THE TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX: 
AN ANALYSIS OF NATION, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE KOREAN DIASPORA 

DISSERTATION 

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By 

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Abstract

The Korean War (1950-1953) produced tremendous geopolitical effects, which shaped Cold War politics worldwide. The war also sparked the rise of transnational adoptions and positioned Korea as the primary leader of these global exchanges. Since the war’s end, more than 200,000 Korean children have been sent to the West. Two-thirds of these children entered the United States – the world’s largest receiving country of foreign adoptions. The majority of these Korean adoptees grew up in white families, making these kinship units not only transnational but also transracial.

Utilizing South Korea as a case study, my dissertation investigates four implications of these transnational and transracial adoptions: (1) the growth of what I characterize as the transnational adoption industrial complex – a neo-colonial, multi-million dollar industry that commodifies children’s bodies; (2) Korean adoptees’ greater access to American citizenship and naturalization due to their membership in the white, heteronormative family compared to other Asian immigrants; (3) the adoptive families’ disruption of traditional white and Asian American families, which are largely conceptualized as a same-race, genetically related units; and (4) recognition of adoptees as adults, who are experts in their own experiences, rather than perpetual children continually spoken for by adoptive parents and adoption practitioners.
Cumulatively, this research underscores how transnational, transracial adoption changes the American and Korean landscape. Drawing from archival sources, interviews, and adult adoptee print and online writings, I challenge the portrayal of international adoption as solely an act of humanitarianism and child rescue. Instead, I contend that adoption is linked to American Cold War ambitions, including the desire to promote democracy abroad. In other words, transnational adoption allowed everyday Americans to join in the fight against communism by providing future generations access to the American dream. Engaging the adoptive family as a site of national belonging, I also contribute to a more nuanced, differentiated understanding of what it means to be Asian and American in the United States. Lastly, this project recognizes the voices of Korean adoptees as legitimate subjects within the Korean diaspora.
To Beesh and Ken
Acknowledgments

This work is a reflection of the past six years critically examining the complexities of adoption. I consider it a bookend to questions I began asking as a teen in *Yell-OH Girls!*, an anthology of young female Asian American voices. I would like to thank my mentor and advisor, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, for her encouragement throughout my time at Ohio State. I am also deeply indebted to my committee members, Eleana J. Kim, Lynn Itagaki, and Wendy Smooth. Yet, this project would not be what it is today without my previous advisors. Many thanks to Kimberly Springer, who invited me to return to the States in 2010 after completing a year under her direction in London. Also, Jane Lewis, thank you for supporting the growth of my initial seeds of interest as a Master’s student.

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  Forthcoming Spring 2014)
• “Connecting to My Story Through Adoption Community Connection.” Adoption Today (March 2012)

Fields of Study

Major Field: Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Minor Field: Asian American Studies
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Introduction: Rethinking Korean Intercountry Adoption

“Adoption across political and cultural borders may simultaneously be an act of violence and an act of love, an excruciating rupture and a generous incorporation, an appropriation of valued resources and a constitution of personal ties.”
- Pauline Turner Strong

Transnational adoption has been historically framed as an act of humanitarian rescue, and more recently, is sometimes cast as a harmful and exploitative practice. Headlines such as “Why are other countries wary of American adoptions?,” “Ukraine to probe foreign adoptions,” “Red flags wave over Uganda’s adoption boom,” and “Russia seeks Interpol investigation of deaths in adoptive US families” reflect heightened scrutiny over the alleged nefarious practices of orphanages, adoption agencies, and families who adopt transnationally. The dark underbelly of intercountry adoption came to light in the

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wake of Russia’s announcement of an adoption ban in December 2012.³ Adding to this notoriety was the death of a Russian toddler in Texas in February 2013. Initially, his death was thought to be the result of a crime committed by his adoptive parents.⁴ However, mainstream adoption discourse positions such incidents of child abuse or death as anomalies. Tom de Filippo, an official with the Joint Council on International Children’s Services, notes: “There were only about 19 serious incidents of abuse or death out of 50,000 adoptions.”⁵ Established in 1975, the Joint Council remains one of the leading coalitions influencing conversations of international adoption in the United States and abroad. De Filippo’s comments raise questions regarding the value of an adoptee’s life. The implication seems to be that we should remain complacent since less than 0.05% of children are killed.⁶ At the same time, quantifying serious incidents of physical harm also overlooks countless cases of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse that may

happen in adoptive families. This abuse is not uncommon as many adoptees recount childhoods of anguish; yet, only recently have such terrible practices garnered attention.  

To understand the seedy realities of adoption, I am interested in how adoptees become commodities sold in the economic marketplace. For example, a January 8, 2013 editorial entitled, “Are Children Today’s Iron Ore? Russia’s Adoption Ban and International Diplomacy?,” demonstrates the way in which adoptee bodies are rendered as interchangeable objects. Yasmine Ergas highlights how the demand for infants at times outweighs the supply of children. Positioning international adoption as the “child trade,” Ergas underscores the power imbalances between adoption triad members – adoptive parent, birth parent, and adoptee – and the broader network of organizations and governments that facilitate adoption. The phrase “iron ore” also raises questions concerning the role of adoptive parents in this consumptive practice – the adoption market. Discussing their family’s experiences, an adoptive parent notes:

We waited longer than four years. International adoptions slowed down tremendously when the Hague convention was enacted. There has also been an increased interest and demand in international adoptions, so the process became backlogged. We were waiting to adopt a healthy, young child and there is a long waiting list to do so from China.

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The lengthy nature of the adoption process is best illustrated when comparing the average wait times for a child by country of origin. According to Adoptive Families, 53% of parents adopting from China wait a minimum of twelve months for a child referral and then 42% of parents wait an additional three months prior to the child’s entrance into the United States. In total, adoptive parents wait a minimum of fifteen months until adoption completion from China. In contrast to this lengthy process, the minimum wait for a completed adoption from Ethiopia is six months. Even as the timelines for adoption from Ethiopia is markedly shorter on average, an adoptive parent of an Ethiopian child notes: “Unfortunately, we got stuck in the switch over from 1 to 2 trips in Ethiopia, as well as the annual summer court closure. So we were delayed more than we should have been in bringing our son home.” The language utilized by the adoptive parents of Chinese and Ethiopian children positions these delays as personal inconveniences. In particular when looking at the second adoptive parent quote, it is interesting that visiting Ethiopia twice is considered a hassle versus as an opportunity to learn more about the adoptee’s ethnic background. Further, phrases such as “the process became backlogged” or “unfortunately, we got stuck” demonstrates how as adoptive parents locate themselves as consumers, who should receive quality service.


11 53% of parents adopting from Ethiopia wait at a minimum of three months or less for a child referral and then 42% of parents wait an additional three months until the child enters the U.S.; Adoptive Families, “Latest Adoption Cost and Wait Time Data.”

12 Adoptive Families, “Latest Adoption Cost and Wait Time Data.”
Speaking to this, a recent article from *The Chicago Tribune* highlighted the “saga of intercountry adoptions, which are typically fraught with obstacles.” However, framing adoption as a set of “inconveniences” or “obstacles” to adoptive parents – the consumers within this process – ignores broader sociopolitical concerns over corruption and the black market of children.

In recent decades, we have witnessed the emergence of scholarship that critically engages the field of intercountry adoption alongside assessments of American domestic adoption practices and the pathologization of single motherhood. Discussing transnational adoption, Howard Alstein and Rita Simon note that developing countries increasingly define this type of adoption as “imperialistic, self-serving, and a return to a form of colonialism in which whites exploit and steal natural resources.” By characterizing adoptees as “resources,” we become more aware of how adoptees represent lost members of a future generation of their birth country. To this end, “sending countries” may very well agree with Ergas’ assessment that adoptees are the new iron ore – a valuable and limited reserve. This notion also directly speaks to Turner Strong’s quote in the epigraph concerning adoption as “an appropriation of valued resources.”

Seeking to further existing critiques of intercountry and/or transracial adoption, my research unearths the connections between institutions, governments, and individuals that sustain international adoption.

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The uprooting and removal of children from ethnically or racially marginalized communities to adoptive families is not a new concept. Nations have historically externally and internally regulated its minority populace through a variety of techniques, including adoption as a tool to mold “good” future citizens.\(^\text{16}\) In addition, researchers continue to interrogate the racialized processes that led to the transracial placement of Native American children into white homes and forced removal from their families to boarding schools up until the 1970s.\(^\text{17}\) Native American tribes only gained control over the adoption of Native American children as part of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act.\(^\text{18}\) Also existing within these critiques of adoption is the racially charged nature of black-white transracial domestic adoption. In 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers deemed the practice “racial and cultural genocide.”\(^\text{19}\)


\(^{18}\) Transracial domestic adoptions continued; however, as part of the Indian Child Welfare Act (1978), tribes gained control over the adoption of Native American children, whereby no Native American children can be placed for adoption without his/her tribal consent. Examining the concept of cultural competency deployed in interracial families formed by black/white or Native American/white adoption, Randall Kennedy explores the controversy surrounding how this specific form of transracial adoption encourages the cultural extinction of black and Native American culture while at the same time risks charges that this practice fails to provide the adoptee a strong, positive racial/ethnic identity; Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

\(^{19}\) At the same time, Dorothy Roberts argues discussions around transracial adoption remain a red herring to examine wider discourse surrounding the deficiencies found in the American child welfare system; Dorothy E. Roberts, *Shattered Bonds: The Color of Child Welfare* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
highlights the unequal racial power imbalances that exist between biological and adoptive parents.

Given the fraught nature of international adoption and the politics around issues of “the best interests of the child,” it may be surprising to learn that since the mid-twentieth century, more than 500,000 children have been adopted across national borders.20 Scholars commonly trace the origins of transnational adoption to the end of the Korean War (1950-52), which facilitated the exchange of over 200,000 South Korean children to the West.21 A sending country for nearly sixty years, South Korea (henceforth Korea) maintains the world’s longest operating intercountry adoption program. Two-thirds of these Korean children entered the United States, and three-quarters of them grew up in white families, making these kinship units not only transnational but also transracial. Korean adoptees are a unique subgroup of the Asian American population, representing one in ten Korean Americans.22

In order to understand how transnational adoption arose from an effort to aid Korean War orphans to become a global phenomenon, this project historicizes the

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20 While I recognize legal scholarship concerning state legislation framing understandings of “the best interests of the child,” my inquiry is centered on how this rhetoric is invoked to implicitly underscore the differences in amenities – social and economic – offered by birth and adoptive parents to adoptees.

21 I recognize recent work by Karen Balcom that examines the earliest transnational adoptions following World War II under the auspices of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 and Refugee Relief Act 1953 concerning the adoption of children from Western Europe; Karen Balcom, "Back Door In: Private Immigration Bills and Transnational Adoption in the US in the 1940s and 1950s" (lecture, Alliance for the Study of Adoption and Culture Conference, Scripps College, Claremont, March 22, 2012).

