biological bond as necessary in adoption

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[2]The child's rights to his or her culture as spelt in the UNCRC is about the child's membership to a group defined by its parent's belonging – making cultural identity to be connected with the notion of group rights. This put children of multiple cultural backgrounds at risk of identity crisis based on this framework of defining the child's right to his or her culture (attachments to biological parents, group or community of origin).

others are of the view that social bonding should be given consideration in adoption. Also whereas racial matching is welcomed by some scholars and particularly at the heart of some minority groups who claim links to adopted children, others see it as insignificance so far as the best interest of the child is concerned. However, the argument of racial matching should be understood in line with life history of minority groups regarding civil rights violations including denial of their rights over their children. Finally, there are mixed opinions on incountry and intercountry adoptions regarding which best serves the child when necessary. Also controversies surrounding intercountry adoption have been partly attributed to deficiencies in international conventions particularly regarding the child's right to the preservation of his or her culture. The child's right to the preservation of his or her culture on which international conventions prioritized domestic adoption over intercountry adoption has led to different opposing views from researchers on which (incountry or intercountry adoption) best serves the interests of the child.

1.0 Aim and objective/Research Question

Amongst the major themes in adoption debates in many different countries and in an international context (as discussed in the reviewed literature) have been *the priority given to national adoption over intercountry adoption*; and *the child's right to preservation of his or her cultural and ethnic background*. There are existence of groups (like the African-American community) particularly the NABSW, black community groups like ASBWAP in Britain and the Aboriginal community groups in Canada who for instance have claimed to be better fitted to speak on behalf of children adopted from their communities because they share the same racial and cultural background (Bartholet 1991; Snow & Cowell 2006). They claim that these children 'belong' to them. On the other hand children that are adopted transracially to Sweden are already separated from the country and the community that can make such claims of belonging. The groups that in Sweden could make such claims based on a shared racial background are immigrants from the sending countries.

Do African immigrants in Sweden have different opinions as against scholars, human rights activists and particularly their closely related groups like African-Americans or African-British in the US and UK for instance that African children should be placed in African families? What meanings do African immigrants in Sweden create on the UNCRC and the Hague Adoption Convention claims that national adoption must be given priority over intercountry adoption; and also call for the preservation of the child's cultural background in all international standard adoptions?

Also, to safeguard the best interest of the child principle in every adoption by international standard call for priority to be given to national adoption over intercountry adoption; and consideration to ethnic, racial and cultural matching by state parties involved. What meanings do African immigrants create on the UNCRC and the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption that every adoption should be performed in the best interest of the child?

Simply put: what are the notions of African immigrants in Sweden on intercountry adoption?

This question is what this study aimed to investigate. The objective is to analyse their opinions to bring to bear their understanding or position on the major themes in adoption debates– incountry adoptions as against intercountry adoption and preservation of the child's right to culture vis-à-vis the best interest of the child principle in the international adoption process. To achieve this, the following four sub-questions were considered. Thus according to informants:

- ❖ What are justifiable grounds for intercountry adoption to take place? Or under what conditions should intercountry adoption be considered?
- ❖ Does the child's right to preservation of his or her ethnic and cultural background serve the best interest of the child?
- ❖ What difference does it make for the individual child to be adopted incountry as against intercountry adoption?
- ❖ Should priority be given to national adoption as against intercountry adoption when there is the need for a child to be adopted?

I believe seeking the views of African immigrants in Sweden on some of these relevant questions could be much revealing taking into consideration that they [African immigrants] have experienced both the African culture and that of the West – in this case Sweden's culture.

4.1 Justification of Study: Why African Immigrants views on Intercountry Adoption

Sweden, where this study is taking place has been involved in intercountry adoptions between many countries in the world including African countries; and even has agreement with African countries like Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. The number of adopted children from Africa has increased significantly since 1969 from 7 to 2201 as at

2007. Thus, from the period of 1969 to 2007, a total number of 2, 201 children from Africa were adopted to Swedish families in Sweden (MIA 2005). Besides, according to statistics from Adoption Centrum and MIA, in last year – 2009 alone, 276 children were adopted from Africa. Thus, out of the total number of 1365 (453 reported by Adoption Centrum and 912 reported by MIA) children adopted worldwide, 276 (95 reported by Adoption Centrum and 181 reported by MIA) of them came from Africa.[3] As at February 2010, 6 children (according records from Adoption Centrum) had arrived from Ethiopia to Sweden as adoptees; representing the highest number against other countries apart from China which has the same number of children adopted to Sweden. Moreover, there has been increasing number of African Immigrants in Sweden over the years. It is important to know the views of African nationals in Sweden so far as the adoption debates are concern for deeper understanding particularly on issues of culture and their position on intercountry adoption in general to contribute to adoption policies.

However, unlike places like the United States and the United Kingdom where minority groups like African or Black-Americans and Black-British have been held and impacted on adoption policies, the voices of African immigrants in Sweden have not been heard on the long-existing intercountry adoption between Sweden and African countries. It is important to point out here that unlike other western countries, Sweden has had virtually no experience of national transracial, transethnic or transcultural adoptions. Therefore, there is absence of controversy regarding the adoption of children from one ethnic (disadvantaged) group to another (more advantaged). This is particularly so because the transracial, transethnic and transcultural adoptions that have been performed in Sweden have been almost entirely intercountry adoptions. Hence ethnic groups like African immigrants, who could have made claims regarding the ethnic belonging of adopted children to their community as witnessed in the United States, have not been represented in Sweden.

Furthermore, in justifying why it is relevant to conduct a study on African immigrants and intercountry child adoption, it is important to emphasize here that the talk about 'African' immigrants in this context is not to suggest that African immigrants constitute a homogenous group. There are many African immigrants in Sweden from different countries and ethnic

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[3] The 95 children adopted from Africa, 33 came from Ethiopia, 38 from South Africa, 3 from Madagascar, 2 from Lesotho, 5 from Kenya and 14 from Nigeria. With the 181 reported by MIA, 2 from Burundi, 7 from Congo DR., 7 from Eritrea, 37 from Ethiopia, 4 from Ghana, Guinea 1, Kenya 12, Lesotho 2, Liberia 1, Madagascar 3, Mali 1, Mauritius 1, Morocco 1, Nigeria 12, Sierra Leone 2, Somalia 40, South Africa 41, Sudan 1, Tunisia 2 and 1 from Uganda. See details of these statistics at the websites of Adoptionscentrun and MIA: (www.adoptionscentrum.se; and www.mia.eu).

groups in Africa with varied or distinct cultures. Hence one ought to be careful when referring to them as a homogenous group because in absolute terms they are not. However, whereas in other contexts African immigrants would be considered as distinct groups of people like Ghanaian, Nigerian, Ethiopian (and so on) immigrants, it makes sense in this study to talk about them as 'African' immigrants. The reason is in the adoption context, race and colour have been attributed significantly, in that African (-American) or black children have been argued to belong with African (-American) or black adoptive parents.

Again, a comparison of African immigrants in Sweden to groups like American black social workers and their counterpart in the UK who were critical against transracial adoption in the US is not to claim that they are the same. These group of people − African or Black (-Americans) are themselves Americans and the concern were about Black or African (-American) children internally. In the case of Sweden, group of people who claimed the belonging of black children to their community and are most likely to be critical on transracial adoption are Africans or Blacks who have migrated from Africa. Hence they are not originally from Sweden neither the adopted black children most likely to be talked about are Swedish natives since almost all children adopted transracially are from outside − intercountry. However, in this study 'African immigrants' as a group of people in Sweden will be the closest comparison to that of Black or African-Americans or Black people in the United Kingdom.

4.2 Relevance of the study

The changing phase of Sweden's population due to the increasing large immigrant groups from continents from which children are adopted to Sweden call for those immigrants to be involved in the country's adoption debate. Hence, sourcing the opinions of African immigrants on ICA will be valuable. To add to the above, intercountry adoption is a global phenomenon of which Sweden has played important role in policy frameworks be it the UNCRC and the Hague Conventions positions on it. A study to seek and analyse the views of African immigrants as minority groups in Sweden on the practice of sending African children abroad for adoption will help in future policies regarding adoptions in international context and even set as platform for other minority groups to be studied on child adoptions and other related matters. It will impact on child welfare policies in sending countries in Africa.

Moreover, it will serve as a reference point for further studies to be carried out in this area – international child adoption.

5. Methodology

This research is based on qualitative form of research precisely, Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Thus, the tool for data collection was through FGD. This technique was considered appropriate to seek from participants how they understand; or the meanings or notions they create on intercountry adoption. The participants for the study were African immigrants in Sweden. There were 6 focus groups with 3-4 participants in each group. Thus, there were minimum size of 3 and maximum group size of 4. In all, a total number of 20 participants[4] who have had some previous knowledge about adoption either directly or indirectly participated to share their opinions on major themes in adoption debate through group discussions. Taking into consideration the complexity or the controversy surrounding intercountry adoption, the smaller group size enhanced smooth discussion with detail accounts on the various themes. The group discussions or interviews lasted between one (1) hour and one (1) and half hours. As a moderator, I posed open ended questions to participants and guided the discussion based on the interview guide which covered background questions and participants general experiences of adoption and information about the number of children adopted transracially from African countries to Sweden; focus on intercountry adoption and major themes: priority to incountry over intercountry adoption, preservation of the child's right to his or her culture and the best interest principle in child adoption.

The approach for analysis was qualitative content analysis after various group discussions have been transcribed verbatim.
The reason for the choice of FGD as a tool for data collection and the various processes in data collection: how groups were formed, the my role as a moderator in focus groups discussions, how data was analysed and ethical considerations are discussed in details below.

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[4] There were 15 males and 5 females out of the 20 participants. The unbalanced gender group is due to the fact that many females who planned to participate in the research did not show up in the process. Subsequent attempts to get more females as participants proved futile.

5.1 Why Focus Group Discussion?

Considering the nature of the study, I chose focus group discussions as a tool or technique for data collection. This is a form of group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data. It is a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously; and at the same time explicitly use group interaction as part of the method. In focus group interview, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions and commenting points of view. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way (See Bryman 2008, Krueger 1998).

Group processes in focus group discussion can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview. The discussion help researchers tap into the many different forms of communication that people use in day to day interaction, including jokes, teasing, and arguing which are useful because people's knowledge and attitudes are not entirely encapsulated in reasoned responses to direct questions (See Bryman 2008: 475-476).

To add to the above focus group discussion has a lot sampling advantage. It does not discriminate against people who cannot read or write. It can encourage participants from those who are reluctant to be interviewed on their own (such as those intimidated by the formality and isolation of a one to one interview). Another advantage is that it can encourage people who feel they have nothing to say but engage in the discussion generated by other members (See Kitzinger 1995).

5.2 How groups were formed

Purposive sampling was used because the study is intended to seek the opinions of African immigrants as a group on Intercountry Child Adoption. Specifically, snowballing was used to form each focus group. In other words, in each of the groups I knew one or two participants long before who then linked me to other participants. Thus, the people I knew before were used as a base for each group.

The groups were coded as FGD1, FGD2, FGD3, FGD4, FGD5 and FGD6; where the number (1,2,3…) represent their order of position – first, second group… in that order. With the exception of FGD4 and FGD6 which were made up four members, all the other groups were made of three participants. I had earlier on intended to have a minimum of four people in each group but some people did not show up as planned.

There was no stratifying criterion in terms of gender representation, work experience and age but all those who took part in various group discussions were above 18 years. More importantly, all participants were African immigrants or considered themselves as African immigrants as the study demanded.

For detail information on each group composition and their experiences in child adoptions, see a Table marked *appendix A* in the appendix section.

5.3 My role as a moderator in the FGDs

Before group discussions in all the FGDs, I introduced myself, gave a short summary of the reason for this interview or background information to calm them down or give them the good mood for the discussion. Then I started with the questions as shown in the interview guide.[5]

As a moderator, I ensured that the discussion was guided especially when I realised it was going off-track. But, I was also careful not to be too instructive as well. The essence was to ensure free flow of information on the topics on board. I also considered my posture during discussion. I considered leaning forward rather than leaning back during discussions to let them know I am interested in what they were saying (Gillham 2000). On several occasions, I applied what is refer to as all-things-considered questions to nail down the final position of participants on intercountry adoption in general especially when they have talked on both sides of an issue (a theme in intercountry child adoption) or seem to have modified their positions (See Krueger 1998: 48).

