

Transforming Transracial Adoption Narratives Through a  
Shared Commitment  
*From Ambition to Action*

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# The Jacaranda Falls

Tam's personal story and the  
jacaranda



# Dominant Narratives



- Love is enough paradigm
- Downplaying of birth cultures
- Over-simplification of identity
- Colour-ethnic-culture blindness
- Racial and identity silence
- Tokenistic racial-ethnic socialisation
- Minimising the importance of heritage, belonging and integration
- Expectation of gratitude
- White saviour rescue narratives

# AFDiT Framework

- Triggered by Murder of George Floyd
- The BRAC<sup>2</sup>eD model (Cane, 2023)
- ARP research work with social workers and PLE (Cane, 2022/3)
- Mapped from conceptual thinking and broader adoption research
- Sought funding (*B.A then A.E*)
- Interviews with adoptees, adopters and birth parents
- Later, co-created
- Trained social workers for pilot

## Practice Models

- **Racial consciousness:** an individual's awareness and understanding of their own race and that of others as a significant factor in shaping personal identity, social interactions, and addressing unequal systemic structures.
- **Race intentionality:** explicitly addressing topics of race, culture and racism and providing resources.
- Consciously exploring identity, accurately recording information and address issues of race, ethnicity and culture (Cane and Tedam, 2023).

# Pitfalls of Current Practice: Practitioner Reflections

- Lack of race trauma informed thinking
- Incompetent conversations about identity, and culture (Cane, 2023)
- Overlooking the identity development process (Lambert, 2024)
- A focus on the technicalities of matching
- Absence of complexity in interlocking identities within family dynamics (Lynch, 2024)
- Missing the psychological connection of identity
- One size fits all one-time workshops - false impression of adequate preparation and readiness



# TRA as Trauma

## Cultural Genocide

- Systematic destruction of traditions, values, language, and other elements that make one group of people distinct from another.
- Attack on cultural identity
- Wilfully destroying identity constructions (Gilsky and Klagsbrun, 2018)
- It takes “waking up from the great sleep” to know one was robbed – when adoptees gain awareness of repressed feelings and thoughts around their identity (Branco et al. 2022)

## Epistemic Trauma and Injustice

- Harms to a person as a knower
- Preventing their capacities for claiming identities, origins and roots
- Barrier to making sense of, and healing through their lived experiences (Dotson, 2011; Stinnett, 2018).
- Who produces narratives and who gets to know the truth
- Undermining the reality of experience

# Opening the Door to Race Trauma in Adoption

Intergenerational, systemic racism affecting birth parents then passed on through birth families.

Dare not ask ! But “if we are not doing it who will”?

Meanwhile, due to systemic inequalities, the goal post keeps changing.

Lifestyle judgments persist.

Limiting the numbers of racialised and minoritised communities adopting.  
(Cane, 2023)

Never heard of this culture or traditions  
Nor the language  
Nor religion  
Not even these rituals  
How can it be right for the child post adoption ?

Contact can't be right.

It's unsafe.

Better raised this Eurocentric/Western culture and practices we know.

# ...and Adopters are Unclear

“We don’t know how to protect her from this world, how to prepare her for what she’ll face [because of the colour of her skin.] The truth is, we never talked about race or religion, anything like that even though there were clearly times when Black people were on the news. We just wanted her to be like all of us and not to feel different, you know. Maybe we should have... **How do you even begin when you don’t know where to start?**

We’ve done everything we could think of — **it never feels like enough. The world was telling her one thing, and we were telling her something different,** but there’s a disconnect.”



## ... Even with Training and PfB Workshop

[adopted [name] a 3-year-old, eight months ago at the time of interview].

“We went to the Afro-hair dressers, to get her hair fixed as we were not getting it quite right...The hairdresser asked me, are you sure you know what you are doing with this hair.

***His response:*** I have a friend helping me with what we need to do with it, but she gets very busy and **its not always easy to keep asking. I feel like we are a burden already.**

She was quite offish with me and said **it's not good enough, you should have thought about these things properly before adopting a Black child.** I was left ashamed and embarrassed...but, **you can't just know these things. No one prepared us for microaggressions as a gay couple adopting a girl [name].”**

“I am **not always sure** how to help him understand about racism when **I can't fully understand it myself.** “

# The Reality of Racial Trauma

“It was like being handed a jigsaw with pieces from two different boxes. My parents couldn't quite see what I saw in the mirror when I look at myself. **I hated my looks**, and the worst thing is, I did not feel like a real person.