22 Korean American adoptees both address themselves as Korean American and Asian American. The terms will be used interchangeably in this work because when speaking about their location as Koreans and/or Asians in the United States, adoptees invoke both terms. Moreover, due to the racialization process of non-white ethnic minorities in the United States, “many ethnic minority people are often attributed not only ethnic, but also racial, labels and images by others – whether or not these labels and images accord with their own ethnic and racial identities”; Miri Song, Choosing Ethnic Identity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 9. As ethnic Koreans, adoptees are subsumed under the racial label of Asian Americans. See also: Hollee McGinnis et al., Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption, report, November 2009, http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/publications/2009_11_BeyondCultureCamp.pdf.
practice of intercountry adoption and examines how a single “sending” country’s program can greatly impact normative American perceptions of nation, family, and ethnic identity. This dissertation makes four arguments concerning: 1) the institutional practice of transnational adoption; 2) the contradictions found in adoptees’ entry to the United States in comparison to other migrants from Asia; 3) the significance of international, transracial adoption for concepts of family; and 4) the ways in which adult adoptees construct a sense of self, kinship, and national belonging. By focusing on the long running relationship between the United States and Korea, it is my intention to elucidate how this connection laid the groundwork for future understandings of international adoption.

First, I expose the growth of what I call the transnational adoption industrial complex by examining the Korean-U.S. international adoption relationship. The United States remains the largest receiving country of transnational adoptees worldwide.\textsuperscript{23} In this respect, I situate international adoption as a neo-colonial, multi-million dollar global industry that commodifies children’s bodies. I find that Korea’s nickname – the “Cadillac of adoptions” – valorizes the streamlined and methodological approach associated with the nation’s adoption program.\textsuperscript{24} This line of inquiry traces the transnational adoption industrial complex’s origins to the military industrial complex, a phrase initially used by U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower to describe the rise of American defense industry

\textsuperscript{23} Peter Selman reports that in 2010, the United States alone received 42% of the adoptions of 29,005 children worldwide, while 50% of these children entered European nations; Peter Selman, \textit{Adoption Advocate} 44 (February 2012), accessed April 7, 2013, https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/images/stories/documents/NCFA_ADOPTION_ADVOCATE_NO44.pdf.

during the Cold War. Spurred by fears of Communism, the military industrial complex became entangled in all aspects of American life both domestically and internationally. To this end, I am interested in how the military industrial complex is an interconnected system, which links military expenditure, infrastructure, and social welfare. An outgrowth of American militarism was the initial placement of children for adoption to the United States: the mixed race progeny of Korean women and American GIs stationed in Korea due to the Korean War (1950-53). Exploring its links to the military industrial complex provides insight into how the transnational adoption industrial complex allowed everyday Americans participate in the containment of the Communist threat.  

Second, adoptees’ entry into the United States markedly differs from that of other persons of Asian descent, due to their status as children of white parents. In particular, adoptees’ affective labor to socially reproduce the white, heteronormative family contributed to the ease in which they gained access to naturalization. This project interrogates how adoptees’ exist simultaneously as privileged immigrants, yet probationary Americans. I examine how adoptees’ are hybridized citizens due to their ability to enter the United States outside of immigration quotas regulating the entry of Asian bodies. Adoptees served as a harbinger for more lenient Asian immigration quotas alongside the migration of Asian war brides to the U.S. Yet, I expose the contradictions in adoptees’ access to citizenship and naturalization by juxtaposing this initial migration with recent cases of transnational adoptee deportations. In doing so, I find that adoptees

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are repositioned as disenfranchised immigrants/citizens. My research departs from previous writings on adoptees within Asian American Studies on the initial adoptions in the post-Korean War period, which focus only minimally on how adoptees’ experiences differ from other Asian Americans.\textsuperscript{26} I suggest that the racialization process adoptees undergo is markedly different than other persons of Asian descent, even as they also encounter barriers shaped by American Orientalism and Cold War rhetoric.

Third, the Korean adoptive family reinvents normative conceptualizations of Korean American and white families, which are traditionally conceived as same-race, genetically related units. Specifically, I explore how adoptive families raise questions concerning the monoraciality of the family. I investigate the contradictions within a traditional understanding of kinship as well as sexual and social reproduction for Korean adoptive kin formations. Though the Korean adoptive family disrupts the standard paradigm of the family, it reifies the notion that families comprise of married, heterosexual parents, as these are the only individuals who may legally adopt from Korea. The deployment of queer theory aids my investigation of the disjunctures and contradictions of the adoptive Korean family.\textsuperscript{27}

Finally, I assert that adult Korean adoptees produce a counterpublic that challenges the transnational adoption industrial complex and the fetishization of their bodies. The adult adoptee counterpublic operates in opposition to the public created by

\textsuperscript{26} Please see: Jodi Kim, \textit{Ends of Empire: Asian American Critiques and the Cold War} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Christina Klein, \textit{Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

mainstream adoption discourse – the same force that generates the conditions of the transnational adoption industrial complex. The counterpublic provides adult adoptees the opportunity to construct a new type of public personhood, one defined by their autonomy and agency versus their status as involuntary migrants within adoption.

Yet, it is important to note that I delineate between the adult adoptee counterpublic and the wider adult adoptee community. While the counterpublic includes individuals who disrupt mainstream adoption discourse, members of the adult adoptee community may be disengaged from wider criticisms of the transnational adoption industrial complex. Rather, these individuals forge kinship with one another based on their singular shared experience: adoption. In recognizing the counterpublic, I foreground the voices of adult adoptees, exploring how they critique Korea’s continued participation in adoption, intervene in cases of adoptee deportation, and challenge the dominant portrayal of the “grateful, saved orphan,” which renders adoptees as perpetual children. Such labeling is akin to how post-Vietnam War refugees and Asian Americans more generally are considered perpetual refugees or perpetual foreigners, respectively. These populations exist in perpetuity as dependents of the nation unable to contribute to society with de jure and de facto citizenship. Yet, unlike these other groups, adoptees simultaneously reinforce and challenge the notion that all Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners due to their circumvention of immigration restrictions.

The adult adoptee community is traditionally an understudied population, which has only received attention in scholarship within the last twenty years. I join other

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28 For more information about publics and counterpublics, please see Michael Warner, Publics and Counterpublics (New York: Zone Books, 2005).
scholars who consider adoptees as experts of their experiences. This work is part of a conversation with scholars exploring transcultural, transracial adoption, diaspora, and how racial or ethnic identity impacts national or cultural belonging. In particular, I situate this inquiry in dialogue with scholarship investigating adoptees’ location in the Korean diaspora and the broader adult adoptee community. I seek to build upon Tobias Hübinette’s analysis of how the Korean state reincorporates adoptees into the nation as I locate adoptees’ white privilege against their raced bodies. I integrate Hübinette’s examination with Eleana Kim’s interest in “adopted territories” – “networks of adoptees and their activities, situated in a range of virtual and actual locations, that comprise the transnational Korean adoptee counterpublic.” Her interest in adult adoptee kin structures and location in Korean society aids this study’s examination of adoptee efforts to create and sustain a reterritorialized community.

Highlighting how adoptees’ negotiate national belonging and family aids my interrogation of adoption as an imperial project. My research echoes the words of Kim Su Rasmussen, the editor of the inaugural issue of the Journal of Korean Adoption Studies, who writes: “Many individual stories have been left untold…[T]he largely unwritten history of international adoption belongs to the adoptees: the larger context in which the

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adoptees might understand their individual trajectory.” 32 This project is invested in locating adult adoptees as experts of their own experiences and seeks to provide legitimacy to the voices of a previously spoken for group. The marginalized nature of Korean adoptees is rooted in their continual status as perpetual children even as many are parents themselves. The inclusion of adult adoptees’ perspectives provides deeper insight into how their own lived histories remain deeply intertwined and embedded in the transnational adoption industrial complex.

At the core of this study is a commitment to explore adult adoptee identity and the ways in which adult adoptees construct understandings of self and belonging — as citizens, diasporic subjects, and family members. While other scholars utilize ethnic and racial identity measures to capture adoptees’ identity construction, it is my intent through an examination of a wide variety of texts (e.g. anthologies, blogs, documentaries) as well as interviews to unearth how identity remains fluid. I encourage others to resist categorization of conceptualizations of identity because adoptees operate in contention with perceptions of what it means to be Korean, American, and Asian American. I argue that such computations cannot quantify the fluidity of identity as respondents in these studies are asked to generalize their experiences. 33 The binary logic of “positive” or “negative” to understand ethnic identity inadvertently pathologizes adoptees as incomplete for lacking a perceived “positive” ethnic identity as an Asian American. Such

a dichotomous approach may also reward some parenting behaviors over others by linking a positive ethnic identity with parents who encouraged ethnic or birth culture exploration without accounting for the interplay between class and geographic location in shaping adoptees’ identity exploration.\textsuperscript{34} To this end, I argue that a holistic approach is required to analyze how ethnic and racial identities are negotiated over time by adoptees. For example, studies that explore the initial moment of racial salience in adoptees’ lives in the shift from childhood to adulthood may overlook whether these moments reoccur in other scenarios (e.g. invitations to join Asian American student organizations in college; questions concerning “where they’re really from?” by coworkers).\textsuperscript{35} I am aware that these works provide a basis to understand adult adoptee identity, and this dissertation is in conversation with these studies as I disentangle adoptee identity from formal categories.\textsuperscript{36} In other words, I am interested in troubling traditional racial/ethnic identities. I situate this work in dialogue with scholars who explore adoptees’ ideological investment in “whiteness” within their local communities, even as they are continually read as the Other due to visibility of racial difference.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{36} The two largest quantitative studies to date were commissioned by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and represent 167 and 179 Korean American adoptees, respectively; Madelyn Freundlich and Joy Kim Lieberthal, Survey of Adult Korean Adoptees: Report on the Findings, report (New York: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 1999); McGinnis, et al., \textit{Beyond Culture Camp...} Smaller studies include: Sueyoung Song and Richard Lee, "The Past and Present Cultural Experiences of Adopted Korean American Adults," Adoption Quarterly 12, no. 1 (2009), doi:10.1080/10926750902791946.
When considering the adult adoptee community, I am interested in how adoptee status interacts with other identity categories to impact their lived experiences. Adoptees operate as cultural whites, familiar with the “insider” perspective of whiteness, yet perpetual “outsiders” because of race. The adoptee’s location as both outsider and insider is critical in understanding his/her positionality. bell hooks writes: “To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.” Korean American adoptees remain at the margins because of race, while insiders because of cultural whiteness and white privilege. They are rendered “outsiders within.” The notion of “outsiders within” was embraced by Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, the editors of Outsiders Within: Writings on Transracial Adoption (2006), who note: “Being within – yet excluded from – the dominant discourse is an incentive to create knowledge that goes against the grain.” Nevertheless, Trenka, et al. overlook Patricia Hill Collins’ assertion that “being a permanent outsider within can never lead to power because the category, by definition, requires marginality.” However, in my reading of Collins, I conclude the “outsider within” standpoint does not preclude Korean adoptees from gaining access to counter discourse “to create knowledge that goes against the grain.” For example, within the Asian American community, adoptees are positioned

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41 Trenka, et al., 3.
42 Collins, Black Feminist Thought..., 289.
insiders based on physiognomy, yet outsiders because of their culturally white upbringing. Nevertheless, Asian physiognomy prevents adoptees from gaining full white subjectivity, rendering them outsiders with an insider perspective of white cultural identity. Similarly, adoptees are rendered “outsiders within” upon return to Korea due to their lack of Korean cultural capital. Although not “permanent outsiders,” their various positionings may render adoptees part of the dominant, “insider” group in comparison to other (Asian) Americans. Yet, they remain “outsiders within” precisely because they never gain full “insider” status in their various positionings.