On occasions I listened for inconsistency in comments and probed for better understanding. Most often, participants made their points clearer when in a nice way referred them to statement (s) which contradicts earlier statement (s). Being a group discussion, some people sometimes tried to influence others with their views which made others try to change

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[5] The interview guide can be found as appendix B in the appendixes section.

a position they have articulated earlier. But I usually paid attention to some of these inconsistencies and probed further for better understanding.

I also took careful notes of some group members by capturing some important aspects of the discussion including both verbal and nonverbal actions. For instances, some participants in the process asked me to make sure I quote their statements particularly when they realised all the members are unanimously supporting their opinions either through words of affirmation or through body gestures or realised I am nodding my head or attentively listening. In such instances, I quickly make notes of such 'quotable' quotes. I also observed carefully gestures or body languages and scenes as these nonverbal acts also counts in qualitative research (See Bryman 2008; and Gillham 2000). Thus, I sometimes in the course of discussions, perform certain function of preliminary analysis by noting emerging themes or important information (particularly nonverbal) whilst participants are around to avoid difficulty in putting together missing pieces of information that could be useful during transcription and for analysis after participants have left. This is usually done in a notebook and sometimes a sheet of paper in order to not scare them with a book in front of me. But I quickly transferred it in my note book and file the paper as well.

As data collection proceeds I noticed there repetition of issues in subsequent groups. Therefore it was enough for me to anticipate what the next group is going to offer. In other words, I had enough on the topics involved. What is refers to as theoretical saturation or "the major analytic-categories have saturated" began to set in since issues were being repeated during the last group discussion. (Bryman 2008: 477).

The data collection (including transcription) took a period of six-week. The recorded discussions were transcribed for analysis.

5.4 How data from FGDs was analysed
After transcribing all the FGDs verbatim, I decided on a tape-based analysis where comments directly related to the topic at hand or the themes involved together with notes made during discussions with participants were used (See Krueger 1998: 45).

The analysis of raw data or comments from informants during the FGDs was based on both 'question' and 'theme' ways of analysis. I analysed question by question by looking for themes within questions and across questions and themes that cut across questions. In other

words, questions[6], themes and subthemes that were developed before, during, and after the focus groups discussions were presented and qualitatively analysed. These themes were followed by the participants' comments and interpretations were given to comments made. In most cases a summary of the responses on a question or a theme was given followed by quotes from participants and interpretations of quotes or verbatim statements. So the style of presentation of analysis is based on the combination of raw data, descriptive, and interpretive models (See Krueger 1998: 73 & 111-114). In short qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the notions created by participants on ICA.

5.5 Ethical consideration

Before, I start to ask the questions, I explained the purpose of the interview and assured them their views will be purely used for academic purpose. I also made them aware that due to the nature of the method for data gathering (focus group discussion) and particularly for the purpose of this study, their views have to be captured on tape or audio voice recorder. So I sought their permission before capturing their voices.

I have maintained the anonymity and confidentiality of my informants. Some personal information shared with me is kept confidential. The names of my informants are not their real names even though some asked me in the process of the interview to quote them with their names. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, I used pseudo names.

All my informants were above 18 years of age or adults and so they took part in the interviews or discussions at their own will without being forced into. Thus, there was no need to seek permission from guardians or parents.

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[6] See research questions under section 4.0 and themes or questions posed during review of literature under section 3.0.

6. Analysis and Discussion

This section will analyse the transcribed data and discuss issues in relations to related previous studies. The analysis is based on qualitative content analysis (See Bryman 2008; and Krueger 1998). The words: 'informants' and 'participants' (as people who took part in the study) stand the same and will be used interchangeably during analysis and discussion.

The views expressed during group discussions or interviews represent the opinions of participants who participated in this study and must be regarded in that context. Their notions or meanings created cannot be used to generalize the opinions of African immigrants nor Africans (in or outside Africa) in general on international adoption discourses. As commented by one of my informants, Kintolani:

> *To be rational as a typical African-Nigerian, adoption is good. But if you ask a question about adoption in the African traditional perspective as in the case of our grand fathers or mothers or parents in Africa, their views may be quite different from our own views. (Kintolani, FGD4).*

This comment by Kintolani suggests that their views on intercountry adoption in this study may be different from the views of Africans back home. Participants understanding of issues as immigrants in Sweden might not be the same as those in Africa. Circumstances that compelled them to move to Sweden and the experiences they might have encountered in Europe could make them interpret issues differently as Africans in Africa. Notwithstanding that the meanings participants created on intercountry adoption cannot be underestimated. Their views have contributed to the international adoption discourse which could eventually help in adoption policies and as a valuable source for further studies. The various themes and subthemes are analysed below.

6.1 Determinants of adoption

Before I bring the views of African immigrants for this study on the various themes in adoption debate, it is important to give an overview of what they think compels people to give out their children or go in to adopt children. What lead (s) to the child's state as adoptable? Some scholars are of the view that World War II and the aftermath of the Korean led to the expansion of intercountry adoption (see Adamec & Pierce 2000; and Hubinette 2004 & 2006). Another explanation frequently given is that there were scarcity of healthy white babies to be adopted; and changed in attitudes of people of different colour and origin (see Gaber 1994; Ortiz & Briggs 2003). Poverty has also been cited as one of the compelling factors that exposed children to adoption (Smolin 2004 & 2007; and Fonseca 2003).

Participants in this study mentioned some factors they believed lead to the child's state as adoptable. The causes could be grouped as push and pull factors. To begin with the push factors, one of the reasons participants believe causes children's status as adoptable is when the children become orphans. According to informants, natural or human made disasters like earthquakes, wars and diseases have caused the death of many parents leaving their children as orphans. The persistent civil wars in Africa and natural disasters like the recent Haitian earthquake were some of the typical examples cited by participants during group discussions. As noted by Issaka-Moro, *many civil wars in Africa made millions of children to become orphans without homes. To give these children hope in like is to offer them for adoption (Issaka-Moro, FGD5).* This goes to confirm what some researchers believe that wars have led to unprecedented increase in intercountry adoption (See Adamec & Pierce 2000; Volkman 2003; Hubinette 2004; and MIA 2005).

Some participants believed some biological parents sometimes run away from their parental responsibility to take care of their children. In addition to that point is the fact that many people give birth without prior proper planning. Thus, unwanted pregnancies lead to unwanted infants on the part of many biological parents. As some of the participants commented:

> *Many people in Africa give birth without proper planning. There are a lot of unwanted pregnancies in the system which exposes children to adoption in the end. (Negus, FGD2).*
> *I think adoption is transfer of parental responsibility to another parent. Many parents transfer their responsibility to others because they gave birth when they were not ready to take care of the child. So they quickly give it to organisations or people looking for a child on adoption (Tayolani, FGD4).*

Besides the above, some also believe that structural problems such as poverty make it impossible for people to take care of their children and therefore exposed them to adoption. More to this point is the fact that many developing countries such as those in Africa do not have better family welfare system to help families keep their children. This was put by one of the participants as:

> *In advanced countries like US and here in Sweden, if parents are incapable of taken care of their children because they are poor or reasons like drug addicts and convicted people, the Child Social Services make sure the child is given a stable household. The state takes care of you! This, unfortunately we do not have in Africa. (David, FGD4).*

This confirms the position of Smolin that poverty or economic hardships compel poor families in developing countries to relinquish their children for adoption and that there should

be better family welfare system to help the poor take care of their children (Smolin 2004 and 2007). However, it must be clarified here that unlike Sweden where the State takes care of her children when circumstances make it impossible to take care of their children, in the US many children are adopted. Hence it is not the state that takes care of these children. Having said that participants believed besides the push factors like structural problems in the child's original country which compel families to relinquish their children for adoption or push people to adopt these children, there were also pull factors. Some were of the views that people go in to adopt because of lack of children. Thus, inability to give birth compels families to go in for adoption as an alternative to have children of their own. As commented by Zakus:

> *It is not only that condition of the child's country of origin or biological family makes them to be adopted…The conditions of some adoptive parents also called for that. Many people go for adoption because they lack children. (Zakus, FGD2).*

Notwithstanding the fact that situations like wars, poverty, natural disasters, epidemics, barrenness, and unplanned births expose children to adoption or compel people to adopt, some participants believe many children are adopted to gain popularity. In this case, adoption by celebrities[7] was predominantly cited as one of the pull factors. As emphasised by Lawrence, *I think most people in the West do it [adoption] for popularity! They want to show off their wealth especially these celebrities… (Lawrence, FGD1).*

The beliefs concerning the causes of children's status as adoptable may have consequences for attitudes towards adoption. The severity of natural disasters and human created problems could for instance motivate people to give out their children for adoption or move in to adopt children from a particular community. Thus, people who find themselves in the circumstances pertaining to the determinants of child adoption as reasoned by participants will be more likely to relinquish their children or move in to adopt children than those who are not confronted with the above mentioned causes or circumstances.

Having discussed what in the view of participants make adoption takes place, there were mixed opinions on whether intercountry adoption is good or bad. The next theme will analyse how intercountry adoption was perceived by participants.

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[7] There will be a section to deal with the views of participants on celebrity adoption as a theme. It was a reemerging theme throughout the various group discussions and therefore calls for detail analysis later.

6.2 Intercountry Child Adoption: Good or Bad?

The consequence of dysfunctional family and structural problems such as poverty has led to the separation of children from their birth families (See Bartholet 2007; Smolin 2007; Gaber 1994; Aldridge; 1994; and Cohen 1994). The question of whether adoption is good or bad when the child finds him or herself in 'adoptable' condition has been very contentious among researchers. Some scholars believe that it is in the best interests of the child to assist birth families to stay together. However, others call attention to the child's right to protection from a harmful environment. Therefore accentuate on the child to be placed in institutions or other families capable of given appropriate care in safe environment (Smolin 2007; and Aldridge 1994).

What were the notions of participants in this study on whether adoption best serve the interest of the child? Simply is adoption good or bad according to participants? There were mixed opinions on intercountry adoption from participants. Some saw nothing wrong with intercountry adoption; but others did not support it. However, the positive views were predominant as against the negative positions on intercountry adoption. Below are some excerpts of group comments on whether adoption is good or bad.

> *I think adoption if well structured and follows laid down procedure then it's advantageous. But some international adoptions are done under pretence which makes it problematic… So children with hopeless or helpless in life need family or someone to take care of them and I think it is a good thing for those children. But it must be regulated. (David, FGD4).*

To David, adoption is good if well regulated. Issues of child trafficking, child labour and other malpractices under the pretence of adoption called for intercountry adoptions to be regulated as alluded to by David. Some participants also believed that adoption is good because it brings about unity in culture. For instance, Negus believes adoption is good since it promotes unity among people with different cultures, ethnicity and gender. To him adoptions make it useless to talk these issues. As emphasised, *I am positive about adoption…I have no problem with Swedish families adopting from Africa. Intercountry adoption is living example of unity of culture. It makes the issues of ethnicity, race and gender useless… (Negus, FGD2).* Thus, adopting children transracially is a positive sign that we can live together irrespective of our ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Another participant, Zakus on the other hand held the view that adoption is good if the child stays in his or her country of origin. *Adoption in general is not bad but what I will tell people if I am in authority is that if you want to adopt a child from Africa, come and live in*

the country where the child comes from. (Zakus, FGD2). This view expressed suggests that adoption is good if the child does not have to leave his or her country. No wonder this participant favoured national adoption over intercountry adoption and also called for those who want to adopt internationally to rather sponsor the child or help to create better environment for the child to grow in their natural environment in the course of the discussions. This position is in consistent with the stance articulated by some researchers like Smolin (2004 & 2007). Moreover, some informants had positive views on adoption even though they believed being a minority as an adopted child can be tough when growing up. Nevertheless, they held the conviction that adoption is good if regulations are followed. As further commented by Zakus and Patrick:

> *I prefer national adoption because many children face difficulties to integrate in foreign countries as adopted children. For me, if someone wants to adopt from Tanzania to Europe I will advice the person to come and live with the child. I know a White lady …I think from Sweden or so who has done that in Tanzania. She moved from Europe and now has a house in Tanzania with her adopted child. (Zakus, FGD2).*