**It wasn't my responsibility to make their image of our family match my reality** - it was their duty to create a new picture.”

Blatant cultural rejection  
Internalised racism  
Self-doubt  
Anxiety  
Identity confusion  
Racial alienation  
Identity crisis  
Invisible pain  
Psychological homelessness

“My parents had never experienced racism and had no tools to deal with anything like that. I was getting all the time, all the time. All they said was ignore it, cry or walk away. **I grew to internalize racism**, envy those who could fight for themselves. Always **felt isolated**, never had the backing from anyone...I didn't have the language for what it was. I was depressed and tired of **feeling I didn't belong in the space I lived, in my mind, and body.**”

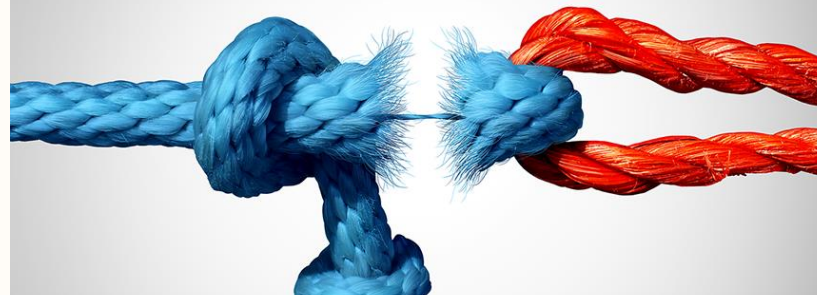
# Your Strategy and Vision

- Addressing racial disparities
- Children and adopters
- Impact on racialized and minoritized children and prospective adopters.

- Lifelong care and support
- Validating identity
- Respecting early relationships.
- Support for children adopted transracially