Accounting for the Untold Perspectives: Critical International Adoption Studies

Through an investigation of the transnational adoption industrial complex and adult adoptee counterpublic, my study illuminates how adult transracial, intercountry adoptee scholars and allies are reshaping mainstream conceptualizations of international adoption. In particular, these researchers shift the debates in two ways. First, they demand the interrogation of the complex system of inequalities fueling international adoption’s continuance worldwide. Second, they question the impact of transracial, intercountry adoption on adoptees. Along with feminist and critical race scholars, adoptee academics challenge existing conceptualizations of historically marginalized groups. Specifically, this dissertation joins the work of other adult Korean American adoptee researchers who desire greater recognition of the adult adoptee critiques of transnational adoption practices.
As I wrote this dissertation, I maintained professional ties within the adoption community. I currently serve on the Advisory Council for the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network and have worked with the Central Ohio Families with Children from China. My participation in both these organizations, which work with adoptive parents and their families rests, reflects my desire to bridge the conversations between adult adoptees and adoptive parents as well as adoption researchers and adoptive parents. This involvement also shapes my understanding of how the adult adoptee counterpublic intervenes in current discussions of mainstream American perceptions of adoption.

Furthermore, as an adult Korean adoptee studying the politics of international adoption, I maintain a self-reflexive stance. Much like adoptee researcher Kim Park Nelson: “I cannot claim impartiality (nor, I would argue, could most adoption researchers).”43 Similarly, the editors of Outsiders Within: Writings of Transracial Adoption argue: “Authors never write from a completely impartial place – our vision always reflects our social location in relation to gender, ethnicity…and involvement in the adoption triad. Knowledge production is always marked by this locatedness.”44 Working towards increasing recognition of adult adoptees’ agency as subjects and “knowers,” adoptee scholars also are community insiders due to their own transracial, transnational adoption.

Operating from this understanding, I find that standpoint epistemology strengthens my analysis of adoptees’ lived experiences. Sandra Harding writes:

“Standpoint approaches use the experiences of the marginalized to generate critical questions about the lives of marginalized people and of those in the dominant groups, as well as about the systemic structural and symbolic relations between them.”

Standpoint theory reinserts their experiences into dominant discourse’s discussion of transnational, transracial adoption as adults capable of speaking their own truths. This method illuminates how multiple adult adoptee experiences produce “alternative standpoints” to “reveal omissions, distortions, and deficiencies in particular accounts.” In particular, standpoint epistemology allows for a deeper analysis of the adult adoptee counterpublic and how the transnational adoption industrial complex impacts the greater adoptee community. From this commitment to standpoint epistemology, this dissertation utilizes adoptee-edited anthologies, documentaries, and adoptees’ online activism to incorporate members of the heterogeneous community.

Complementing my utilization of standpoint theory is my commitment to preserve and recognize the everyday realities of adoptees via a feminist ethnographic approach. Judith Stacey writes: “[Ethnography’s] approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal, attentive… to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency.” Feminist ethnography provides an opportunity to challenge and disrupt dominant discourse, which in this case means mainstream American understandings of adoption.

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46 Ibid.

and adult adoptee experiences. In doing so, I am conscious of the ways in which research and knowledge is mediated. Discussing narrative construction, Barbara Ann Cole notes: “There is also a fundamental question around ‘whose’ story is being told, the researchers or researched (or someone else’s?), and for what purpose.”

As part of my feminist ethnographic approach, I buttressed my theoretical investigation of the transnational adoption industrial complex, family, and citizenship with archival research conducted at the University of Minnesota Social Welfare History Archives. I examined the following materials: Child Welfare League of America records, Children’s Home Society of Minnesota records, International Social Service – American Branch records, and Leonard Mayo papers. The first three sources conducted international adoptions from Korea and facilitated the placement of children across the United States. Leonard Mayo served a prominent role in social welfare, including child welfare, from the late 1950s to early 1970s. Mayo worked with the International Union of Child Welfare and the American Korean Foundation. Through this work, his papers, articles, and letters provide insight into how the U.S. government and private sector actors conceived of and understood adoption from Korea. Cumulatively, these materials illuminate how adoptees were presented to adoptive parents and discussed by agency officials as well as the links between adoption and democracy within U.S. Cold War rhetoric. By integrating the voices of adoptive parents and adoption practitioners based

49 Ibid., 571.
50 The visits to the archives occurred in July 2012 and January 2013.
51 In accordance to regulations by International Social Service – American Branch, please note that points of view in this dissertation are mine and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of International Social Service, United States of America Branch, Inc.
on archival findings, I also strive to create a richer body of knowledge of the transnational adoption industrial complex.

While I examined International Social Service – American Branch records, I viewed 64 sealed case records of Korean adoptions. In particular, I examined records from the immediate postwar period and subsequent cases from 1968, 1972, and 1977. Selecting cases from these years provides a glimpse into how adoption was characterized by adoptive parents and adoption practitioners both in Korea and the United States. Further study is warranted to locate whether language shifted over time as a result of multicultural rhetoric shaping the adoption industry in the 1980s and 1990s.

I recognize the complex politics of sealed records. For instance, domestically adopted persons continue to strive for access to their original birth records and birth certificates. At the same time, adult adoptees from Korea continue to seek access to their records in their entirety. Anecdotally, many adoptees reveal that they are told multiple “stories” concerning their records and to never believe all of the information disclosed when visiting agencies in Korea. Adoptees also encourage one another to make sure when visiting their Korean agency that they utilize a trusted translator to ensure information is not literally lost in translation. Many times the reason limited information provided is rooted in the belief that orphanages and adoption agencies must protect adoptees from potentially “damaging” information. The concern over the veracity of information is rooted in how adoptees remain located as perpetual children unable to

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process histories of themselves or their birth families. Given how adopted persons access to their case histories is fraught with tension and the veracity of information presented to adoptees is questioned, I recognize my privilege as a researcher able to obtain this information. Careful to honor the individual histories found within these records, my analysis focuses on: 1) Child Placement Services Inc. (then Social Welfare Services, Inc.) “social studies” of adoptees; 2) American agencies’ home studies of prospective adoptive parents. As the Korean agency utilized by ISS – American Branch, Child Placement Services Inc., offered the earliest portraits of adoptees to prospective adoptive parents. Home studies provide insights into the ways in which prospective adopters were rendered “fit” parents.

In order to ensure the voices of adult adoptees were not obscured, I also utilized three distinct sources. First, I analyzed two adult adoptee edited anthologies, *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees* (1997) and *Voices From Another Place: A Collection of Works From a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries* (1999). These publications edited by adult adoptees. Consequently, these are the earliest collections to include multiple adoptee recollections of their transracial childhoods in the United States, return to Korea, and encounters with racism.

Second, I investigated adoptees’ utilization of the Internet to engender change within mainstream adoption discourse. In particular, I explored how adult adoptees

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disrupted information disseminated by three popular and respected news outlets, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and Minnesota Public Radio. I examined how their online communication reflects a wider shift in how the adult adoptee community and its allies build effective coalitions. The interrogation of adult adoptees’ online activism provides insights into how adoptees gained legitimacy as valid informants on adoption and the adopted experience.

Third, I draw from interviews I conducted with thirteen adult adoptees (9 female and 4 male) to situate adoptees’ experiences within a broader understanding of the transnational adoption industrial complex. Their responses provide insight into how adoption affects individuals at the micro-level, specifically concerning themes of national belonging, citizenship, and family. Typically, these experiences are overshadowed by well-known memoirs, anthologies, blogs, and documentaries. Overarching questions (Appendix B) were utilized as a guide to ensure I captured information concerning adoptees understandings of family, identity, and community. Further study is warranted to understand whether socioeconomic class impacts identity development.

Participants were solicited via adult adoptee and adoptive family listserves, posting the research study announcement on Facebook, and the snowball sampling effect. Interviewees ranged in age from 23 to 52. Respondents’ engagement with the adult adoptee community ranged from individuals who are active in adult adoptee spaces (e.g. adult adoptee associations), including the adult adoptee counterpublic, and adoptive

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54 From June 2012 to March 2013, two interviews were conducted with each participant in order to account for any changes in respondents’ involvement in adoption related issues. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes to two hours due to participants various engagement with members of the adoption community.
family networks (e.g. Korean Adoptee Adoptive Family Network) to individuals with limited to no contact with other adoptees. Please see Appendix C for participant pseudonyms and information concerning: demography, adoption placement, and racial/ethnic identification.

I approached each interview as an oral history collection of subjugated knowledges. Discussing oral history’s impact in understanding ethnic communities, Gary Y. Okihiro writes: “Oral history is not only a tool or method for recovering history, it also is a theory of history which maintains that the common folk and the dispossessed have a history and that this history must be written.” Reframing the focus to locating marginalized populations’ lived experiences, Okihiro further notes: “Oral history offers an alternative way of conceptualizing history and a means by which to recover that past.” From this perspective, adoptees’ oral histories shed light onto significant events or aspects in their lives related to adoption. Their interview responses are woven throughout this dissertation to provide a deeper context to how abstract concepts such as family, citizenship and national belonging affect the lived realities of adopted persons. I integrate the voices of respondents alongside an examination of adult adoptee edited anthologies and online activism. The combination of these sources allow me to cultivate a deeper knowledge of the adult adoptee community. In many ways this accounts for how adult adoptees interact with one another; as Kim Park Nelson notes: “[T]he oral history

57 Ibid., 211.
process is not totally outside cultural norms within the Korean adoptee community; exchanging stories is an informal ritual of socialization among Korean adoptees."\(^{58}\)

This overarching mixed methodological framework provides new avenues to critically assess adoption practices and its effects on adult adoptees. Utilizing multiple sources, I seek to construct a holistic lens to how the transnational adoption industrial complex was created and sustained itself for nearly sixty years. At the same time, my deployment of a feminist methodology also reflects my interest in how feminist scholars construct knowledge against the grain, troubling traditional conceptualizations of history. In this regard, I situate this project within scholarship invested in a feminist discussion of power, markets, and family.\(^{59}\)

_**Interrogation and Inclusion: Korean-American Adoption Practices and Politics**_

This dissertation is divided into two parts: 1) The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex and Kinship (Chapters One – Three); and 2) The Assertion of Adoptee Identity in Print and Online Media (Chapters Four – Five). Section one introduces the concept of the transnational adoption industrial complex and interrogates how notions of nation, citizenship and family are intertwined in the production of transnational adoption as an extension of the American imperial project. The second section critically examines how the adult adoptee counterpublic troubles mainstream

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adoption discourse following over sixty years of infantilization and fetishization. This doctoral project raises new questions concerning why and how transnational adoption is continually praised while critiques simultaneously emerge from the counterpublic.