> *…I cannot say it's bad, it depends on the way you adopt the child. But sometimes it can be tough for the child…especially in Sweden where Africans are not common in many places. My opinion on adopting from Africa…as long as it's done in the right way I don't see why not! (Patrick, FGD5).*

However, some participants do not believe in adoption and therefore held negative views. According to one of the participants, Santonis, *the whole issue of adoption among different race does not usually work. I don't believe in it! On paper it sounds workable but in real life it becomes difficult because of different backgrounds… (Santonis, FDG1).* This participant was negative on adoption. To Santonis, adoption is bad because it does not work. He went on further to say that many adopted children to Sweden do not have smooth life with their adoptive parents. As further asserted by Santonis *…since my long stay in Sweden and with my experience, adopted kids have never had smooth life with their adoptive parents.* Besides, it was further emphasised that adoption is business. Some informants cited recent cases of child trafficking under the pretence of adoption just to make money. For example, the story on Chad where some French international workers attempted to traffic children under the feigning of adoption was cited by some of the participants to back their views. Consequently, calls for ICA to be well regulated otherwise it becomes a business. Santonis cited the Chad story to justify that adoption is business. As commented:

> *I believe adoption is a business. For instance, recently there were some Whites [French aid workers] in Chad who illegally tried to adopt or I should say buy some children to France. All they did was that they capitalised on the poor state of the parents [Chadians] and gave them some money as an exchange for their children… (Santonis, FGD1)*

Also, some participants were of the views that [intercountry] adoption is good but the attitudes of some prospective adoptive parents call for questions to be asked. As a participant put it:

> *I am not against adoption but the question I always ask is: why people decide to go to a particular country [for adoption]? For instance with the case of Madonna, why was she still insisting to adopt the boy from Malawi after all the protest? Why that particular country? Couldn't she have gone to another African country? (Nana Seto, FDG3).*

This comment also suggests that adoption is good but adopters should allow the system to operate without forcing their way through. Thus the attitude of forcibly adopting a child raises a lot of questions like what Nana quizzed. These show how conscious the participants were on adoption and for that matter ICA in practice. In spite of some negative views held on adoptions the predominant view was that adoption is good if well regulated. So in sum, participants believed adoption is good under the condition that regulations were followed.

6.2.1 Celebrity adoption: Welcomed in Africa?

One of the emerging themes in the course of the group discussions was celebrity adoption. Most of the informants cited the case of Madonna's adoption of the Malawian child in 2006 and other celebrities like Angelina Jolie. They cited these celebrities particularly Madonna by questioning their moral status and their ability to give proper parental care to the adopted child. In all, African immigrants interviewed welcomed intercountry adoption from families in the Western countries with genuine love to place the child in a permanent home when it calls for. What they do not welcome is the trend of celebrities adopting from Africa to show their popularity or their might in terms of wealth rather than genuine love and ability to proper parental training.

Below are some excerpts of group comments:

> *The family setting in Africa is different from the Western world and moral values are totally different. For instance, someone like Madonna adopting a child, what kind of family setting is she bringing the child? Somebody who*

sings with her body exposed to everyone…what kind of training will she give the child? (Denis, FGD1).

I support adoption but I think most people in the West do it for popularity! They want to show off their wealth especially these celebrities. Look at what Madonna did? Did you read that? Do you think anybody can do that? She did that just to make headlines in the media! (Lawrence, FGD1).

I am a proud African, when it comes to adoption it is usually the rich people who adopt from Africa. So in my view I think they are looking down on us especially these celebrities who walk in with their money to adopt children and flouting rules! (Nana Seto, FGD3).

To interpret the above comments, even though Africans welcome intercountry adoption, participants were not comfortable with the growing culture of celebrities going to Africa to hand pick a child coupled with western media giants' coverage. Participants believed celebrities break rules involving international adoptions, poor parenting and adoption for the reasons of making headline news. Africans have a cause for alarm taking into consideration the history of slavery and colonialism. Many Africans (in Africa and Diaspora) have read or been told about the atrocities of slavery and colonization on the dignity of many Africans. With the scars of slavery and colonization in the minds of Africans, it makes sense for them to raise eye brows on wealthy celebrities from western countries conveniently stepping in to adopt children. According to informants, the attitudes of some celebrities forcing their way through the system to adopt children even when they encounter public disapproval makes their intentions questionable. Moreover, they believe many of these celebrities do not have the qualities or even if they have, based on their observations they see them as not having the needed time to put children in a stable home and give them proper parental training as require by ideal parents. Their beliefs also hinged on the fact that most often, celebrities forced their way through even when they encounter public disapproval. This could make many Africans see this form of intercountry adoption as a new form of slavery and colonization. In fact, it will not be a mistake if one argues that the negative effects of colonialism and slavery on Africans have in a way contributed to the tensions surrounding intercountry adoption between receiving countries in the western world and sending countries in Africa. For instance, in an attempt to answer the question: *can Africans adopt children from Europe?*[8] The predominant views were that it will make it difficult to convince westerners to give their children on adoption to Africa even if

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[8] This question was posed by one of my informants (Issaka-Moro, FGD5) during one of the group discussions.

prospective Africans are capable. The obvious reason participants gave was because many African countries are not well organised. Besides this obvious notion, the opinion of one of the informants in a subsequent group discussion was unique and could explain as one of the reasons why negative reoccurring views on celebrity adoption. As Poncho commented:

> *Africans can raise White kids better…But what I think the Europeans will never do it [give out their children for adoption to Africans] is when you go back to history, the White mentality about Africa: the slavery, the poorness, they see nothing good about Africa. So looking at all these things, they will never give their children to Africans on adoption. Also, many Africans think intercountry adoption is good but they talk against it sometimes especially these popular people from US and Europe going to adopt from Africa due to what happened in the past. The fear of slavery is there! (Poncho, FGD6).*

What transpired in the past (colonization and slavery) between Africa, and Western Europe and North America is making Africans and westerners conscious about issues regarding the two race leading to overarching debate in transracial adoption. This goes to confirm the argument that treatment to particular group(s) of people in the past has led to some of the unending tensions in transracial adoption (see Slaughter 2009; Snow and Covell 2006; & Cohen 1994).

6.3 Incountry versus intercountry adoption

Participants showed their understanding on whether adoption in general is good or bad for the child. How did participants perceive the question of whether priority should be given to incountry or intercountry adoption when considering giving the child for adoption? Thus, will they decide on incountry adoption or intercountry adoption should they be in a position to give a child for adoption. Before, I present the meanings created by participants, it is important to look at the position of international conventions on this same situation. In international conventions, incountry adoption is prioritized as against intercountry adoption. The 1993 Hague Convention on intercountry child adoption calls for consideration to be given to incountry or national adoption before intercountry or international adoption. The priority for incountry adoption which is clearly expressed in the preamble and further accentuated in Chapter II (Article 4b) of Hague Convention takes its strength from the 1989 UNCRC (See Article 21b).

In this study participants were asked to share their opinions on the priority given to national adoption over international adoption. They gave reasons for their positions in

support or against incountry and intercountry. Contrary to the position of international conventions, participants in this study favoured intercountry adoption as against incountry adoption. Their position is based on the grounds that there are *better opportunities* in places like the United States and in many of the European or advanced countries. For instance according to Kilimanjaro many families in Ethiopia prefer intercountry adoption to domestic adoption. Like other participants, he did not only say families in Ethiopia prefer intercountry adoption but himself also held the same idea that international adoption gives better material opportunities to the child. As the comments below denotes:

> *Many families in Ethiopia prefer to give their children to families from Western countries like the United States and European countries…because there are lots of opportunities in Europe. Let's be frank!, here in Europe, they have best standard of living, good and free education and many other opportunities for the development of the child and promising future."* (Kilimanjaro, FGD2)

However, some participants believe that some families in Africa can adopt and take good care of the child. These participants believed it is not only families from western countries that can give better opportunities to adopted children. According to Redo, a Nigeria national, *mostly Nigerians who adopt are well to do and very good people. That is in the case of real adoption. The adoptive parents take good care of the child. (Redo, FGD4).* Similarly, some participants believed some people in Africa are financially capable to adopt children but many are not better fitted financially. *I believe some people in Africa are financially sound but most are not financially sound to take care of an adopted child in a quality way (Titilayoni, FGD4).* In between the extremes (those in favour of priority over incountry and those for intercountry adoption) was the view held by Negus. Negus was of the view that it is about the ability of the prospective parents to fully take better care of the child to grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. These to him are things that matters whether adopted nationally or internationally. Hence, he considered *priority* in adoptions as out of place and should not be entertained since it in the end entrenched racism and other forms of discriminations among Westerners and Africans. As he further argued that adoption should be opened so that those who are capable to adopt whether incountry or intercountry should be allowed to do so:

> *I am against priorities… Priorities on adoption entrenched racism. It affirms differences in Europe and Africa and should not be encouraged. Adoption should be left opened and families from*

*whichever continent, country or race that meet or that is sound to do
so should be allowed. (Negus, FGD2).*

In spite of the views of participants like *Redo* and *Titilayoni* coupled with the liberal position of *Negus*, intercountry adoption was predominantly favoured. Thus, the predominant view was that even if some individuals are rich in Africa, structural conditions in Africa do not pave way for better opportunities as compared to places like the US and Europe. They believe that the continuous wars, unstable educational systems, poverty and lack of safety nets make it difficult for most children to achieve their dreams in life. Hence to adopt a child and give him or her quality education and other developmental opportunities in Africa call for very rich individuals who are few in the system. In other words, being rich and having parental qualities as an individual is necessary but not enough for the child to succeed in life. It is a combination of the fitness of parents; and a stable country together with opportunities created by the state for all children irrespective of their social backgrounds. To many participants, based on recurring views, intercountry adoption has structural benefits (free education, better material standards) together with peace and fitness (the fitness of adoptive parents financially among other considerations) of adoptive parents in receiving countries like Sweden compare to incountry adoption. Below are typical comments from some participants to justify why they think; and for that matter believed other people in Africa will prefer or choose intercountry adoption as against incountry adoption.

I think the issue of superiority versus inferiority is one of the reasons. Most people think; and it's a fact that what the Whiteman has is better. This mindset and because of perennial wars in Africa under {???} governments, many parents prefer to give their children to families in Western countries. (Denis, FGD1).

We have to be careful here also. In Africa, we know the economic conditions of most of the people…So you must be economically buoyant to be able to support this child! And that you give them quality of life better than what their present conditions! (David, FGD4).

In addition to the above, comments from some participants indicate that they favoured intercountry adoption because of ethnic tensions due to multiplicity of ethnic groups in many African countries vis-à-vis weak nationhood as compare to US and Europe. Some believed in Africa, people consider themselves more of ethnic bond rather than state or nationality bond. They preferred intercountry adoption since children adopted within Africa are likely to face the problem of ethnic discriminations. Thus the fixation of ethnicity by blood in African

countries is said to be unfavourable to adoptees. For instance, Redo and David commented as:

> *The problem with domestic adoption is that they remind the child of his background when he is successful. For instance in Nigeria, they will let people know your background when you're going for political appointment. It boils down to ethnicity. (Redo, FGD4).*

More importantly, 'quality of life' was at the heart of participants. To participants, whether those who prefer national adoption to international or vice versa in the end have one purpose for their stands: quality of life for the child. Thus, in almost all the diverse comments phrases like quality of life, better opportunities, better conditions, and safety life were mentioned. As put forward by Patrick[9] and Kintolani as:

> *…let's be realistic, I think it will be better for the child to grow up in a more developed country. No doubt! If I was a father and suddenly I have to give away my child, I will probably give that child to somebody in the West or Sweden than somebody in Africa or in Ghana…You know in Europe he will have the opportunities that he will not have in Africa. (Patrick, FGD5).*

> *…If the quality of life given to that child nationally, will be the same or comparable, or even better than the international one, then in that case I prefer the national. But then in a society where that is not applicable then a rational Nigerian will always take {???} international adoption…Just for that child's welfare. (Kintolani, FGD4).*

Some of these comments suggest that where the child is going to be assured of a safe environment and better equal opportunities in life is where they would want their children to be. This will inform their decision, whether they should be in a situation to give their children or a child for adoption. It is not bolt from the blue when recurring views from participants showed preference to international adoption as against national adoption. As Poncho clearly put it *…If the child is my own child and I want the best for the child, then I have no choice than to give the child for international adoption because the child will be in safe place and have bright future… (Poncho, FGD6).*

Participants support for intercountry adoption on grounds of material opportunities is inconsistent with what international conventions see as not valid reason for adoption. It could be that because informants are immigrants and might have chosen to come to Sweden to seek better opportunities and had seen the differences in terms of living standards might have

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[9] This participant is an adoptee but still he considers himself as an African immigrant.

influenced their views. Hence the different views from groups like black social workers in America who were totally against black children being adopted by white families. It also goes to confirm the comment Kintolani made that their views as immigrants may be different from Africans back home. As stated:

> *...adoption is good. But if you ask a question about adoption in the African traditional perspective as in the case of our grand fathers or mothers or parents in Africa, their views may be quite different from our own views. (Kintolani, FGD4).*

The support for intercountry adoption due to structural benefits, peace and fitness of adoptive parents in developed countries does not suggest that participants called for anyone in advanced countries like Sweden, the United States and the UK to adopt children in developing countries like those in Africa whimsically. The consideration for financial fitness for instance, does not imply they arbitrarily endorsed the idea that anyone who is financially fit should be allowed to adopt children internationally. However, they called for background checks of any prospective adoptive parents in receiving countries including social and psychological notwithstanding the financial suitability or the likelihood of material opportunities for the child. They even factored the receiving country's status of treating immigrants or foreigners as one of the checks before given out a child for intercountry adoption.