Jack off slippery Randa

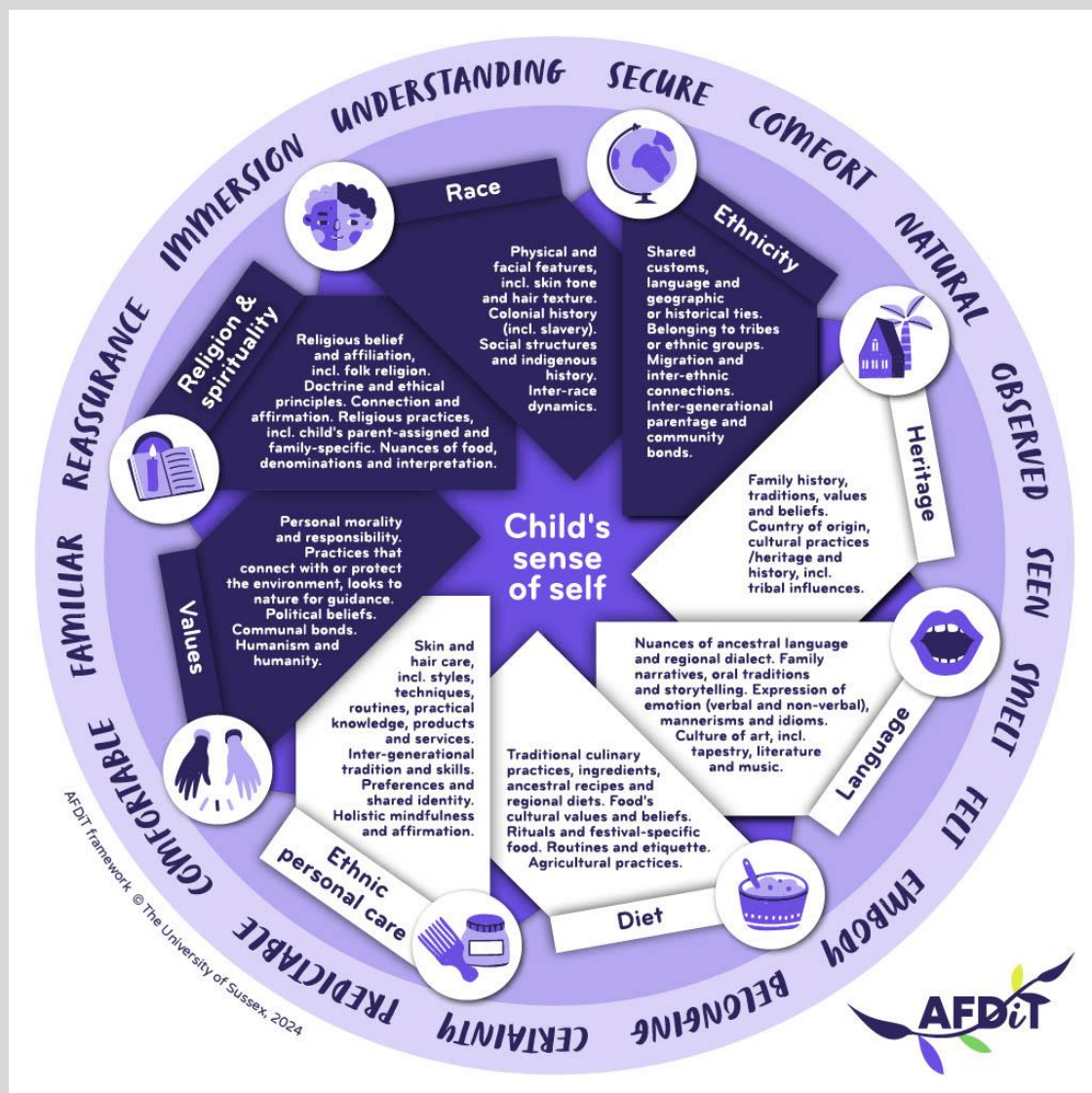


Debias, connect better, recruit more



Race Trauma Lens

# The Vision Behind AFDiT (Cane, 2024)



- A transracial adoption without racial trauma
- Addressing cultural trauma
- Practice that is centered on race trauma healing
- Practitioners with a clear sense of their own racial and cultural consciousness and intentionality
- Practice that is identity affirmative including those of birth families
- We begin to see our practice moving away from colour blindness
- Move beyond hair and skin and colour blindness
- Greater emphasis on emotional and psychological support around identity from care through to adoption
- Inclusive safe spaces to talk about race and racism
- Positive support systems – I see you
- Reform in agencies around long-term relationships with birth family and birth cultures

# A Call to Commit Using Sankofa: Ghanian Philosophy for Transform



- Accountability to the child
- Disrupt current ways of working
- Remove colonial approaches that replace birth cultures with Eurocentric world views
- Intersectional focus on complex identity facets
- Intentionality about contact and belonging
- Embed intentional discussions about the reality of complex identities in matching
- Understand intergenerational pain
- Prevent harms of social media on cultural confusion
- Forgiveness and Ubuntu - the burden must not fall on the adoptee (Branco, 2022)

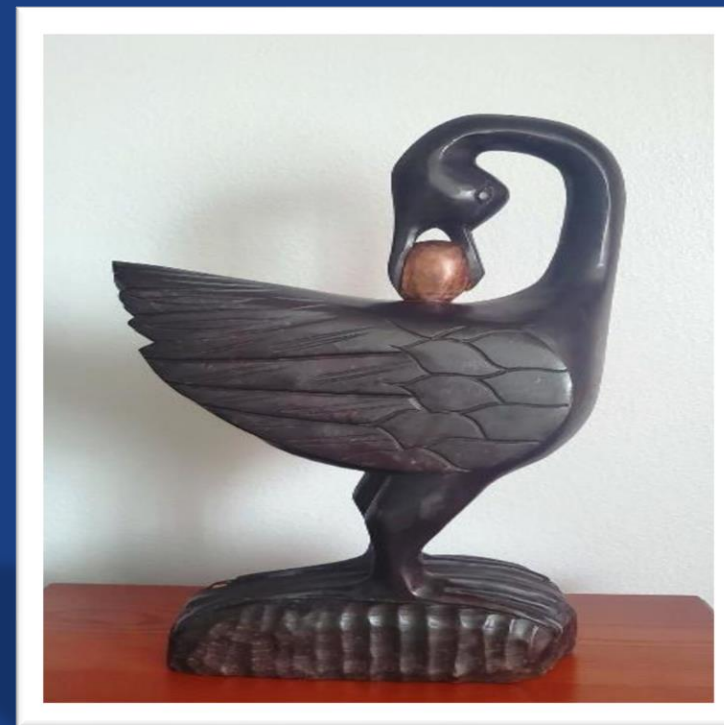
# The Beauty and a Clear Identity Path



- Ubuntu is humanity
- “Sawubona” “Takuona”
- I see you and your needs and challenges.
- I see and foresee racial trauma – prevent it
- I bring a broom to sweep with you
- The collective effort
- Achieved together



Thank you...



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