The first chapter, “The Market in Children: Historicizing the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex,” interrogates how adoptees are rendered interchangeable objects ready to be bought and sold. I argue that smaller deterritorialized sites – the South Korean welfare state, orphanages, adoption agencies, and American immigration policy – operate in conjunction to form a transnational adoption industrial complex. Assemblage theory aids my examination of how the various mechanisms remain directly and indirectly linked to multiple processes of state and non-governmental organization control.\(^6\) My deployment of assemblage theory is imbued with a feminist intersectional approach to account for instances where power and subordination operate simultaneously and sometimes, asynchronously, to impact the macro- and micro-levels of the adoption industrial complex.

The second chapter, “The Making and Unmaking of Adoptees’ Citizenship,” will locate adoptees entrance into the United States by historicizing their access to legal and social citizenship within Asian American history. Drawing upon feminist and critical race scholarship on citizenship, I reveal the inconsistencies in how de jure and de facto citizenship operates within the Asian American community in adoptees’ path to naturalization. I seek to locate whether adoptees are the acceptable immigration exception or if their status is linked to their adoptive parents’ citizenship and white privilege. Yet, I

am invested in complicating citizenship hierarchies. I investigate the adoptee counterpublic’s call for retroactive citizenship for adult adoptees whose parents/guardians failed to naturalize them. In doing so, this chapter explores adoptees’ social citizenship because as ethnic Koreans, they may encounter anti-Asian prejudice because of the black/white binary girding constructions of “Americanness.”

Recognizing how adoptees entrance into the nation is predicated upon the act of adoption, the third chapter, “Beyond Normative? Redefining Real Kinship,” examines the transracial, transnational adoptive family. I investigate the disruption of traditional kinship structures predicated upon genetic relatedness and monoraciality as the majority of adoptees entered white families. I situate this inquiry in conversation with David Eng’s (2010) exploration of Asian international adoption in *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*. I seek to further his scholarship, exploring whether the adoptive family renders a new conceptualization of heteronormative kinship by pushing the metaphorical boundaries of normative white and Asian American families. This inquiry also engages existing scholarship concerning sexual reproduction as I examine whether adoptive families are queer, postmodern formations in their circumvention of procreative sex.

With a focus on adoptee identity, the second section investigates the adult adoptee counterpublic. Standpoint theory aids my reading of the print and online texts, locating

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adoptees as legible subjects, who interrupt and resist previous silences. I am interested in how adoptee experiences expose the limitations of binary logic that characterizes them as “grateful, happy, and well-adjusted” or “ungrateful, angry, and maladjusted” individuals. Exploring the limitations of these binaries, I investigate how a rhetoric of “happiness” renders adoptees as perpetually unhappy and embittered individuals.


Building upon the feminist analysis conducted in the previous chapter, Chapter Five “Embracing the Anger: Adoptees’ Online Activism” interrogates how the adult adoptee counterpublic critiques members and/or mechanisms of the adoption industrial complex. In particular, I investigate three incidents that galvanized the online adoptee community from 2007 to 2012. I orient this interest in online media within critical race and Cyberstudies scholarship. In particular, the work of Nancy Baym, Emily Ignacio and Lisa Nakamura provide a foundation for this exploration of online racialized

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65 Bishoff and Rankin, Seeds From a Silent Tree...; and Cox, Voices from Another Place...
representation. More broadly, it is my intention to locate how the Internet has changed the ways in which members of the Korean adoption triad as well as other transracial adoptees discuss adoption.

In the conclusion, I reconcile my findings concerning the adult adoptee against my overall explorations of feminist, queer, and critical race scholarship on nation, citizenship, family and identity. I explore the ways in which adult adoptees utilize memes as a tool for advocacy and activism to bridge the macro- and micro-levels of the transnational adoption industrial complex. Locating Korean adoption as both an imperial and exploitative project, this dissertation disrupts dominant understandings of adoption, making four distinct interventions. First, analyzing the adoption industrial complex, this project interrogates how gender inequalities, racialized national identity, American neo-colonialism, and South Korean neo-liberalism influence the standardization of transnational adoption. Second, I contend citizenship is hybridized to allow for adoptees to exist as privileged and disenfranchised immigrants. Third, I argue Korean adoptive families operate as a paradox producing new questions concerning white and Asian American families. Finally, this inquiry raises new insights concerning the adoptee counterpublic as more nuanced than a dichotomy focused on “adjustment” and “gratefulness.” Cumulatively, this dissertation illuminates how transnational adoption can no longer be discussed in silos focusing on a single aspect of the complex; rather this research demonstrates that it is necessary to understand how various institutions, 

organizations, and individuals operate synchronously and asynchronously in conjunction with one another.
Part I: The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex and Kinship
Chapter 1: The Market in Children: Historicizing the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex

The origins of the transnational adoption industrial complex (TAIC) lie the American military industrial complex’s involvement in Korea during and after the Korean War 1950-1953. The sexual entanglements of American soldiers and local Korean women resulted in mixed race progeny who faced discrimination in Korea – stigmatized by the notion that their mothers were prostitutes. As a result, many of the first children sent abroad for adoption were mixed-race children or war orphans. American military influence extends further than the direct military intervention, to the social effects war produces within local communities. Since the Cold War, countries in military conflict as a result of U.S. involvement have been likely to become sending countries for transnational adoption. Discussing the breadth of U.S. imperialism, Anne McClintock writes: “Since the 1940s, the U.S.’ imperialism-without-colonies has taken a number of distinct forms (military, political, economic, and cultural), some concealed, some half-concealed.” Likewise, I find that the stretch of U.S. imperialism-without-colonies remains critical in understanding the ways in which Korea was shaped by the American

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1 Aspects of this work concerning unwed motherhood in the Republic of Korea were presented at the Second International Korean Adoption Symposium in Seoul, Korea in 2007 and included in the conference proceedings.
military industrial complex. Due to this imperialism, Korea is part of a wider neo-colonial endeavor, positioning the United States as “the self-styled liberator” attempting to safeguard Korea from Japanese colonization vis-à-vis the Axis defeat in World War II and the communist threat during the Korean War (1950-53).³

Tracing the transnational adoption industrial complex’s origins, I unearth how a larger system of mechanisms operates to create and sustain the continued abundance of “orphaned” children.⁴ This interest in commodification of bodies joins the work of Barbara Yngvesson and Laura Briggs concerning the monetary values placed on the bodies of children and the limited impact of national and international legislation on adoption practices.⁵ While I recognize the multiple socio-cultural and psychological complexities produced by transracial and transcultural nature of this type of adoption, for the purposes of this inquiry, I am interested in the growth of the international adoption economic marketplace. To capture the various components that fuel the sustained and successful nature of Korea’s adoption program, I utilize the term “industrial complex” to denote functions of supply and demand in adoption. Specifically, I am concerned with how the Korean social welfare state, the orphanage, adoption agencies, and American immigration legislation facilitate the development of transnational adoption between the two nations. While “success” is arguably subjective, I carefully employ this term to

⁴ The use of the term “orphan” remains in quotes because as numerous news articles have shown, not all adoptees are in fact orphans. Scandals of abduction and trafficking continue to proliferate as international adoption becomes a more popular form of adoption in comparison to domestic adoption and/or fostering.
capture the machine-like, rote nature of Korea’s adoption program for it serves as a template for other sending countries. In other words, the sustained nature of Korea’s program in lieu of building a strong social welfare state demonstrates how adoption serves as a de facto social welfare option. Further, the term “template” reflects the ways in which the policies and practices of organizations and individuals facilitating each step of international adoption operate asynchronously, yet concurrently. The streamlined approach utilized in the Korea-U.S. international adoption process serves as an example for other “sending” and “receiving” countries to create a straightforward procedure of adoption.

In focusing on the economics of adoption, it becomes important to interrogate both the commodification of children and monetary exchange between sending and receiving countries. Sara Dorow persuasively argues that an altruistic relationship between “sending” and “receiving” countries is nonexistent as intercountry adoption becomes intertwined with modes of “exchange, meaning, and value that are both caring and consumptive.” Transnational adoption often results from wealth and power imbalances between sending and receiving country. Yet, as “sending” countries reconsider “receiving” countries’ charitable motivations behind international adoption, it is necessary to also note the monetary benefits associated with their participation. Jae Ran

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Kim notes: “The adoption industry benefits South Korea to the tune of over USD$15 million a year.”

To aid my investigation, I deploy assemblage theory to interrogate how smaller sites – the Korean state, orphanages, and adoption agencies – operate asynchronously, yet concurrently. Assemblage theory’s interest in how multiple mechanisms remain interconnected points to disjunctures in existing investigations of intercountry adoption as sustained phenomena. While present adoption research continues to develop understandings of the history of the Korean program as well as adoptee adjustment and negotiation of identity, such work fails to consider how various components of the adoption process operate in conjunction with one another. By doing so, this inquiry seeks to move past reductive notions of Cold War orphans and the excavation of adult adoptee experiences to focus on the concrete ways in which different institutions work to facilitate the continuance of the Korean program.

Recognizing how the multiple assemblages of the adoption industrial complex exist concurrently I draw upon Manuel DeLanda’s discussion of geography’s impact on assemblages. Interrogating the spatiality of cities and communities, DeLanda provides new understandings of how geographic boundaries operate to limit and support the

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growth of populations.\textsuperscript{10} He notes: “[S]ocial assemblages larger than individual persons have an objective existence because they can causally affect the people that are their component parts, limiting them and enabling them, and because they can causally affect other assemblages at their own scale.”\textsuperscript{11} DeLanda recognizes how assemblages remain precarious and always in process because the interactions of their multiple components may not occur synchronically, even if they operate simultaneously.\textsuperscript{12}

This dissertation highlights how the transnational adoption industrial complex is a “specialized assemblage…capable of operating at \textit{multiple spatial scales simultaneously}.”\textsuperscript{13} The size and long running existence of the Korean program serves as the template for wider understandings of the applicability of the adoption industrial complex to understand other “sending” nation’s culture of intercountry adoption. Because of the scalability and recombinant characteristics of assemblages, critical examination of this Korean case study reveals how varying, and sometimes unequal, power arrangements also are sustained and redeployed in other global instances of international adoption. In other words, smaller assemblages of the Korean TAIC may become reconstituted into another adoption industrial complex formed from the relationship between various sending and receiving countries. Moreover, even if a node in the complex evolves (i.e. changes to legislation within sending or receiving countries), this particular instance does not negatively affect the assemblage’s continuance. Instead, each assemblage operates as

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 45.
a regulatory mechanism and will produce new interventions to ensure the complex’s continuance.

In the sections that follow, I first locate the transnational adoption industrial complex within the American military industrial complex, which emerged to fill the perceived need to protect the United States from a growing Communist threat.\(^\text{14}\) In doing so, I explore how the spiritual industrial complex intersected with American democratic ideals invested in Communism’s containment.\(^\text{15}\) I will then interrogate how the commodification of children and motherhood operates at the crux of the adoption industrial complex. Multiple sites – the Korean social welfare state, the orphanage, and adoption agencies – facilitate the growth of a culture of transnational adoption through disciplining the bodies of mothers and children as well as producing standards of normalization. I argue each smaller site remains utilized as de facto Korean government practice to mitigate the need for a more substantive welfare state to support lone motherhood and existing children in orphanages. While adoption agencies may not be exclusively based in Korea or not based in Korea at all, these organizations directly benefit from this existing Korean government practice that implicitly encourages international adoption as a form of social/child welfare relief. While American immigration policy remains an interconnected site of the adoption industrial complex as well as adoptive parents’ American citizenship and white privilege, I explore these two mechanisms in Chapters Two and Three, respectively, in order to fully address the complexities produced by transnational understandings of kinship.