6.3.1 Racism and Discrimination: Difficulties in intercountry adoption

In spite of the beliefs that there are better opportunities in most of the western countries than African countries, informants had the conviction that there are challenges involved. Some asked the question of whether children from sending countries would be fully accepted by the receiving countries. It sounded from participants that it is not only about having the structures for quality life in place but how these structures, in advanced countries, will equally benefit adopted children without any form of discrimination from the majority.

For instance, racism and discrimination was cited by participants during interviews as some of the difficulties involved. The inability for receiving countries to warmly receive adopted children from Africa to some participants will even worsen the adopted child's conditions despite the basic infrastructures and social amenities in place. Informants were calling for social integration as against social segregation; and equal opportunity as against discrimination on grounds of color and cultural differences. They believe where the child is not going to be fully integrated in their new country then they prefer national adoption rather

than sending the child to another country to be treated as a second class citizen. Thus participants raised concerns on issues of racism and discrimination as embedded in their comments as the excerpts below confirm:

> *Make no mistake racism is in the blood…we cannot eradicate it completely we can only control it. The child will definitely face racist attitude because of the colour. Sweden is trying hard to be nice with people with different race but I think racism is in the blood. There are some people; they cannot control their racist attitudes because it's in their blood. (Lawrence, FGD1)*

> *…One cannot lose sight of the fact that adopted kids face problems within Sweden. Racist attitudes towards them…example: racist questions like…when are you going back to your country? Where originally do you come from? These children [adopted children], feel Swedish, they speak Swedish, think Swedish, dream Swedish but {???} because of their colour some Swedish nationals ask them such racist questions? (Negus, FGD2)*

> *The issue of racism is another problem. Children adopted to Sweden are usually asked about their otherness. The questions of where do you come from? Who are you? When are doing back to Africa? What do you eat in your house…make the child conscious of him or herself and he begins to think or do self introspection. (Santonis, FGD1).*

The above extracts from participants during group discussions show difficulties of living in Sweden as an immigrant according to participants. They see questions which usually refer foreigners to their 'otherness' like 'when are you going back to your country'; 'what do you eat in your house'; is it cold like this in your country? All these are seen as indirect way of racism, discrimination or telling people with different colors that they do not belong here. According to Santonis, *if you know a child in an area as an adopted child, then it will be cynical to ask when that child is going back to his or her country.* This suggests that the adopted child is now living in Sweden in a permanent home like other Swedes and in fact a Swede according to international laws regarding intercountry adoption. Therefore he or she is not like a tourist or someone who is just passing through the system temporarily for such questions of 'otherness' to be addressed to.

However, some believed asking of those questions by the majority may not necessarily mean racism but it could be that the majority have genuine intentions to ask such questions. Thus, it could be the normal tendency of people being curious to know much about people of the minority in a particular country. Lawrence, a participant had emphasized earlier that racism is in the blood and that there are some people in Sweden whose racist attitudes

cannot be controlled in spite of the state's hard efforts to promote racism free society because it is part of them by nature. Notwithstanding that position, he also believed not every attitude of the people of the majority should be interpreted as racism and discrimination. *I do not think some of these questions are asked in an attempt to discriminate. We should be careful not to interpret everything as racism! We should look at the context, mood and the frequency of such acts.* Thus people asking the 'otherness' of others may be on a genuine intention to know much about them. According to Lawrence, the minority should know the context, frequency and the mood for such questions rather than hastily interpreting them as racism or discrimination. This position was further strengthened by David's comment in a subsequent group discussion that adopted children sometimes make them difficult to be handled by their adoptive parents and for that matter their new countries. According to David, *most adopted children have this self exclusion or complex attitude…if you even treat them as your own child they have this disparages self-desperation attitudes making them difficult to handle.*

Some of these instances show how complicated it is for a country to accommodate people with different race or cultural backgrounds. It requires people of the majority population in countries like Sweden to be dynamic and very circumspect in handling some of these complicated issues on adopted children as immigrants. According Negus, transracial adoptive parents and countries that encourage adoptions are the ideal families and countries, and should be commended since it requires herculean efforts to handle issues involved.

> *…families who adopt children from Africa, Asia and other places in Latin America have to be respected. I have great respect for them because they are fighting their own battles regarding dealing with racial tendencies towards their children. Families that adopt children are the ideal families.* (Negus, FGD2).

The discussion so far confirms the assertion by Volkman (2003) that "questions of belonging, race, culture and subjectivity loom large in the discourse of transnational adoption". The comments from participants show they believed intercountry adopted children face problems of racism and discriminations. They consider these as difficulties involved in ICA.

The analysis of their comments shows how complex it is to handle issues of racism and discrimination. The ideal countries are those that strive to navigate through to ensure permanent home for children in need, in spite of these complexities. On the other hand, the ideal adopted children; and minority groups who claim relations with these children are those

who do not make themselves complex to be handled – by given a paranoid interpretation to every attitude in time space or in every context by the people of the majority population as racism and discrimination.

6.4 Is matching necessary in transracial adoption?

Racial matching is a very contentious issue in transracial adoption. The difficulties of people of different race encounter in their adoptive homes or countries (as discussed in the forgone section) have compelled some groups and researchers to favour same race adoption. Thus some researchers (see Slaughter 2009; Snow & Covell 2006) are of the view that past experiences of some minority groups such as violation of their rights over their children influenced such groups to favour the adoption of children with similarities in environment and cultural backgrounds as against different race and cultural orientation. For instance, some groups like associations of black social workers in the US in the 1970s declared that black children should be adopted by black families to avoid identity crisis. The position of some participants during group discussions shows similar patterns of arguments on transracial adoptions. In other words, comments from some participants show preference to same race adoption rather than transracial. As commented by some informants:

> *I prefer the Africans in Sweden to adopt kids from Africa than Swedes because there will be similarities in values and culture; it will be easy for the child to adjust. (Ngoma, FGD5).*

> *I prefer Africans adopting African children or adopting from another African country. There is no huge difference…There are similarities in culture… The skin color is the same, people will not also tell the child that he or she is not part of them. It will be difficult for the child to ask questions about his origin because there will be the sense of belongingness in terms of color and culture. (Denis, FGD1)*

The comments above signify participants' preference to same race adoption because of similarities in culture, same skin color to avoid questioning of the origin of the child. However, comments from other participants also show that even within the same race or colour as Africans the child could face problems of ethnic discriminations which are similar to racial discriminations. As commented by David:

> *…The issue of nationhood or nationality is quite weak [in Africa]. It is not as strong as in Europe. I consider myself as more of a Yoruba man but I am a Nigerian…I look at myself more of ethnic bind which is the same with most of people in Nigeria or other African countries. If a Hausa man adopts a Yoruba child, entirely different ethnic group, entirely different cultural setting we are*

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talking about! Of course you are within the same boarders but things are entirely different! (David, FGD4).

The comments above point to the fact that in spite of the sameness in color, questions will still be raised on Africans adopting African children within Africa considering the multiplicity of ethnic groups (with varied ways of living) in most African countries. It is important to also note that the emphasis on ethnic bond rather than skin colour or racial belongingness (black or white) show the difference between the position of African or black Americans as a group and that of African immigrants in Sweden on transracial adoption. Whilst much emphasis was on racial differences on the part of black Americans, African immigrants in Sweden did not only talk about race as a concept but more importantly ethnicity. Ethnicity and related issues like similarities in languages and other cultural activities were emphasised rather than skin colour of individuals or the goal to prepare black children to survive in a racist society. It could be argued that matching was viewed by participants in the context of ethnic background, geographical and cultural proximity rather than transracial belongings as displayed by groups like Association of Black Social Workers in the US. As further commented by David:

> *For instance I am a Nigeria and should a Ghanaian for instance adopt a child in Nigerian, circumstances are similar which make it easy for the child to integrate. But now where someone comes from China and adopt a child from Nigeria... uprooting this child; takes him to a place [China] where biologically, genetically, racially he is different then there are more issues to contest. Issues of identity...can create problems for the child down the road. (David, FGD4).*

The discussion so far points to the fact that matching in adoption could not only be controversial in transracial adoption but could also be an issue with same race adoption. This is because of internal cultural differences particularly in Africa where countries have different ethnic groups. But is matching by race or ethnic or geographical proximity viewed to be the solution to controversies surrounding transracial adoption?

Comments from some participants indicate that racial matching is regarded unnecessary. For instance, Guamani and Nana Seto believed some Africans are black in color but are more Westernized or Europeanized than the Europeans themselves. Also, some Westerners are more Africanized than Africans. So colour does not change anything. As they put it when I asked whether they prefer Africans in Sweden to adopt children from Africa to Swedes adopting from Africa:

My problem is some Africans arrived here young. They were brought up like Europeans; they don't have this African culture [talking about]. May be black in skin but they are typically Europeans. So I have problems with people who want Africans in Sweden to adopt African kids from Africa on cultural grounds. Who is an African? As I said…Africans here now behave like Europeans or Swedes. Sometimes more than the Swedes themselves! Do we still call these people Africans? (Guamani, FGD3).

Most Africans in Sweden have lost their identity already! There is no difference between them and Europeans or Swedes… (Nana Seto, FGD3).

Some Africans in Europe have completely turned Europeans in how they think, behave and live. The same as some Whites in Africa! They live like Africans and sometimes more than we do. (Issaka-Moro, FGD5).

Some of these counter comments against the emphasis on same race adoption suggest that it is about attitudinal change towards each other and not change in colour. It is about the readiness and the ability to receive and take better care of the child irrespective of differences in race, ethnicity, cultural and geographical boundaries that matters; and not matching. Sometimes children's ability to adapt to different environment with people of different ethnic or racial backgrounds and geographical locations makes matching as chasing the wind. The comments by some participants suggest that matching is not necessary just as it was downplayed by scholars like Bartholet (1991) and evidence from the work by Howell on transracial adoptees (Howell 2006). As put separately by Kintolani and Negus:

…I have seen about three children adopted to Sweden: one from Asia, others from Latin America and Africa. Normally I have seen they integrate quite fully well into Swedish culture…they get influenced by the Swedish culture actually. (Kintolani, FGD4)

Naturally, there is not much difference between biological and adopted parents so far as the care, love and parental treatment given to adopted children are concerned. (Negus, FGD2)

This position is at variance with what was expressed by Chimezie (1975); and that of groups like NABSW and ASBWAP in the United States and Great Britain in the 70s and 80s respectively (as cited in Bartholet 1991). However, one of the arguments of American Black Social workers was that black children needed black parents to be prepared for life in a racist society. This might have contributed to the difference in their position due to persistent

violations of minority group rights at that period. Consequently, it is important to point out that some historical memories particularly mistreatment of minority groups during civil rights struggle, slavery and colonization in the past might have influenced the position of groups like NABSW in the US as well as some informants in this study to favour racial matching in transracial adoptions. It is in this regard that Cohen (1994) elucidated that the current debates on transracial adoption connote a re-emergence of what transpired in the past. It was therefore cautioned that considerations should be given to the life histories of people for better understanding of their stance on issues bothering them.