Finally, this investigation yields insights into how intercountry adoption impacts South Korea’s geopolitical standing as seen in how Korea gained worldwide negative attention during the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic games for their “exportation of children.”\textsuperscript{16} Additionally, as adult adoptees are refigured into the nation as “overseas Koreans,” I argue the Korean government’s invitation to adoptees to return to the nation that previously cast them out provides an additional template to other “sending” countries to reincorporate adult adoptees and adopted children and their families as new consumers. Interrogating the various ways adult adoptees are reinserted into nationalist discourse provides a new lens to examine adoptees’ access to claiming a particular national identity, one imbued with assumptions concerning ethnic and cultural homogeneity.

\textit{Tracing the Origins of the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex}

American Cold War militarism directly and indirectly laid the groundwork for what is now an extensive system of transnational adoption between the two nations. At the outset of the Korean War (1950-53) in June 1950 then President Harry S. Truman framed “all U.S. involvement in Korea as a defense against the threat of communism.”\textsuperscript{17} During the immediate post-war period, the United States spent an estimated $200 million (USD) in donations in conjunction with funds to maintain the American military presence alongside money “from voluntary aid groups, secretarian organizations and individual


\textsuperscript{17} Grace M. Cho, Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 74.
donors." Monetary support allowed aid organizations (e.g. Save the Children’s Fund, World Vision, and Catholic Charities) undue influence to construct early Korean adoption policies as the Korean government lacked sufficient funds to create a strong social welfare infrastructure. Speaking about the presence of the United States in Korea in 1954, General James A. Van Fleet said:

To me, Korea is the key to the Orient and the Orient is the key to the future peace of the world. The crucial period, the turning point for Korea, will be the next six months. Our support of Korea during this period is more than humanitarian, it is more than giving from the heart. It is giving from the ‘head’ as well, for contributions toward the rebuilding of Korea are an investment in the future security of America and the free world.

This rhetoric was bolstered by the beliefs of members of the American-Korean Foundation, who viewed humanitarian aid to directly extend to the plight of children. American-Korean Foundation board member, Leonard W. Mayo found: “The children of South Korea are truly a symbol of her plight and by the same token they offer the free world a receptive soil for a fruitful demonstration of democracy.”

In many ways, the work of the American-Korean Foundation speaks to the ways in which everyday individuals were not immune to the impact of American Cold War politics. Tobias Hübinette writes: “[International adoption gave] ordinary Americans a sense of personal participation in the Cold War.”

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19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Pan, the airlift of over 14,000 Cuban children to Miami from January 1961 to October 1962, Karen Dubinsky notes how “fears of the Communist baby snatcher” fuelled transnational adoption programs during the Cold War.\(^{23}\) As one form of the “global imaginary of containment,” transnational adoption offered individual Americans a chance to participate in democracy abroad.\(^{24}\) For example, Eleana J. Kim notes: “Bob Pierce, the founder of World Vision International, an evangelical Christian aid organization… explicitly used the adoption of mixed Korean children as part of an anticommunist, Christian propaganda program.”\(^{25}\)

Interacting with Cold War ideology, citizens’ Christian Americanism supported the notion that adoptees would enter “good homes” in a democratic society.\(^{26}\) The linkages between domestic intimacy concerning kinship and family ties with Christian values illustrate the legacy of Christian missionary work in U.S. territories abroad. For example, in 1953, the earliest adoptive parents were affiliated with the Seventh Day Adventist Church.\(^{27}\) Their work was furthered by Catholic Relief Services and evangelical Christian, Harry Holt, an Oregonian farmer and founder of Holt International Children’s Services (formerly Holt Adoption Program). Christian Americanism is one facet of the spiritual industrial complex that emerged alongside the military industrial


\(^{24}\) Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*…, 23.


complex on the domestic front against the spread of Communism.\textsuperscript{28} Galvanizing society’s faith as an aspect of American democratic values, the spiritual industrial complex provided American militarism with a rationale for U.S. neocolonial ambitions abroad.

I also suggest that the transracial, transnational adoption of Korean children is an extension of early American Orientalism exhibited by white women, in that “women encountered Asian objects first as public spectacles.”\textsuperscript{29} Children as commodities serve as spectacles ready for the consumptive practice of adoption. This form of Orientalism also creates hierarchies of motherhood. Mary Yoshihara writes: “Vis-à-vis Asian women, white women possessed material power sustained by racial and class differences and exercised discursive power by performing the roles of, or representing, Asian women.”\textsuperscript{30}

To this end, Christina Klein argues: “[T]he white mother of Asian children [is an] emblematic figure…of an internationalist America.”\textsuperscript{31} Rooted in notions of mothers as reproducing citizens of the nation, white mothers, under this Christian American rubric, are deemed “fit” parents not only in the context of transnational adoption, but also in existing discussions concerning the moral imperative of motherhood in domestic adoption debates.\textsuperscript{32} Laura Briggs finds: “Stranger adoption is a national and international system whereby the children of impoverished or otherwise disenfranchised mothers are transferred to middle-class, wealthy mothers (and fathers).”\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{28} Herzog, \textit{The Spiritual Industrial Complex}…
\textsuperscript{30} Yoshihara, \textit{Embracing the East}…, 194.
\textsuperscript{31} Klein, \textit{Cold War Orientalism}…, 59.
\textsuperscript{33} Briggs, \textit{Somebody’s Children}…, 4.
“fitness” underscore the ways in which national and racial hierarchies operate to fuel transnational adoption.

At the same time, however, these adoptions demonstrate the hypocrisy of the U.S. government and Americans concerning wider issues of paternalism and race. Tinged by Christian Americanism, Americans and the nation-at-large invoked claims concerning the need to “rescue” children for the “backward East” and bring them to the “progressive West.” This distinction arose because the mothers of mixed race children suffered condemnation and were labeled “U.N. madams,” “comforters,” or “Western queens.” Hübinette writes: “[T]he first children sent away were products of sexual exploitation, military prostitution and, most probably in many cases, rape.” Table 1 highlights the ratio of mixed race versus same race adoption from 1955 to 1960. In these earliest cases, transnational adoption was viewed as the best option for illegitimate children, who overwhelming bore this stamp of illegitimacy.

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Table 1: Mixed-Racial and Same-Racial Children Placed for Intercountry Adoption

Studies conducted in the immediate postwar period throughout the 1960s supported the notion that mixed race children faced limited opportunities in Korea. A 1971 report by the Korean agency Child Placement Services, Inc. reinforces this belief, noting that many of the mothers of Eurasian children participating in the Eurasian Children Living as Indigenous Residents (ECLAIR) program were prostitutes.

At the same time, the presence of mixed race children served as reminders of war as well as the joint legacies of colonialism and imperialism imposed on the nation. From

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1955 to 1973 (the last year mixed-race children were counted as a distinct sub-group of adoptees), an estimated 5,546 mixed-race children were sent abroad. The plight of mixed race children also influenced adoptive parents’ motivations for adoption. For example, discussing a Midwestern couple interested in adopting in 1972, a case worker noted: “[A]ny child they adopt would probably be illegitimate but it makes no difference to them. In fact, they feel that this type of child needs to have a home and understanding more than one with parents.”

Complicit in this process of adoption of mixed race children were adoptee social studies, which are comparable to home study documents concerning prospective adoptive parents. The adoptee’s social study documents the progress and history of the child, including knowledge of the birth family. From this information, I find that orphanages conspire with American adoption agency rhetoric that adoption is the “best option.” For example, in the late 1970s an orphanage worker noted in a social study:

The natural mother has worked at American army [since age 19]. She met the natural father, an American soldier and gave birth to this child, but she has never heard from the natural father after the natural father returned to America…Although the natural mother works in American army, she is so poor that she can not bring up two children [who are mixed blooded]…[T]he natural mother decided to have both children adopted by a stable and understandable family in America thinking [their adjustment would be easier].

Similarly, in an earlier case of adoption from the mid-1960s, the birth mother decided that adoption was in the best interests of the child. According to the intake interview:

“[S]he was unable to give the child the care needed by a baby and that she was the child

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42 Box 318, Folder 87, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
43 Box 360, Folder 24, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
of an American soldier so thought that it would also be better for the child if she could go to an American home for adoption...[The biological father] left Korea a short time after the baby was born and she has not heard from him since.” 44 Two additional cases from that period echo this narrative regarding adoption following the biological father’s return to the United States and failure to support the biological mother and child. 45

By advocating the adoption of mixed race children, Americans could shore up notions of democracy and liberal equality even as the United States encountered domestic questions concerning de jure and de facto racial inequality. Immediately after the Korean War, Assistant Director Susan T. Pettis responded to an adoption inquiry from the Child Welfare Supervisor of the Department of Public Welfare in Greenville, South Carolina on March 26, 1956, writing:

The American-Korean orphans are not accepted in the Korean culture and are considered outcasts, even left to die. These are the illegitimate children of American serviceman and the small group of Negro-Korean children are the most needy. The dark skin is completely unknown in this country and carries with it a tremendous stigma. They have absolutely no future in this country and are often discriminated against in the sub-standard understaffed orphanages. 46

This communication not only demonstrates the construction of Americans as benefactors, but also positions the United States as a place of racial tolerance. Yet, it would be remiss not to locate this rhetoric in conversation with the racial prejudice remaining from the Jim Crow South. Michael Cullen Green writes: “[T]he Cold War imperatives that encouraged

44 Box 252, Folder 78, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
45 Box 247, Folder 52, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota; and Box 255, Folder 8, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
46 “Letter from Assistant Director Susan T. Pettis,” Box 10, Folder 12, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
the cultural celebrations of the adoption of Asian orphans and abandoned white-Asian children...did not extend to Afro-Asians. Moreover, this anti-Black sentiment was revealed in prospective adoptive parents’ requests for children as they noted they were accepting of any child regardless of race, except for black.

Working in conjunction with this raced understanding of the “best” children for adoption is how the American government and prospective adoptive parents overlooked the significance of how initial mixed-race adoptees lacked their father’s American citizenship upon birth. Unless the Korean mother could prove the natal father’s citizenship, the illegitimate offspring from their sexual union lacked access to American citizenship. This practice was not new in the post-Korean War period, as Green notes: “[T]he United States, beginning with its turn-of-the-century acquisition of the Philippines, had long refused to provide social welfare benefits or citizenship to illegitimate biracial children in Asia.” Such complicated access to citizenship led to at least one case of a father adopting his half-Korean child, following his return to the United States. As the father knew of his paternity, it is unclear why this child was not naturalized as an American citizen upon birth. In another example, in February 1958, a white, American former serviceman residing in the southern United States wrote to

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49 Ibid., 90. Unlike the American policy, in her examination of European colonies in Southeast Asia, Ann Stoler found the mixed-race progeny of Dutch male settler and their Asian concubines were not necessarily recognized by their fathers, even as “native women had responsibility for but attenuated rights over their own offspring”; Ann Laura Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule, Second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 68.
International Social Service (ISS) inquiring about adopting his Korean child. Working with the father, ISS completed the adoption by May 1959. Formal legal acknowledgement remained unattainable outside of the father’s recognition at birth until October 1982, with the enactment of Public Law 97-359. This legislation was seen as a humanitarian act and was meant to “[permit] the immigration to the United States of certain illegitimate Amerasian children of United States citizen fathers.”

Public Law 97-359 only covered children “born in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Kampuchea or Thailand after December 31, 1950, and before October 22, 1982” and not their mothers.

De Jure and De Facto Inclusion: Korean Lone Motherhood

Operating asynchronously from the American military industrial complex, the Korean state serves as a second apparatus to render the existence of adoptable bodies. Androcentric legislation concerning children’s access to Korean citizenship existed as reproductive coercive force in the lives of low-income families and/or unwed mothers. Such reproductive coercion is also seen within societal stigma against unwed motherhood and through the ways in Confucian filial piety inhibited the growth of the social welfare state. However, I am mindful of the need to move beyond the scope of reductive narratives concerning unwanted children and patriarchal Confucian culture to explain

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52 Ibid., 9
54 Divorce and widowhood are common reasons for single motherhood versus the deployment of the term unwed motherhood to differentiate between the two types of lone parenthood experienced in Korea.
Korea’s adoption program. This said, due to their minor status as infants and children, adoptees lack agency in deciding to migrate abroad. Instead these decisions are not only made by biological family members, but are also constrained by societal limitations reducing lone parents and families economic situations to raise children in Korean society.

The intention of this particular line of inquiry is not to elide the agency of Korean women and the role of Korean women’s organizations. Since Japanese occupation (1910 – 1945), Korean women have organized around numerous issues, including capitalism, worker exploitation, legislation, sexual violence, and sexual enslavement of Korean women in World War II. Within the last two decades of the twentieth century, legislative gains also included the passage of the following laws: the revision of the Mother and Child Health Act (1986); Gender Equality Employment Act (1987); revision of the Family Law (1989); Infant Care Act (1991); Sexual Violence Special Act (1993); Domestic Violence Prevention Act (1998); revision of the People’s Pension Program (1998); the Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Women and Relief Act Revision (1998); Special Law for Supporting Women’s Business (1999); Gender Discrimination Prevention and Relief Act (1999); Revision of the Gender Equality Employment Act (1999); and Maternity Law Reform Bill (2001). In recent years, organizations have been

actively working towards improving a woman’s ability to lone parent, with the establishment of the Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network in 2007 and the Korean Unwed Mothers and Families Association in 2009.

Working in coalitions, the Korean women’s movement has engendered change, including the establishment of the Korean Women’s Development Institute (KWDI) in 1983, which works “to improve conditions for women and end the formalized discrimination against women in Korea,” facilitating a relationship between women’s organizations and the government.56 In 1984, Korea entered the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW). Four years later, President Roh Tae Woo (1988 – 1993) provided formal recognition to gender policy in the establishment of the Second Ministry of Political Affairs to concentrate on women’s issues, which was previously covered under the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The Presidential Commission on Women’s Affairs was launched in 1998 by President Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003). In 2001, the Ministry of Gender Equality was established.

Despite these gains Korean women remain disenfranchised as the Korean government from President Roh Tae Woo (1988-1993) onwards provided inadequate resources or personnel to support the newly enacted laws. Nicola Jones (2003) reflects on the disparity between policy and practice, noting: “Activists, academics, and femocrats alike lament the gap between de jure and de facto inequality: that is, women’s formal rights are now comparatively comprehensive, but gender inequality remains pronounced.

in most spheres of life.** Therefore, supporting women as social actors remains critical to Korea’s ending of intercountry adoption participation. Marginalized economic inclusion as temporary or irregular workers severely hinders the ability of women to achieve the economic and social tools necessary to gain full independence as citizens. Examining the status of women will facilitate a deeper understanding of how gender roles overtly influence Korea’s continued participation in intercountry adoption. Understanding the social and economic factors fuelling female engagement with adoption will better position the Korean government and nongovernmental organizations to support single mothers. Within this section, I first discuss the ways in which legislation limited a woman’s ability to lone parent. I then examine how Korea’s male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy impacts women’s location in the economic marketplace and inhibits their ability to contemplate lone parenting or even increasing their families’ earnings to aid family preservation.

*The Gendered Nature of Korean Citizenship*

“All citizens are equal before the law and bars discrimination in political, economic, social, and cultural life on account of sex, religion, or social status.”

- Korean Constitution, codified 1948

Even as gender equality was established within the 1948 Korean Constitution, a notable gap existed between *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality to guarantee political equity. For example, the Nationality Law 1948 codified patrilineal *jus sanguinis* and non-

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recognition of dual citizenship. While Korean men’s children obtained citizenship regardless of their natal mother’s nationality, “children born to Korean women and foreign men could not.” This law had severe impact on the children who were products of liaisons between Korean women and American men as not only could they not gain Korean citizenship, due to difficulties in proving paternity, many of these children also remained ineligible for American citizenship. It was not until the law was revised in September 1997 that the Nationality Law was revised to include bilateral _jus sanguinis_.

Operating alongside the Nationality Law, women lacked the right to enter their children on their family registry without needing to petition their husbands or fathers until a revised Family Law became effective in January 1, 1991. The Family Law is established by Part Four and Five of Korea’s Civil Code. From 1948 to 1991, the Family Law denoted the husband as family provider and granted a series of rights over family members within his _hoju_ as part of the family registry. These rights included the ability to: accept or refuse an individual’s entry into the family register; expel a family member from the registry; decide upon a place of residence; exercise primary custody over children in the case of divorce; and admit an illegitimate child he begot with another woman into his family without his wife’s consent. The importance of the family registry

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60 Ibid., 106.
63 Moon, “Begetting the Nation…,” 53.
in providing legitimate status to the child underscores the way in which citizenship is
gendered, operating as a function of an androcentric state. Hence, children, regardless of
their own gender, encounter the effects of women’s gendered oppression.

It was not until 2005 that the *hoju* system formally deemed incommensurable with
the Constitution. By 2008 it was officially abolished as a result of cooperation between
the Korean government, specifically the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, and
non-governmental organizations with a feminist mission, including the Korean Women’s
Associations United.\(^{64}\) Though this was a milestone, the simple act of a legal change,
allowing children to inherit the family name of their mothers, in addition to their fathers,
does not necessarily entail a shift in societal mores, nor increased economic support for
mothers or even low-income families.\(^{65}\) To ensure that these legislative gains can be truly
attained in the lives of unwed mothers economic empowerment and gender equity must
be attained. The pairing of *de jure* citizenship rights alongside economic gender equality
will demonstrate to mainstream Korean society that unwed motherhood is a different not
deviant choice.

*Economic (Dis)empowerment: The Impact of Limited Social Welfare Supports*

While androcentric legislation limited women’s ability to exercise citizenship
rights, the gendered division of labor inhibited women’s growth as economic actors.

\(^{64}\) Kyungja Jung, "The Development of Women’s Policy in South Korea," in *The Work of Policy: An
International Survey*, ed. H. K. Colebatch (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); and Eunkang Koh,
"Gender Issues and Confucian Scriptures: Is Confucianism Incompatible with Gender Equality in South

\(^{65}\) Chung-a Park, "Children Can Adopt Mother’s Surname," The Korea Times, June 3, 2007, accessed
Predicated upon a male breadwinner/female housewife dichotomy, women’s employment opportunities were constructed within a stratified economy. In other words, when participating in the workforce, women were relegated to limited opportunities for professional development and economic mobility. Even with high levels of education women tend to be relegated to lesser paying and low prestige positions in comparison to men with less education.\(^6\)

At the same time, even when the Korean state courted female workers, these policies historically engaged the “underprivileged or stigmatized categories of women” – single women and female heads of households – and focused on training in feminized occupations (i.e. embroidery, cooking, sewing, and other low-skill, low-technical professions).\(^7\) By providing training for only low-skill, low-technical positions, the state reinforced women’s economic marginalization. For example, at the end of Korea’s height as a sending country, during the 1980s, studies found that although 90% of single mothers participated in the work force, the majority were irregular, unskilled or self-employed workers.\(^8\) Women’s location to irregular and part-time feminized labor sectors are two forms of reproductive coercion that penalize unwed mothers and women’s ability to bolster their family’s income. To this end, reflecting on her efforts to safeguard her family, Noh Keum-Ju, notes: “When I was 18 and working in a factory, I gave birth to Seong-wook (35, living in South Dakota, United States) due to an unwanted pregnancy. My starvation was so serious that I was unable to lactate. My husband gambled and was


\(^7\) Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, 134.

\(^8\) Sarri, et. al., *Goal Displacement and Dependency in South Korean-United States Intercountry Adoption,* 99.
never around, and the next year, while I was away for a month, I lost my child.”69 The lack of state welfare support to aid low-income families, including unwed mothers, severely inhibits family preservation. Adoption became the only feasible option to ensure opportunities for women’s offspring.

A stratified labor market also impacts women’s ability to utilize social welfare supports available to able-bodied workers for aspects of the state’s limited social welfare programs remain limited to employment in the formal sector.70 The limited engagement of the Korean government in social welfare results from what scholars discuss as the “East Asian welfare model,” which is characterized by its reactive nature in that nation’s enact welfare measures during times of economic distress.71 Confucian beliefs in conjunction with voluntary organization support limited the growth of state social welfare provision over time.72 Specifically, Confucian emphasis on filial piety was the basis for the Korean state’s expectation that “individual families [should] be primarily responsible for health care, housing, education, child care, and care of the elderly.”73 Consequently,

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70 Equitable access to benefits was not available on a wider level to women, who traditionally are excluded from the protected, full-time labor force; Ibid. Korean industrial organizations provide numerous non-wage benefits to full-time workers that function as a form of social welfare; Ruth Pearson, "Towards the Re-politicization of Feminist Analysis of the Global Economy," International Feminist Journal of Politics 6, no. 4 (2004): 609.
73 Moon, Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea, 118.