6.5 The child's right to his or her culture: Acquired or inherited?

The United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC) calls for the preservation of the child's right to his or her culture or identity which borders on national or ethnic descent. Right to culture, looking at the various articles in the convention is defined by his or her adherence to the culture of the family or the community he or she comes from. This must be recognized as well as considered before giving a child for adoption. As spelt out in the preamble of the UNCRC, "taking due account of the importance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child..." This is further emphasised on in subsequent articles 8, 29, and 30 (See 1989 UNCRC). It is in that regard that the convention prioritized incountry adoption over intercountry adoption for the purpose of promoting the preservation of the child rights to his or her culture.

When asked about their opinions on the UNCRC position on the preservation of the child's rights to his or her culture, there were varied views. The concepts of *age* and *roots* in relations to the child's rights to culture cropped up during discussion. Some believe emphasis on culture is not important particularly if the child was adopted at a tender age. Others were of the opinion that preservation of the culture is important particularly if at a stage, the child wishes to know his or her origin. Notwithstanding the mixed views based on the concept of age, critical look of the opinions of participants points to a unifying position. Thus, participants believed it is necessary to let the child know the cultural background when the child at a particular stage wishes to know. The comments from participants show that the child's right to his or her culture is very important in transracial adoption with some having existentialist view on cultural identity. Moreover, others even showed preference to incountry because of the failure of adoptive parents to allow their child to communicate with their roots. Denis, a participant held existentialist view that Africans are Africans and nothing can change that. Therefore the African child's cultural identity cannot be changed when adopted to

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Europe. To Denis, no matter how long he or she lives in Europe his or her inherited cultural identity as an African child will exist. *We should always remember that this [adopted] child is a product of culture… Africans are Africans, no matter how the condition will be in Europe, their 'Africaness' will be in them even if not at an early stage; it will show up later in their lives. (Denis, FGD1).* This idea from Denis that the child was a product of culture before he or she was adopted goes to support the UNCRC call for the recognition and the preservation of the child's right to his or her culture. The comments from Nana Seto and Zakus also served as indication of how the preservation of the child's right to his culture was important to participants. They asked for the child to be given the opportunity to communicate with their biological parents or country of origin to help them keep their original cultural identity. As commented by Nana Seto and Zakus:

> *I believe the child should be given the opportunity to see parents. The child's cultural background should be maintained…otherwise the child eventually lose his identity. (Nana Seto, FGD3).*

> *…if you adopt me you should also adopt my culture. So the child should be permitted to go back to his roots or communicate with original country. But usually the [adoptive] parents refuse to do that…that is why I prefer incountry adoption because there are similarities in cultures. (Zakus, FGD2).*

Furthermore, comments from some participants show that cultural identity is not only important to groups which claim relations with adopted children in a particular country but more importantly the adopted children themselves. As one of the informants who was adopted and now a grown up adult (adoptee) commented:

> *…at teenage you want to know where you come from, you want to know your identity. That sometimes can be difficult for us. Not even only Africans [children] but all adopted kids! Identity is something important for us. That is why if you adopt someone the culture has to be aware of. Adopted kids have rights to know their background without anyone stopping them! (Patrick, FGD3).*

The above comment reflects the position by MIA (2005) that adoptive parents should be opened to their adopted children regarding their identity or cultural background when they demand to know to make them develop a positive self-image.

6.5.1 The concept of age

As pointed out earlier, one concept that came up in relation to the preservation of the child's cultural background is *age.* The participants [including the adoptee] who called for the preservation of the child's right to his or her culture made mention of *age* as a concept. To them much emphasis on culture should depend on the age of the child. In other words, if the child was adopted as an infant, then the child has not been inculcated into any culture and for that matter the new place should be the source of his or her culture. Moreover, they believe if at certain age the child demand to know his or her identity then the child has right to know. The comments by participants which were closely related to the child's rights to culture and age below confirm this position:

> *Well, it depends on the age of the child too. If the child is an infant then the culture wouldn't have much effect on that child. I mean whichever country that child is adopted to at an infant age then that particular child is going to integrate very easily when he comes to that country. But for a more matured child then the culture now is in that context going to have much influence on the child. (Kintolani, FGD4).*

> *It depends on the age of the child when he was adopted. Also I believe normally the child should have the rights to get contact with the biological family. But the problem is…the child can be confused [!] because of differences in culture" (Ngoma, FGD5).*

This presupposes that everything regarding the child's rights to his or her culture depend on the child him or herself. Adults choosing a culture for adopted children could lead to confusion on the part of the child as Ngoma (FGD5) alluded to in his submission. That is, importance of original culture depends on the age at adoption. This reflects the stance of some scholars that children should be allowed to make their own choice in determining their cultural identity (see Ronen 2004; & Eekelaar 2004). The acquisition of cultural identity should be through the personal experiences of the child rather than by and through birth or the birth parents (Eekelaar 2004:190). This means having access to information about the birth parents is not equal to the individual child determining his or her own cultural identity. This leads to the question of whether culture is something by nature or through nurture.

6.5.2 Culture as something acquired or inherited?

Signe Howell has investigated perspectives of adoptees in Norway on the concept of roots. He noted that adoptees interviewed believe culture is acquired rather than something biological and that roots (knowing country of origin and birth parents) was not significant to adoptees as popularly believed to be by the majority in Norway (Howell 2006). According to Howell, adoptees believed "kinship or relatedness are much more than biology" and that transnational adoptees "feel comfortable in their social world" as against the presumable biological relatedness among the majority in Norway (Howell 2006: 133).

In this study comments from participants indicate that culture was predominantly viewed by participants as something inherited or biological through family lineage. Notwithstanding that some participants' comments suggested that culture is social rather than biological (as also indicated in Howell's study), the recurring views from participants showed culture is inherited or more biological than social. To begin with are some comments of participants suggesting that culture is a learning process which the child acquires in his or her environment as growing instead of something inherited. As Negus and Guamani put it:

> *The child has no culture in this regard. The new place of the child should be his or her source of culture. Emphasis on culture in adoption is racist thinking. The child has the right to know from adoptive parents where he originally comes from if he or she wishes to know but it should not necessarily be that the adopted child be raised based on the culture of the community he was adopted from. Culture is place bound not culture or ethnic bound… (Negus, FGD2).*

> *I see nothing wrong for not maintaining the culture of the child. Usually children are young so there is no culture to lose. They learn the culture of the new place which I think is not bad! (Ado, FGD3).*

Besides those who see culture as something *acquired*, others believed that it is something *inherited* from biological parents. Hence they made emphasis on the maintenance of culture and used *roots* as a concept to signify original culture and identity inherited from biological parents or original country as Africans. Below are some comments from participants in line with this argument:

> *Irrespective of where the child is coming from, I think there should be [a way] that the roots of the child can always be traced. That is important! At certain age the child may want to know: where do I come from? Who were my parents? How do my people live? How is the situation? What is my cultural background…those are natural questions that the child may ask. (Titilayoni, FGD4).*

I believe people cannot be delinked from their roots… I believe we are all animals as humans and just as every animal has their lineage, we humans cannot be separated from our lineage… That is why there will always be a sense of belongingness to original roots even if one is transported from his or her roots for several years to another community. (Santonis, FGD1).

Some of the comments above depict the notion that culture is inherited or something in the blood which cannot be changed or 'rerooted'. These comments also reemphasized the position already made by other participants that an attempt by adoptive parents to distort the original culture of the child could be harmful to the child. Some participants even went further to challenge that the refusal by adoptive parents to allow their children to have contact with their roots is against international conventions on the right of the child in relation to adoption. As a participant put it, *the notion…I don't want my child to be in contact with his biological parents even if there is a possibility, is not in the normal adoption declaration!* (*Issaka-Moro, FGD5*).

6.5.3 The concept of Roots

Another important thing noted was the meaning assigned to *roots* as a concept. Is the 'roots' or origin of the child traced to the birth parents or birth culture? Critical look of comments from participants as already cited, show that the origin or identity or roots of the child is traced to their biological parents. So it is through their biological parents that the child gets his or her cultural identity. In other words, a recurring view in group discussions was the emphasis on contact with biological parents whenever the issue of roots or origin came up. Therefore participants' comments on the preservation of the child's rights to his cultural backgrounds put the source or roots of the child's culture as something traceable to biological parents or their community of origin and associated cultural practices.

The discussion on the child's right to culture so far points to entrenched positions on what the culture of the child should be. In fact the rigid positions regarding maintenance; and 'destruction' of child's cultural background by the adult parties involved depicts the way parents (both biological and adoptive) could trample on the rights of the child in the process of honoring their parental responsibilities. The attitudes of some adult parties in transracial adoptions suggest double standards rather than fighting for the rights of children. One of my informants, Redo, believed adults sometimes display double standards in handling affairs of children. *If we Africans have problem with regards to Swedes or westerners giving African*

children Swedish or European names, then what about an African in Sweden or Europe who born and give the child a Swedish name? (Redo, FGD4).

To put Redo's statement in another way, why should we wrestle over giving a name to adopted children whilst it is done smoothly with biological children under the same principle by the same groups who resist it in transracial adoption? What about Africans in Africa who give birth and give the child a European name? Most Africans still have European names and continue to give their children western names: so why can't adoptive parents give their African adopted children Swedish names for instance? On the other hand, what difference will it make for adoptive parents in the west to give children who already have African names to have their names changed to western names? Is this a way to justify the comments made by one of the participants, Guamani? As he puts it *if I adopt a child that child is mine! I have the right to give that child the name I want or train her the way I like…It is not compulsory to allow the child to go back to biological parents…* There was a counter argument or opinion from other participants which is also value mentioning here. To David, *the idea that I adopt a child and that child is mine and I can decide for the child the way I want sounds like I bought the child.* In dealing with the dilemma of maintaining or rejecting the cultural background of their adoptive child, the advice by Redo could be helpful as a starting point towards granting freedom for the child to develop his or her own culture. According to Redo:

> *The culture you were brought up and the society you come from become part of you. It is going to be difficult for someone to change it. For anyone who wants to change one's culture that person has to accept it first! So persons who adopt and want to change the culture of the child have to accept the culture of where the child is coming from before they can even amend it later. (Redo, FGD4).*

It is important to emphasize here that some of our attitudes or actions towards children as parents – be it biological or adoptive makes the child to be like our property. This way of thinking has made it difficult for parents to grant children their rights whilst performing their duties particularly in the upbringing of their children. It is in the midst of the difficulty in performing this herculean task of parental training and at the same time, granting children their rights as humans, that made scholars like Brennan and Noggle (1997) to come out with what they called 'limited parental rights thesis'. Brennan and Noggle believe parents have rights to ensure the best for their children in life particularly since some rights are role dependent or construct rights. Therefore such rights require certain level of maturity,

knowledge and experience before being fully granted to children. However, they were of the strong view that parent's rights over their children should have some level of threshold. Thus parenting should be guided by the concept of stewardship rather than ownership (see Brennan and Noggle 1997:2-17).

It could be argued here that international conventions have contributed to the one-sided view on culture as something inherited from biological parents hence the call for the preservation of the cultural background of the child in all adoptions. However this position towards how and what the culture of the child should be is narrow and does not take into account the plight of children with parents of multiple cultural identity. If we continue this narrow view of attributing one culture to children, then where will children with biological parents of different race, identity or culture belong to? It is in this regard that Ronen (2004) pointed out that the UNCRC has failed to define which culture a child should enjoy, particularly those with different cultural backgrounds. It is clear that our actions as adults put these children at risk. The risk of identity crises: confusion, negative self image and other psychological problems. The only way to rescue them is to allow them to put up their own culture through personal experiences. What adults can do is to act as stewards by given the necessary help to guide their choices when needed.

6.6 The best interests of the child principle: What constitutes it?

One of the major themes in adoption debate is 'the best interests of child'. According the 1993 Hague Convention, in all adoptions the best interests of the child should be paramount. Thus, the convention calls for state parties to ensure that consideration is given to national solution first, that the child is adoptable, preserve the background of the child, evaluate prospective adoptive parents, match the child with a suitable family and impose additional safeguards when necessary. Specifically, Articles 1a, 4c, 16d, 21(1), and 24 all talk about the best interests of the child (1993 Hague Convention).[10] This fundamental principle of the child's best interests which gives effect to Article 21 of UNCRC should guide the development of integrated national child care and protection system. Consequently, a part of this integrated national child protection system is an ethical, child-centred approach to intercountry adoption. The question then is: what constitutes the best interests of the child

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[10] These Articles deepens what has been stated in UNCRC's Articles 20 & 2 regarding separation of children from their natural environments and for that matter its position on adoption which is also further expressed in regional conventions like the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC): Articles 24 & 25.

according to the understanding of my informants? How can we determine that an adoption is in the best interest of the child particularly where most adopted children are not in the position to decide for themselves due to their maturity level or age? Informants shared their views on this principle. The obvious notion expressed when asked about the best interest principle in adoptions is to ensure the child does not end up in the hands of miscreants but to end up in the hands of good people for better future in life.

> *It is in the best interest of the child to check the backgrounds of adoptive parents. One can say I have the money to adopt your child but could be a criminal. So the best thing is to check the adoptive parents and do follow ups after adoption... (Issaka-Moro, FGD5).*

Patrick, also emphasized that there must be background checks to ascertain if people interest in adopting a child are qualified to take care of the child permanently. *The best interest for the child is to ensure that prospective adoptive parents are qualified to take care of the child without any criminal records. (Patrick, FGD5).*[11] Also participants believed it is in the best interest of the child to let them know their background and called for the child to be given the opportunity visit their biological parents or country of origin when necessary. *The child is my blood and tradition must go on. It is in the interest of the child to let them know their background. (Denis, FGD1).* Negus on the other hand believed it is not in the best interest to stress on the preservation of the child's cultural background.

> *The thought that the best interest of the child should be preservation of the culture of the child's biological parents or that of the community he or she originally comes from is racist thinking (Negus, FGD2).*

For Ado, anything that can create confusion for the child is not in the best interest of the child. As commented:

> *Anything that can obstruct the child's right to development is not in the best interest of the child! Sometimes the fight over the [child's] right to culture by biological parents…and the resistance from adoptive parents for the child to know their background when they demand to know all put the child in a confuse state. These are not in the best interests of the child! (Ado, FGD3).*

This presupposes that anything that could hinder the development of the child is not in his or her best interest. Hence the stumbling blocks that could prevent the child from realizing their goals in life and make good impact on society should include over emphasis on the child's cultural background. Adoptive parents should also know that their refusal to let

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[11] The views on the best interests of the child by participants: stressing on the backgrounds of prospective adoptive parents to be checked to ensure the child does not end up in the hands of bad people to deny them better future also reflects their reasoning on whether adoption is a good alternative or not. It also reflects what they want in place to make ICA work as analysis and discussions will show later.

children know their backgrounds or link up with their countries of origin when they (children themselves) demand to know may lead to state of confusion which could eventually affect the best interest they yearn to have for their adopted kids.

It can also be argued that some comments by participants point to the fact that cultural differences claimed to create difficulties of attaining consensus on the best interest of the child. The comments below support my claim:

> *When you talk about intercountry adoption, for me two things come to mind: the family and the moral values of African countries and that of the Western world. The family setting in Africa is different from the Western world and moral values are totally different... The culture in Sweden allows homosexual marriages and they [homosexual couples] can adopt [a child]! In Africa, and especially Ibo land in Nigeria where I come from, homosexuality is forbidden; you cannot even talk about it. (Denis, FGD1).[12]*

> *Who defines quality of life? My brother I can assure you if you are in a Nigerian village and they give you a dollar a day you wouldn't know how to spend it! It'll be more than enough for you. It's like I go to the farm, I get my okro...am not going to the club, not eating at the restaurant. Not like in Sweden where you will go and eat in the restaurant and pay big money! (Denis, FGD1).*

The comments above show a challenge on western notion of what is in the best interests of the child. They go to support the idea that there are different childhoods in different cultural settings. Thus differences in family setting, moral values of Africans and conditions pertaining to different African countries do not allow standards set for evaluation of the best interests of the child as defined by children's rights conventions to fit in the same context.

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[12] This point was backed with a story from the informant as follows:
"There was a case of same sex male couples in Tanzania to adopt a child from a community. They were warmly welcomed but when they were about to give the child for adoption, they asked them…where is the wife who will take care of the child? The two men replied…we are a couple. The villagers pursued them with sticks. They were chased out from the town! The people couldn't believe two men were married. This is to support my argument that even though they might adopting the child to give that child good education, bring him to clean environment and all the best things in life, there is an aspect they are not looking at; our moral values."

6.6.1 Adults' interests in the best interests for the child?

Critical consideration to some comments by informants under different themes (particularly national adoption vs. intercountry adoption) shows that decision to give children for international adoption is not only influenced by the fact that they want the best opportunities in life for the child alone. They also have the conviction that when the child is successful one day, they will trace their way back or at least will let them also feel the impact of their success acquired from the advanced country they might have found themselves. This position was overtly well put by David by citing a documentary from CNN. To paraphrase David's story, a Nigerian lady in Denmark was deported to Nigeria, and a Danish man who has been in intimate relationship with the girl in Denmark decided to follow the girl to Nigeria. In the process the girl was given to the man to marry to facilitate her return to Denmark. As he puts it:

> ...a young Nigerian lady was deported to Nigeria. A Nigerian mother in Edo State offered the child to the man that I dash you...Do you think it is for altruistic reason that the mother is doing that? No! it is materialistic because she has a long term vision that one day the daughter will be successful somewhere [in Europe] and find their roots back...Then it will connect to an economic conduct pipe to the mother and also connect other family members to Europe to become successful and bring money home. That is the best interest of the child to the woman. That is the economic dimension! (David, FGD4).

This comment came directly under the discussion of the priority to national adoption over intercountry or international adoption. However, it indirectly revealed what some participants think informed or would inform the decision of many Africans or parents from developing countries to give out their children for international adoption as against domestic adoption. As further articulated by David which all the participants unanimously agreed to:

> ...One way or the other, many Nigerians prefer international adoption but they are not doing it in the best interest of the child alone but they are forecasting long term plan that in 20/30 years if the child is successful and find their way back, it will be a source of income for the family. (David, FGD4).

The above comment suggests that in an attempt to fight for the best interest of the child, adults covertly fight for their interests as well. There is always an atom of self interests being safeguarded by the parties involved in intercountry adoptions besides the seemingly interests of the child involved. The parties (besides the child) here include biological parents

and adoptive parents or sending and receiving countries. It is important to note that unlike other studies like Lind and Johansson (2009) the statements from participants with regards to adults' interest of benefitting later from the child as narrated by David indicate the attitudes of my informants in relation to African parents. They are however not the views from African birth parents themselves. In Lind and Johansson study, the participants (Indian adoptive parents) that were interviewed not only spoke about their own views, but also about what they believed were the attitudes of Indian adoptive parents in general.

Nevertheless, views expressed by participants that adults sometimes have hidden interest for themselves whilst they pursue the best interest for the child cannot be wholly overlooked. The obscured interest of adults is exhibited by the international discourses regarding intercountry adoption. Typical example is the UNCRC and the Hague Conventions over emphasis on the preservation of the child's rights to his or her culture as a constituent of the *best interests of the child principle*. The question is: are we really preserving the culture of children in their own rights? Is it not rather the quest of adults of sending countries to perpetuate the conservation of their culture; and that of the receiving countries to inculcate their culture in the end? Lind and Johansson were right when they elucidated that the preservation of culture hitherto has been talked about as either serving the best interest of the child or that of the ethnic minority. But it may also be argued to serve the best interest of the adoptive parents who have preferences regarding the child's background (See Lind and Johansson 2009). If not for the interest of safeguarding adult's culture, then which culture? What culture has a five months baby for instance? As one of participants, Negus commented, *the child has no culture in this regard...*[13] Though some scholars like Corsaro (2003) has argued that as little as infants, children have their own culture. But in this context (adoptions debate and policies), adults seem to be imposing their own culture on children as exhibited in UNCRC and other international discourses on children's rights.

Without being hypocritical and putting children at risk in the end, it is important to overtly recognize that adults also fight for their interests in the process of seeking for the interests of children. Thus, it lays emphasis on the point that childhood is not about children alone but adults as well. It is in this regard that Smolin contended that the only kind of

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[13] This comment came up during a group discussion with my informants. Negus one of the informants commented when I asked their opinion on the preservation of the child's rights to his or culture as spelt out by UNCRC. He believed during adoption, the infant child has no culture. They acquire their culture later. So to him there is no culture to be preserved if we really are to preserve the child's own culture because they do not have as infants.

adoption that can serve the "best interests of children" is adoption that honours all triad members. The adoption 'triads' according to Smolin are the complex relationships between birth family, adoptive family and the child; and the complex relationships between the child, sending and receiving countries (Smolin 2004).

6.7 Alternatives to intercountry adoption according to participants

The 'subsidiarity' principle of The Hague Convention call for contracting States to recognise that a child should be raised by his or her birth family or extended family whenever necessary. But if that is not possible or practical, due to the lost of parent(s) or unwillingness of extended family to take care for instance, other forms of permanent care in the country of origin should be considered. Thus, preference is given to national adoption when the child lacked birth parents and relative to take care in a permanent functional family setting. Where all attempts to get national solution have failed, consideration is given to intercountry adoption to secure a permanent home for the child. As a general rule, so far as the Hague Convention is concerned, institutional care should be considered as a last resort for a child in need of a family. Hence, however good the quality of an orphanage is, it is still viewed in the Hague Convention as inferior to an adoptive family in another country.

In this study informants were asked if they think there are alternative(s) to intercountry adoption in a situation where the child's biological parents are not in position or not available to take care of him or her. The general view from participants was that there should be proper structures in African countries by African governments to give children opportunities for better life in future. The comments by Issaka-Moro and Patrick below are some of the common comments by participants to show their displeasure on lack of effective family welfare systems in many African countries:

> *The best interest for the child is to have better opportunities in a country to go to the best school, live in good home, better health care for better future. This is why I asked Why Europeans do not send their children to Africa for adoption? The reason is because their countries are well organized! Even if the children's parents are dead, there will be well organized operated orphanage! (Issaka-Moro, FGD5).*

> *Let's get better orphanages or provision of good foster homes to make sure the kids have future. The African governments have to make sure that they have schools, homes for those children to stay in the country to help the country instead of adopting them. But if those countries cannot offer that then adoption is the only option. (Patrick, FGD5).*

The comments above call African countries to have in place effective family welfare systems to help children stay with their families. In the absence of creating strong welfare system in Africa then there is no alternative than giving the child to families in advances countries for adoption. This is inconsistent with what critics of ICA claim that ICA stands in the way of creating better child's welfare system or structures to help families keep their children. For instance, Smolin has demonstrated his concern on the structural effects of ICA on the readiness of countries to support birth families (See Smolin 2004 &2007). Also the call for better orphanages by Issaka-Moro and Paul conflicts with the Hague Convention's posture on orphanages. The convention considers orphanages as inferior even to the last resort on its scale of preference (intercountry adoption) when it becomes impossible or impractical for biological parents or close relatives to care.

Besides, participants' call for better welfare systems, one concept that emerged during group discussions was 'child sponsoring' or what some participants called 'distance adoption'. They indirectly saw distance adoption or sponsoring a child as another alternative. Below are some excerpts of views from participants:

> *If I were those White wealthy families who go to Africa to adopt with the mind of making life better for these unfortunate children, I will create opportunities in their own countries for them so they can have better educations as in other countries. This will give them the power to change or shape their lives when they grow and have impact in their societies than taking them to Europe. (Denis, FGD1)*

> *There is a concept now in Sweden called sponsor a child or sponsor someone that is old. So you don't necessary need to bring the child from Africa to Sweden. It is economically easier to have the child in their own environment and give them better condition rather than taken the child to Sweden. (David, FGD4).*

It could be deduced from the above that some participants want families from western countries with the intention to adopt a child to create opportunity for those children in their birth countries by sponsoring rather than adopting them. The question then is: is distance adoption or sending money to children abroad to cater for their needs the same as international adoption? Or does donating money to create better living conditions for families in Africa or elsewhere truly satisfy the quest of families in need of children or to place children without families in permanent homes? As one of my participants put it:

There is clear link between Swedish International Development Agency [SIDA] and international adoption. Swedish Nationals sent to developing countries like Ethiopia started to develop interest in adopting children. But there is distinction between Sida's work as development agency and that of Swedish families who needed children and started showing interest in adopting children from Africa. Aid giving should be separated from international adoption to avoid misunderstanding (Negus, FGD2).