Even when women entered the paid employment sector, these opportunities operated against other constraints as women continually bear the burden of unpaid household labor.\footnote{See Cho, et al.; “Korea’s Miracle and Crisis: What Was it for Women”; Elizabeth Choi, "Status of the Family and Motherhood for Korean Women." in Women of Japan and Korea: Continuity and Change, ed. Joyce Gelb and Marian L. Palley (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Diane Elson, "From Survival Strategies to Transformation Strategies: Women's Needs and Structural Adjustment," in Unequal Burden: Economic Crisis, Persistent Poverty, and Women's Work, ed. Lourdes Benería and Shelley Feldman (Oxford: Westview Press, 1992).} Lack of childcare, in particular, acted as a barrier to women’s entry into paid employment. As adoptions from Korea were declining in 1990, only 2,323 day-care centers were available, which accommodated a small fraction, less than 9\%, of
children requiring childcare. In 1991, four accidental infant deaths occurred as a result of parents leaving children at home unattended in order to go to work. Lisa Kim Davis notes: “Government or company subsidized child care is especially pressing for low-income workers, considering that the minimum wage in January 1991 was $1.15 per hour.”80 By not taking into account particular differences between men and women in the household division of labor, including the amount of unpaid labor performed by either sex and its effect on paid labor engagement, economic reforms remain gendered and will not benefit women until basic private sphere needs, such as childcare and elder-care, are addressed. However, it is important to note that in January 2012 the Korean government announced they would provide childcare to all infants and toddlers with financial subsidies proved to parents regardless of income level to support childcare. Yet, by the end of 2012, the program had proved untenable and costly at the local level.81

The Challenges of Lone Motherhood

By not recognizing the discrepancies that exist between de jure and de facto gender equality, a woman’s ability to contemplate unwed or single motherhood remains inhibited. During the peak period of Korea’s involvement in intercountry adoption (the

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79 Ibid.
1970s and 1980s), single women received little government and social support. As a result, unwed mothers struggled financially, unless receiving familial support, as government financial support only began in 2003. Nonetheless, in 2006, 78.6% of unwed mothers attributed financial hardship as a barrier to caring for their children. Only in 2009 did support for unwed mothers increase from 50,000 won (USD $44) to 100,000 won (USD $89) per month. Now, as centers to support unwed mothers become more widespread throughout the nation, women are increasingly gaining access to temporary housing, education, counseling and medical care. These centers are typically sponsored by the four government sanctioned Korean adoption agencies, which also operate orphanages for Korean children. Even as these financial and social welfare overtures occur, a 2010 study conducted by the Korean Women’s Development Institute found unwed mothers’ priorities included: securing adequate housing; financial support; child care; and enforcement of policies to enable their employment without discrimination.

Despite evidence that more women are choosing unwed motherhood over adoption, the stigma of lone parenting has yet to be erased in mainstream Korean society. This is evident from a response editorial from the Kwon Hee-Jung, Executive

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Director of the Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network concerning the increase of social welfare expenditures for unwed mothers: “[T]he increase in the number of unwed mothers means that more children are being raised by their biological mothers…Therefore, the accompanying increase in social welfare support is natural because the right of a mother to raise her child must be protected whether or not a woman is married or not.”86 When unwed mothers and their allies must justify why they deserve funds to keep their families in tact, it demonstrates the ways in which rhetoric and policy do not necessarily operate concurrently. Thus, as the Korean state makes overtures concerning the status of unwed mothers and need for subsidized childcare, these acts do not mitigate the legal and economic barriers that historically rendered adoption as the only option for low income and unwed mothers. I suggest that adoption continues to serve as the de facto social welfare support due to the Korean social welfare state’s historic reactive nature and lack of investment in women as mothers and workers in the formal labor sector. In many ways this reflects how Korea continues to rank as one of the lowest countries for gender equality. The World Economic Forum recently ranked Korea as 108 out of 135 countries in their Gender Gap Index 2012.87 In comparison to other OECD countries, Korea only ranks ahead of Turkey.

Yet, this is not to say organizations and individuals are not working towards equality for unwed mothers. For instance, since March 2009 unwed mothers met monthly in Seoul as part of the organization Miss Mamma Mia. The Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea also works with unwed mothers and activist adoptee organizations in Korea to enact social change concerning international adoption and domestic single parent policies. In addition, adoptive father Dr. Richard Boas founded and funds the Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network to “enable Korean women to have sufficient resources and support to keep their babies if they choose, and thrive in Korean society.”88 As an advocate for unwed mothers in Korea, Dr. Boas seeks to raise questions regarding the accountability of birth fathers and orient his organization as one avenue for women to advocate on behalf of unwed mothers and their children.89 These various groups have merged to form the Korean Unwed Mother Family Association, which seeks to “change opinions about unwed mothers and spearhead efforts to support legislation regarding the responsibilities of biological fathers and rights of unwed moms.”90 Furthermore, the movement to remove the stigma of unwed motherhood garnered attention in May 2011, when unwed mother advocacy groups renamed Adoption Day (May 11) to Single Mom’s Day.91 Additionally, on May 27, 2011 the Institute for Gender and Law at Ewha Women’s University in Seoul held the “Unwed Mothers, 

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89 Ibid.
90 Korean Unwed Mothers Support Network. All Mothers Have the Right to Raise Their Own Children. pg. 13.
91 Lee, “Single Mom’s Day shifts focus to family preservation.”
Adoption and Gender Law” conference. The success of these two events remains to be seen; however, as unwed mothers organize with adult adoptee advocacy organizations working in Korea, these two populations are making inroads into a landscape dominated by government and adoption agency officials in changing discourse around adoption in Korea.

The Interchangeable Nature of Children

As the Korean state condones reproductive coercion, orphanages and adoption agencies bolster the notion of “unwanted” children who are commodities available for purchase.92 This commercialization of Korean children is similar to what Ann Stoler discusses concerning métis children in French Indochina, who “were sometimes sought out by state and private organizations” and placed in orphanages.93 According to Stoler, the orphanage was thought to be a site of savior for these “abandoned” children to ensure that they “were to be molded into colonial citizens of a particular kind.”94 Stoler notes that this orphanage placement for fair-skinned Eurasians was seen as a better alternative than living in native villages and to ensure métis girls, for example, would not enter into prostitution. This fear of prostitution is also seen in adult adoptee narratives. For example, in her well-known memoir, The Language of Blood, Jane Jeong Trenka reflects on her white, American friend’s question concerning whether she “would have rather been raised in Korea,” writing:

92 SooJin Pate, "Genealogies of Korean Adoption: American Empire, Militarization, and Yellow Desire" (diss., University of Minnesota, 2010), 207-208.
93 Stoler, Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power..., 70; emphasis added.
94 Ibid., 90.
For my friend, the question is rhetorical and the answer is clear. She’s been told that I was ‘saved’ and ‘born not under my mother’s heart, but in it.’ I have been rescued by adoption; had I stayed in Korea, I would have been institutionalized, after which I would have turned into what Asian girls tend to turn into if left to their own devices: a prostitute.\textsuperscript{95}

According to Stoler, the orphanage was thought to be a site of savior for these “abandoned” children to ensure that they “were to be molded into colonial citizens of a particular kind.”\textsuperscript{96} In this regard, reflecting on her experiences as a pioneer in Korean social work, Hyun Sook Han writes: “The social worker’s job was to visit different sites – mostly near the military bases – that were known to have high numbers of mixed-race children living with their birth mothers and ask the mothers if they wanted to place their children for adoption.”\textsuperscript{97} Han further notes that mothers would hide their children upon learning she was visiting their neighborhoods because they feared Han would, as she notes, “make them agree that their children should be placed for adoption.”\textsuperscript{98} Working in combination with lack of social welfare support for parents, the orphanage and its social workers serve as another coercive element aiding the growth of transnational adoption.

Aiding the creation of potential adoptees is the ways in which the orphanage manufactured adoptee identities. Internal International Social Service, Inc. communication between the Korean and American branches indicates that the invention of birth dates and names was not an uncommon practice. For example, in a letter dated May 23, 1960 Anne M. Davison, ISS Korea, wrote to the American Branch stating that Korean social workers are “afraid now to make or accept a guess in age now” until the

\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., 90.
\textsuperscript{97}Hyun Sook Han, \textit{Many Lives Intertwined: A Memoir} (St. Paul: Yeong & Yeong Book, 2004), 98.
\textsuperscript{98}Ibid., 99.
orphans are seen by a doctor.99 Within the same missive, Davison also notes: “One other case this week had three birthdates for the same child.”100

In addition, adult adoptees’ recount the creation of information within their autobiographical writings. For example, adult Korean adoptee Kimberly Hee Stock writes: “Doctors estimated my age like I was a stray dog at an animal shelter, I was given a new generic name and a new generic birthday.” (emphasis in original)101 Korean adoptees also recount that their Western birthdays are not representative of their true birth date. Only upon returning to Korea do adoptees learn their correct birth dates after reuniting with birth families and/or acquiring their adoption files from orphanages.102 Similarly, Kevin, one of my interviewees, revealed that upon returning to Korea, he discovered: “I found out that I was left at a police station in a basket, with my name – just my first name – and my birth date on it. So my last name was actually made up by the adoption agency.”103 In altering and fictionalizing birthdays and renaming children, the orphanage demonstrates that what many biological children take for granted – correct birthdays and their birth names – are irrelevant and replaceable, even as individuals in the West increasingly seek to document their family histories.

At the same time, these children are also perceived as interchangeable. Reflecting on her adoption, Kelly Neff notes that when the baby her parents expected to adopt died,

100 Ibid.
103 Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
the adoption agency exchanged the child with Neff.\textsuperscript{104} Similarly, in my examination of International Social Services – American Branch case records, I found adoption agency officials switched a mixed race Korean child with a mixed race Japanese child because the prospective adoptive parents expressed concern over the mixed race Japanese child’s intelligence.\textsuperscript{105} In addition, I discovered a 1961 case where the adoptive parents contacted the adoption agency, orphanage and Christian Children’s Fund concerning inconsistencies involving the child’s birth date and orphan history.\textsuperscript{106} The history provided by the adoption agency and orphanage conflicts within information provided to the adoptive family by the Christian Children’s Fund, when the family first began supporting the child through their foster parents’ plan. An April 1961 letter between ISS Korea to ISS American Branch reveals that it is possible that the orphanage confused records of female orphans and that the original child requested was not available for reasons unknown and was substituted for the child sent for adoption.\textsuperscript{107}

Operating simultaneously to this construction of adoptees is how orphanages “marketed” children’s bodies via the social studies provided to American adoption agencies and adoptive parents. From my examination of these social studies it became evident that the language utilized to express the “uniqueness” of adoptees was not actually distinctive. Rather, similar language was used to discuss all orphans. For


\textsuperscript{105} Case Records, 1929-1995, International Social Services, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
instance describing the origins of the adoptee in the orphanage social study, many of these reports repeated a slightly varied narrative such as this:

According to the official report, she was found abandoned on [date], and was referred to our [City] branch through the magistrate of [city]. She was placed in our [City] baby home. On [subsequent date] she was taken to our headquarters in Seoul and was placed in a foster home of our agency. Her date of birth was estimated by the clinic’s director. Her name was given by our agency. Further information on her background is not known because she is an abandoned child.108

Variations of this account may note the child’s date of birth as written on a slip of paper with the child’s belongings. Complementing these similarities in “origin stories” is the language utilized to describe the children once they were settled in the orphanage. In multiple social studies, children were given the following characteristics: cute with round

face, well-shaped nose, medium mouth and ears, double eyelid, normal complexion, good appetite and digestion, good health, medium black eyes, round ordinary eyes, healthy.  

The orphanage as a production site is best demonstrated within the documentary *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee* directed by Deann Borshay Liem. A follow-up to her first documentary exploring her adoption to the Borshay family, Borshay Liem explores how as a child in Korea, the orphanage sent her in place of another girl, Cha Jung Hee. Told not to reveal that she was not in fact Cha Jung Hee by orphanage workers prior to her airplane journey to the United States, Borshay Liem lives her life with Cha Jung Hee’s birth date and adoption case history as her own. Searching for the “original” Cha

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110 *In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee*, dir. Deann Borshay Liem (Berkeley: Mu Films, 2010), DVD.

111 *First Person Plural*, dir. Deann Borshay Liem (San Francisco: Center for Asian American Media, 2000), DVD.