This suggests that given aid to poor families in developing countries to support their children should be separated from intercountry adoption. Thus, to Negus, the difference between adoption and given aid should clearly be made for better understanding of the practice of intercountry adoption.

The importance of extended family system was also raised. In other words, some comments from participants exhibited the significance of the family system in Africa. As embedded in the comments by Tamanta:

…in Africa, there is always the family first. If one cannot take care of a child other members of the extended family are there to help. The family is always there to help unlike Sweden where other members of the family do not care…And people have to take social. So when it comes to alternatives, a member of the family in Africa can look within the family and if any other member of the family can take care of the child, then that can be alternative. (Tamanta, FGD6).

Similarly, Redo believed that the strong belief in extended family system in Africa should prevent a child being offered for adoption.

In Africa extended family members care a lot! I believe in Nigeria we don't even need child adoption. When your parents are not there or they are incapable to take care of you other members of your family like uncles, aunties, cousins and even distant relatives will be there for the child. (Redo, FGD).

The above comments suggest that the traditional family system in Africa, where members of the family help one another could serve as an alternative. This view is in line with what is expressed in the Hague Convention that consideration should be given to extended families when looking for permanent homes for children in the absence of birth parents.

On the other hand, some participants believed there are lots of waste going on in many African societies and called for the basic things like proper management of little resources available before calling for better welfare system in place. The comment made by Sandra when asked about the alternatives to international adoption is worth quoting.

In Africa, people easily give money to people any how whilst their welfare is not taken off. Good welfare system doesn't work in this way of thinking. So... basic things including tackling of corruption and proper management have to be corrected before thinking of {???} oh, let's have the kind of social security system in Sweden. It doesn't work like that! (Sandra, FGD6).

To sum up, participants believed governments should create better structures to help birth parents keep their children. They as well called for individuals in advanced countries to sponsor the child or distantly adopt the child to prevent moving the child from his or her natural environment, but some argued that child sponsoring is different from adoption. Some believed extended families taken care of the child could serve as alternative to ICA and others also admonished that the waste in the systems of many African countries should be checked before calling for better child welfare systems. When all-things-considered question was applied for participants to nail down their final position on alternatives to ICA, they believed in the absence of better structures to create opportunities for the child internally, the only alternative is to offer the child for intercountry adoption.

6.8 What 'African immigrants' want in place before ICA takes place?

The international conventions including regional convention like the ACWRC have rules and regulations or mechanisms to safeguard adoptions (See 1989 UNCRC, 1993 Hague Conventions; and 1990 ACWRC). The Hague Convention has clearly specified what needs to be done (procedural requirements) before a child can be offered for adoption. It calls for State parties to put in place central competent authorities and accredited bodies to ensure ICA is done in the best interests of the child. This is to uphold the recognition of the fundamental rights of the child rather than the abduction, sale of, or traffic in children (See Article 1a-c, and particularly Chapters II-IV).

In this study, participants gave various measures or criteria when I asked them what they think should be done before one gives out a child. Participants called for background checks of adoptive parents and receiving country's status of treating foreigners; publicity and education for awareness creation; national agency for evaluation and monitoring; and well laid rules and their fulfillments to safeguard ICA. For instance, Paul and Issaka-Moro believed for ICA to work, the background of prospective adoptive families (social, financial and psychological status) must be thoroughly checked by competent national authorities to ensure children do not end up in the hands of bad people. *The best for the child should be that prospective adoptive parents are qualified to take care of the child: no criminal background*

or abusive or anything bad. (Paul, FGD5). Issaka-Moro also believes in background checks of adoptive parents. *Checking the background of [prospective adoptive] parents is very important….one can be rich for instance but not qualified to adopt because he or she may just want to molest or abuse children. (Issaka-Moro, FGD5).* This participant further suggested that there must be national committee to do follow ups after the child has been given for adoption.

> *To determine what is best for the child's future is not an easy task. It is not just simple…it is really difficult. We have to do follow ups by a national committee as the child grows to know how the situation is going even after given the child for adoption.*

This position of follow ups by a committee is clearly stated in the 1990 ACRWC (see in particular Article 24f).[14]

Besides checking the backgrounds of adoptive families, participants believed the receiving country's status of treating foreigners should be taken into consideration when given out children for adoption. Hence they do not want these children to be isolated or discriminated but rather fully integrated in receiving countries to enjoy equal rights. They also want these children to be loved at homes where all their needs will be provided by adoptive parents and government without any discrimination. The excerpts of comments from participants during various group discussions indicate that they wanted the adoptive child to be successful in life and become responsible adults in future:

> *Well, during adoption, the child cannot decide for himself. So the best for the child is that he will be able to live in a family…in a country where he is going to have equal rights and he is going to be taken care of just like any other child in the society, be educated and given all the necessary things in life to develop (Titilayoni, FGD4).*

> *…the best interest of the child is to have everything she needs in life. Second, the child should not be isolated in the society adopted to…. Asylum seekers are always isolated. These people are more or less adopted though not like what we are talking about but I think the country adopted them as part of their citizens but they are always isolated... (Samantha, FGD6).*

> *The best interest of the child is to have a loving home! To be honest, most children adopted to Sweden have loving homes…where their needs are cater for. (Negus, FGD2).*

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[14] In fact most of the measures participants want to be in place before adoption takes place were consistent with international conventions particularly the ACRWC's position on ICA.

Moreover, some participants believed there should be publicity and education on adoption for people particularly biological and adoptive parents to know much about the processes involved to make informed decisions. According to *Redo*, there should be awareness creation about ICA in Africa for people to know the criteria involved to avoid exploitation. *...if there could be a way of having publicity on adoption...down to Africa or where else they adopt, to let them know the criteria for adoption either on the internet or through any other means {???}.(Redo, FGD4).* Redo further emphasised that biological parents have to be educated about ICA since most of them do not know much about the processes involved. *Biological parents have to be educated about adoption. Usually most of these parents do not know anything about adoption. All they know is that they are in hard condition and someone is coming in to help their child.* Similarly, Ado believed adoptive parents must be educated about ICA to be well informed. *...yes! You have to know the rules involved. Adoptive parents have to know the rules. They have to do a lot of research about the country involved. (Ado, FGD5).*

Participants also called for well laid down rules and regulations; and their fulfillment to safeguard ICA due to irregularities involved. As commented by David:

> *The issue of putting up structures is very important! You remember three years ago these French aid workers that went to Chad and illegally tried to take 106 children to France...? So at times the motive for adopting children is not clear! (David, FGD4).*

The above comment shows that the participant(s) were aware of malpractices in international adoption and therefore called for the necessary measures to be put in place to prevent child trafficking for child labour and child slavery. For instance, Redo who had earlier on emphasised on awareness creation through the media to educate the public about adoptions, believed before ICA takes place, there should be clear documentations certified by the appropriate authorities to avoid irregularities. *Normally if I am in position, I should see a clear paper that this is certified and is a typical agreement that follows normal protocol...So we don't fall into the problem of malpractices and exploitations as it happened in Chad. (Redo, FGD4).* One of the participants, Santonis, had the notion that adoption is business and that some people capitalised on the adoption system and poverty levels in developing countries to make money out of it. Santonis cited the story some French internationals as aid workers in Chad attempted to traffic some Chadian children to France to justify that adoption is business.

I believe adoption is also a business. For instance, recently there were some Whites [French aid workers] in Chad who illegally tried to adopt or I should say buy some children to France. All they did was that they capitalised on the poor state of the parents [Chadians] and gave them some money to as an exchange for their children…They were doing business…they were literally buying these children from their parents to wealthy families in need of children in France. I believe they collected big money from these wealthy families in France. (Santonis, FGD2).

It is against some of these issues that the recurring views from participants maintained that the waiting period should not be short but should be long for proper investigation to take place before a child is given out for adoption. The excerpts of comments from participants below confirm this:

I think people should not complain about the waiting period. This is not something simple. It's somebody's life and cannot mess with it! So in that case they go through more process before giving out the child. Things that are necessary need to be done even if it will take long time. (Patrick, FGD5).

…during the earthquake in Haiti people, some journalists from the US were advising for children to be taken away. What they were doing was actually kidnapping the children. Of course some were in the adoption process... But I believe some were being technically stolen from their parents. So it is good to take time and check the process because in most adoptions there is a massive ring of globalised child slavery, child prostitution and child pornography. (David, FGD4).

From the forgone comments, it is clear that participants want a good system in place to facilitate ICA without jeopardizing the lives of children. It could be argued that the long waiting period could even endangered children who urgently need permanent homes. Nevertheless, since we cannot rule out wicked people or charlatans in international adoption mission, care should be taken especially when dealing with the lives of children as informants emphasised. But does waiting too long solve the problem? I believe as we reserve some level of time (long but not too long) to investigate the process, the international community should also ensure effective systems particularly in developing countries to ensure efficiency in intercountry adoption processes. What is causing the unnecessary delay is that many developing countries lacked effective domestic adoption standards; and fairer international standards. These sometimes lead to unnecessary tensions between the sending and the receiving countries.

6.8.1 *A call for effective systems in Africa and fairness in international standards*

In almost all the discussions with the groups, my informants raised concerns about the lack of proper laid down structures in Africa to effectively conduct adoptions be it national or international. Some also questioned the universality of international standards on grounds of lack of fairness, differences in culture and called for African countries to have their own local standards. The excerpt of Titilayoni comments during group discussion was typical of participants' support for effective adoption regulations in African nations.

> *...the problem I have with Africa in many of these things is that we don't have good system to regulate them. We don't have everything to regulate them as a continent. So there is no corruption free and this can lead to exploitation of these kids rather than open adoption opportunities or conducting transparent adoptions...The standard when it comes to Africa has to be raised concerning the rules and regulations to give way for transparency for adoption to take place! (Titilayoni, FGD4).*

The above excerpt represents the concerns frequently raised by informants during various group discussions. They are of the opinion that rules governing adoptions in most (if not all) African countries are not effective which leads to exploitation under the feigning of adoption. Hence they called for effective domestic rules to safeguard all forms of adoption in Africa and among the international community. In other words, besides the fact that many countries do not have official rules to govern ICA in Africa, where there are some rules, they are not enforced. As commented by Denis:

> *The onus should fall on the government of the countries where these people are adopted {???} to ensure that these standards have been met...The very good case in context is the Madonna's adoption in Malawi where she basically has to enforce the government to create rules to have her way to adopt the boy called David! (David, FGD4).*

> *Actually international standard is not enough! We should have our own standards. Based on our own principles, values and culture and everything... international standards will always favour those people from rich Western countries. (Denis, FGD1).*

More importantly, some challenged the international standards or rules on intercountry adoption for its universal posture. Many thought such conventions opens up the doors of African countries for 'intercountry adoptions' whilst many developed world well

coordinated rules internally. They believe what the promulgators (dominated by the West) of international conventions on intercountry adoptions think best serve the interest of the child might not be what the African child need. For instance, some were of the view that the West notion of living standards which inform their choices on what the child needs is not as the same as Africans notion on living standards. The comment below well explains their position:

> *For fairness in adoption process each country should have its own standards. The international standards are artificial standards. It is always based on Western ideas and makes it favour the rich parents in the West. The way we live is different. What the western world think is good for their children will not be in the best interests of the children in Nigeria." (Titilayoni, FGD4).*

> *…Why keep using the same parameters set by somebody else? These standards set by Europeans are based on their own cultural framework of reference which ours is different! (Zakus, FGD2)*

The above comments are examples of recurring notions of informants calling for African countries to have their own rules based on their own cultural frame work of reference. This exhibits the tension between universalist and cultural relativists' positions on children's rights discourses. No wonder participants called for African countries to have their own standards since the international standards only favour those in the advanced countries. In fact they were not only calling for African states to have their own intercountry adoption regulations but even wanted domestic adoption standards to be more effective than international standards. Some participants believe most European countries have effective domestic rules and they always ensure that those rules are enforced or strictly adhered to. The excerpts below confirm the views articulated:

> *International standards are always baseline standards or minimum requirements and cannot be used to make decisions over other countries. So actually we must set national standards higher since international ones are usually lower (Lawrence, FGD1).*

> *I think if a Swede wants to adopt from Africa there are rules in Sweden that he or she has to follow. Well regulated! The same thing has to apply to people or families who want to adopt in or from Africa. But when it comes to intercountry adoption in Africa…the standards are not working! (Tamanta, FGD6).*

The concerns raised by informants show how global conventions or 'universal' norms constantly meet with local norms and could cause tensions if not properly merged and manage during implementations. Maybe the world can be said to be gradually moving from local and global to 'glocal' since the local and the global world constantly meet. The

implementation of children's rights discourses have encountered challenges in many developing countries on grounds that they are imposition of western universal values at the expense of relative values of the developing world (see Banks 2007; Reichert 2006; Chirwa 2002; and White 1999).[15]

7   Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates mixed opinions from participants on various themes discussed. On what put the child in adoptable state, naturally and humanly created problems such as wars, earthquakes, poverty, epidemics, barrenness and unplanned births were some of the conditions participants believed exposed the child for adoption. Besides these obvious reasons, participants believed some people adopt children to gain popularity. Here, adoptions by celebrities were repeatedly cited. Even though there were predominantly positive views towards adoption in general, they showed negative views or frowned at celebrity adoption on moral grounds. They believed most celebrities embark on adoptions to show their might in wealth rather than genuine grounds for adoption.

Among the major themes discussed is international conventions' priority to incountry adoption over intercountry adoption. In this study, notions created by participants showed their preference to intercountry adoption as against incountry adoption. The recurring view for their support for intercountry adoption was that there are a lot of structural benefits coupled with stable environment for the child to succeed in life. To the participants, unlike Western Europe and America, many African countries lacked effective welfare systems, stable economic and political environment to enhance equal opportunity for the development of children. They believed combination of these factors put prospective families in advanced countries like Sweden to be better fitted (least materially or financially) to provide the needs of their adopted children as demanded. The consideration of material benefits as a major factor that informed their choice for intercountry adoption is interesting since this kind of reason for adoption is not seen as valid in the international conventions. The prioritization of

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[15] See also the position of UNCR and that of ACRWC on child adoption and rights of the child in general. After critical look, one could argue that the UNCRC position on children and that of ACRWC emerged from two philosophical grounds - universalism and cultural relativism. The encounters of local and global universal ideologies call for celebration of different cultures whilst we navigate through the global systems. Since both the local and the global world constantly meet, one may be tempted to say the world is neither local nor global but rather glocal – combination of local and global or universal cultures.

intercountry adoption over incountry adoption by participants could be due to conditions that might have compelled them to move from their countries of origin to Sweden as immigrants.

The discussions with participants also showed how issues of race, ethnicity and cultural identity loom large in transracial adoption most often than not, interwoven with the concept of matching. There were mixed views on whether matching is necessary and how should it be done if they intend to do so. Some believed in same race whilst others believed matching is not necessary. Matching was viewed by participants in the context of ethnic background, geographical and cultural proximity rather than transracial belongings as displayed by groups like Association of Black Social Workers in the US. Analysis of counter comments from participants indicates that it is about attitudinal change towards each other rather than matching to reduce tensions in transracial adoptions.

The beliefs in matching coupled with negative views towards transracial adoption by groups like African-Americans in the US; and as displayed by some of my informants in this study should be viewed in light with violations of the rights of minority groups in the past. For instance, the negative view towards the concept of celebrity adoption by participants was not only for the fact that they believed many celebrities lacked the moral and parental values. But they also recounted what happened to many Africans in the past - slavery and colonization. With the scars of slavery and colonization in the minds of many Africans, participants thought it was reasonable to express worries about how some wealthy individuals from the West forced their way through to 'adopt' children even when such adoptions received public outcry. So any judgement on groups' positions on matching; and protests should take into account their life histories.

The child's right to the preservation of his or her culture is one of the dominant themes in international adoption. This is defined by international conventions in reference to the culture or origin of the child's biological parents as a way to prioritize incountry adoption over intercountry adoption. Just as it is expressed in the international conventions, the various group discussions in this study pointed to a uniform position that culture is something inherited. Therefore the child's culture which ought to be preserved is traceable to biological parents. Participants viewed the culture of the child as 'umbilically' connected to the cultural background of biological parents and so considered biological parents are as the child's roots or source of cultural origin. Despite the relevance given to the preservation of the child's

right to culture by participants, they believed the emphasis on the preservation of the child's right to culture should depend on the age prior to adoption.

It can be argued based on the analysis and discussion that international conventions have contributed to the one-sided view on culture as something inherited from biological parents. International conventions give more weight to the preservation of the cultural background of the child in all adoptions. This does not only put transracial adopted children at risk but even non-adopted children in multicultural societies. It covertly put children with parents of multiple cultural identities at risk or crises regarding which culture to choose as part of developing their identity as individuals.

The meanings created by participants show how contentious the international adoption debates are. The analysis and discussion portray that the complexities associated with intercountry adoption do not really come from adoption as a phenomenon. It mainly stems from constructions constantly made by humanity or society on issues such as race, ethnicity, culture and identity intertwined with treatment towards minority groups in the past. The universal position of international conventions on what is seen to be in the best interest of the child was criticized on grounds of differences in living standards and cultural orientation. This position from participants goes to strengthen cultural relativists' argument that there are different cultures and therefore decisions in relations to children in the international community should be guided by that reality. Thus, the differences in cultures are making it difficult for the global world to reach a consensus on the principle of the best interests of the child.

Notwithstanding the mixed opinions, participants in this study believed in general term that adoption is a good mission. It is important to also acknowledge that in spite of their overall support for intercountry adoption, participants raised concerns about the difficulties involved. They were aware of the issues of malpractices in the international processes. They also raised concerns about the challenges adoptees go through in their new countries particularly regarding issues of discriminations and racism or questioning of their otherness; and the complexities in the development of their cultural orientations. Therefore, their support for intercountry adoption due to the anticipated benefits does not suggest that participants called for children to be adopted from African countries arbitrarily. They called for background checks of any prospective adoptive parents and the receiving country's status of treating immigrants before giving out a child for intercountry adoption. Hence, call for

effective adoption rules and equal representation of the views of minority groups in international conventions for ICA to be well regulated to the supreme benefit of the child.

The perspectives from participants make child adoption and for that matter intercountry adoption a double-edged sword phenomenon. It is good if well regulated. If well regulated it has the potential to give hope or put smiles on the face of many children who conditions have denied the right to permanent families for dignified lives. On the other hand, it is bad if not well regulated. Hence, it paves way for people to adopt children for mere popularity; take advantage of poor families to make money out of it and other irregularities which eventually lead to tensions.

This double-edged sword nature of adoption makes it a challenge facing humanity. We have to face it, negotiate on it and do our best to ensure its positive side benefit humanity particularly the child involved. To achieve this does not suggest a call for us to be too global. Neither does it call for too local positions on matters relating to transracial adoptions. The views of participants so far suggest that the world is neither global nor local. The world is gradually becoming what could be term as 'glocal'. The global world and the distinct local worlds keep meeting on matters regarding childhoods like adoption. Hence any attempt to mistakenly lay emphasis on the 'global' position on intercountry adoption without recognition of the 'local' position(s) expressed by minority groups as shown by participants in this study could lead to a slip of vital information for equitable adoption policies.

The importance of adoption for humanity cannot be relegated to the ground in spite of the challenges involved. The notions from participants denote that the ultimate goal for adopting a child from Africa to any part of the world and for that matter Sweden should be the fulfillment of what is in the best interest of the child. To them, the best interests of the child in intercountry adoption is for him or her to have structural benefits; to be loved and well catered by adoptive parents, enjoy peace and fully accepted in the receiving countries without *anything* that will hamper in any way their development as required. The *anything* here include the questioning of their 'otherness'; the refusal to let them know their roots when they demand to know and the rigidly over emphasis on the maintenance of the child's inherited cultural backgrounds. It is in the best interest of the child to allow them to acquire their own culture in their own right rather than imposing on them what we as adults think is in their interests. Otherwise we might end up as adults serving our own interests to maintain our cultures to the detriment of the child.

Come what may, there will be children in need of permanent homes. Moreover, the issue of cultural identity will continue to be a burning issue in the international adoptions discourse. What needs to be done is more education particularly intercultural education for celebration of mixed cultures for better understanding and coexistence. It is in this regard that more studies in the field of child adoptions on people of varied cultural backgrounds in different countries will be relevant.

Being aware of the fact that the views expressed by participants are limited to their own understandings on various themes discussed, it could serve as a source for further studies particularly on minority groups in receiving countries like Sweden. This will give them opportunity for their views to be heard to inform child adoption and family welfare policies in both sending and receiving countries. In future, a comparative research on African nationals in receiving countries and those living in sending countries could be interesting to study since the views of both living inside and outside Africa would be held for comprehensive results.

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Appendix A

Group Composition in Each FGD
Area of research: *Perspectives of African Immigrants on ICA*
Moderator: *Collins Armah/The author of the thesis*
Study Setting: *Sweden (Interviews held in the cities of Falun, Borlänge & Gävle in Dalarna region)*

Interview Dates		2010/02/28	2010/03/10	2010/03/24	2010/03/27	2010/03/28	2010/04/06
Names of Groups		FGD1	FGD2	FGD3	FGD4	FGD5	FGD6
No. of participants		3	3	3	4	3	4
Age Range		36-51	33-66	25-35	27-30	24-31	26-34
Nationality		Nigeria = 2 Chad= 1	Ethiopia = 2 Tanzania = 1	Ghana = 2 Cameroon =1	All Nigerians	Cameroon =1 Togo = 1 Uganda = 1	Gambia = 2 Kenya = 2
Gender	Males	3	2	3	3	3	2
	Females	None	1	None	1	None	2
Reported Experience of adoption.		**None as adoptee, adoptive parents, but reported knowledge of contact with an adoptee and friends who have adopted. Have work experience in relation to adoption.**	**None as adoptee nor adoptive parents, but gave reported knowledge of an adoptee and friends who have adopted.**	**None as adoptee nor adoptive parents, but reported knowledge of contact with an adoptee and friends who have adopted.**	**None as adoptee nor adoptive parents, but reported knowledge of contact with an adoptee; and friends and family who have adopted both nationally and internationally.**	**One of the members as an adoptee. None of the other (two) members are adoptee neither are they adoptive parents. But gave reported knowledge of an adoptee and adoptive families.**	**None as adoptee nor adoptive parents, but gave reported knowledge of an adoptee and friends who have adopted. One of the members has work experience in relation to adoption.**

Interview Guide

Below are some of the questions asked informants or guided me during FGDs.

❖ What are your opinions on intercountry child adoption

❖ Do you have knowledge about anyone who was adopted or have adopted a child or any personal experience about adoption?

❖ Is there anything you think makes people to give out their children for adoption?

❖ How do you consider child adoption in General?

❖ Should priority be given to national adoption as against intercountry adoption when there is the need for a child to be adopted?

❖ Will you prefer an adoption of African child to another African country than to a Western country like Sweden?

❖ What do you think are alternatives to intercountry adoption?

❖ Do you think adoption based on the Hague Convention which calls for the preservation of child's cultural background serves the best interest of the child? What are your views on the child's to preservation of his/her culture during adoption?

❖ What is your understanding of the best interest of the child principle

❖ What do you think should be considered before intercountry adoption takes place?

❖ Should consideration be given to the background of adoptive parents?

❖ Should the culture of the child's biological parents be maintained by the adoptive parents?

❖ As an adoptee what are some of the challenges you have faced in Sweden?

❖ Do you think the preservation of a child's cultural and ethnic identity serves the best interest of the child?

These questions served as guide during group discussions with participants, and in effect led to other subsequent important questions to be asked.