112 Sun-ah Shim documents this practice, which is described as “child laundering”; Sun-ah Shim, "Dark Side of Inter-racial Adoption Surfaces with Arrivals of Grown-up Adoptees," *Yonhap News Agency*, October 10, 2012, accessed April 7, 2013, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/n_feature/2012/10/10/5/4901000000AEN20121010008500315F.HTML.
Jung Hee, Borshay Liem contacts her agency in Korea and individuals named Cha Jung Hee in the phone book. Figure 1 is a documentary still, where Borshay Liem is at a local police station learning how many Cha Jung Hee’s live in a particular area.

![Figure 1: In the Matter of Cha Jung Hee (2010) Police Station Visit](image)

Meeting multiple women named Cha Jung Hee, Borshay Liem wonders what happened to the young girl in the photo sent to her parents. As Borshay Liem processes that 83 Cha Jung Hees exist and meets individual women named Cha Jung Hee, the viewer is previewed to the mixed emotions associated with voyeuristically examining the lives Borshay Liem may have had if she was not adopted. Figure 2 is a documentary still of Borshay Liem examining pictures of herself and two other young girls identified as Cha Jung Hee by the orphanage.
The three photographs in the documentary still illustrate how each child’s body is rendered as an interchangeable object. The orphanage renamed two other young girls as Cha Jung Hee to fulfill the fantasy of the original Cha Jung Hee as a young orphan in need of Western humanitarian aid. When children become identical female objects instructed not to speak of their actual names and birthdays, they are told that their original identities are irrelevant and unimportant. Children recognize the tenuous nature of identity under these circumstances as the orphanage disciplines the children’s bodies and underscores adoptees’ object status. While these incidents may not be representative of all intercountry adoption practices, one cannot overlook how the disingenuous practices of orphanage officials and workers facilitate the trading of children.
As the Korean orphanage commodifies children, American adoption agencies attach monetary value to Korean children’s bodies. For example, Holt International and Spence Chapin are two well-known U.S. adoption agencies with Korea programs. On each of their websites, each agency provides an estimated cost associated with the adoption process. Holt International states that adoption from Korea costs an estimated $20,365 for healthy or minor special needs children.\textsuperscript{113} Similarly, Spence Chapin lists the fee for the Korea program as $18,040.\textsuperscript{114} The total adoption fee ranges between $30,930 - $51,130 for Spence Chapin and $27,565 - $30,075 for Holt International. Parents are charged for various costs, including: agency registration fee, program services fee, Korean program fee, travel, and medical, legal and translation fees. They also face “professional service fees,” which cover home study visits, parent preparation, processing of adoption application and required paperwork for local, federal and foreign governments; child referral and placement; support and guidance through the adoption process, including post-placement and post-adoption services. Financial assistance is available for parents from Holt International if they are adopting a “special needs” or waiting child. In addition, if parents escort their child from Korea to the United States a fee of $500 is charged in lieu of the other travel costs, which range from $2,900 - $3,410.

The agency also notes prospective adoptive parents should take advantage of the Federal Families Adoption Tax Credit and examine whether their employer offers assistance.\footnote{115}

These high costs reflect how transnational adoption is a class reproduction option. Eleana J. Kim notes: “[T]ransnational adoption offered a (new) reproductive technology – one that has become an increasingly commodified ‘choice’ existing alongside a number of other, stratified consumer options for would-be parents.”\footnote{116} Even as both American adoption agencies offer financial assistance, the actual cost of adoption outside of the costs associated with parenting serves to regulate which class of parents may adopt. The total costs associated with adopting from Korea would cost the average American at least 38% of their year’s salary in 2010 as the real median average income for a married family was $72,751.\footnote{117}

Yet, international adoption did not always exist as a classed form of reproduction. For example, in 1972 International Social Service – American Branch operated a sliding scale based on gross family income. A family earning below $15,000 was charged $200 in comparison to a family earning above $35,000, which was charged $650.\footnote{118} Four years later, this sliding scale increased. Families earning below $15,000 were charged $800 in processing fees, while households earning above $35,000 paid $2,500.\footnote{119}

\footnote{116} Kim, Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging, 26.  
\footnote{118} Cost of Intercountry Adoption Program, Box 11, Folder 1, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.  
\footnote{119} Cost of WAIF Intercountry Adoption Program, Box 11, Folder 2, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
While the overall cost is important to note, what is interesting is how for both Spence Chapin and Holt International, the cost of adopting from Korea is the highest. In comparison, the Spence Chapin country program cost for Bulgaria is an estimated $8,000, while the Holt International country fee for Haiti is an estimated $8,690. I highlight the difference in country fees to underscore how different monetary values are placed on children’s bodies. Nevertheless, the individual country prices for children are not unique to the twenty-first century. For example, in 1972 International Social Service – American Branch noted additional country fees existed for prospective adoptive parents.\(^{120}\) To adopt from Korea, parents paid an additional $780 fee, while the Hong Kong and Jamaica program fees amounted to $400 and $190, respectively. The various country fees demonstrate how adoption agencies implicitly rank children’s bodies. Country program price differentials reflect how on some level the various reputations of country programs (i.e. Korea as “the Cadillac of adoption”) impact how sought after children from each specific nation are by adoptive parents. At the same time, such value judgments on children’s bodies occur within the “sending” country as Korean children are stratified within an economy of children as these prices are for healthy children. For example, Holt International notes: “Fees for adopting older children or children with moderate to major special needs may be as low as $6,950 and are determined on a case-by-case basis.”\(^{121}\)

With prices attached to these nameless and faceless bodies, parents also are able to look at photographs of waiting children on adoption agency websites. These sites

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\(^{120}\) Ibid.

\(^{121}\) Holt International, “Adoption Fees and Financial Assistance.”
substitute earlier print advertisements in magazines such as the *Saturday Review* or *Life*, which “seared the idea of ‘adoption’ into millions of Americans’ minds as an effective means to fight the Cold War.”\(^{122}\) Early advertisements in the post-Korean War period demonstrated how the American media proved especially helpful in framing adoption not only as part of American exceptionalism, but also as a way to demonstrate how “Korea’s children [sic] were the true victims of Communist aggression.”\(^{123}\) Laura Briggs writes: “[These photographers] became part of the architecture of Cold War liberalism, which constructed an overseas role for the United States that was at one compassionate and interventionist.”\(^{124}\) These advertisements promoted fostering programs of children in Korea and other developing nations torn from war. Sealed case record files reveal how the impact of such advertisements on adoption. For example, prospective adoptive parents wrote to International Social Services, Inc. – American Branch or their local adoption agencies with a deep interest to formally adopt the sponsored child. As part of their inquiries, it was common for interested parties to include the child’s sponsorship case number, orphanage, name and even birth date.\(^{125}\) Figure 3 is one of the early sources of how orphans were marketed to prospective American parents. While not from one of the well-known sponsorship organizations (i.e. Christian Children’s Fund or Foster Parent’s Plan), the form from the Everett Swanson Evangelistic Association, Inc. captures


\(^{123}\) Oh, “A New Kind of Missionary Work…,” 170.

\(^{124}\) Briggs, *Somebody’s Children…*, 138.

\(^{125}\) Box 318, Folder 87, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
the ways in which images were used to encourage Americans to support children from overseas.

Figure 3: Sponsor Advertisement “Help Heal a Child’s Broken Heart”

The bottom right hand corner of the advertisement, asks interested parties to select which child from the image they desired to sponsor or note whether they sought to support a girl or boy with financial and material goods. The Association asked for $8 per month for the child. The form also provided an option for individuals to receive additional information about sponsoring Korean orphans.

Contemporary Internet photographs on adoption websites allow families to gain instant access to a plethora of waiting children from Korea and other “sending” nations. As spectacles, adoptees, like other objects to view on the Internet for sale are viewed based not only on their physical features, but accompanying descriptions. Regardless of prospective adoptive parents’ intentions, I argue photographs of waiting children become mere objects for spectators – prospective adoptive parents – to consume. This is not to discount the emotional ties adoptive parents have with their children; rather, this line of inquiry is invested in how such photographs serve as “lures.”\(^{127}\) In other words, as Lisa Cartwright notes, such images “[draw] prospective clients into the adoption market, helping them to imagine ‘their’ child or themselves as parents of children ‘like these’.”\(^{128}\) Similar to earlier Victorian forms of advertising explored by Anne McClintock, these images are commodity spectacles for the technology of photography produced panoptic power to “display and discipline.”\(^{129}\) Further, the technology of the photograph serves as one tool to normalize children into “adoptable” objects.

Prices attached to “unknown” children highlight how the practice of adoption is an economic marketplace. I consider these children “unknown” because child placement

\(^{127}\) Cartwright, “Photographs of ‘Waiting’ Children…,” 83.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.

\(^{129}\) McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context, 123.
into a family is based on the selection of available children and parents may lack the ability to “choose” the child of their desires. Instead this process of child selection occurs within the facilities of the orphanage and adoption agency as they take into account specific preferences the adoptive parents may have regarding available children.

The visual of the photograph is the successor of the initial written requests by adoptive parents for specific children. Placing orders with lawyers and adoption agencies, adoptive parents clearly articulated whether they were interested in infants, toddlers, and adolescents as well as male or female children. Parents also deftly answered their racial preference (i.e. full Korean, Korean-Caucasian, Korean-Black) and whether they would accept children with disabilities. Immediately after the Korean War communication between Mrs. Oak Soon Hong, Director of Child Placement Service in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs at Seoul, Korea with social welfare agencies and lawyers in the United States revealed that parents placed “orders” for children.130 A letter from Arthur Herzog Jr. from Public Relations in Detroit wrote to Mrs. Hong, noting that he had a family interested in “a boy or a girl from 3 to 6” on July 7, 1956. Subsequent correspondence from Mr. Herzog Jr. indicate his clients included families which sought “a 7 year old girl” and “a girl to keep their two boys company” on the 13th and 17th of July 1956, respectively.

I also discovered correspondence between local agencies and ISS – American Branch that contains stark, concise language concerning preferences adoptive parents had for children. For instance, case files reveal strong racial preferences with some families

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130 Correspondence, Box 10, Folder 14, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
indicating that they could not accept a mixed race Black-Korean child due to prejudices within extended family.\textsuperscript{131} These files also reveal broader preferences for children based on age and sex. For example, in a case from 1977 one social worker noted: “The [family] would like a Korean child of either sex, between the ages of 1 and 3. An alert child with no physical or emotional handicaps would be most acceptable to the family.”\textsuperscript{132} Discussing another family’s preference in 1977, a different social worker wrote: “Either sex, up to two years of age, but preferably a boy…Minor correctable medical handicaps okay. Open to any racial mixture but black. Could handle a diabetic problem.”\textsuperscript{133} Similarly, a subsequent caseworker found: “They would accept a child with a correctable problem, of any background but Black and/or unknown background. They would not consider permanent physical handicap.”\textsuperscript{134} Yet, these preferences were not a phenomenon only associated with case records from the late 1970s or in the immediate post-war period. For example, one social worker from 1972 noted:

\begin{quote}
[The prospective adoptive parents] are interested in a child of Oriental or Oriental/Caucasian extraction. [The wife] indicated a slight preference for a girl, but could also accept a boy; [the husband] has no preference. The couple would like a child as soon as possible so that they could participate fully in the developmental process, but stated they can accept a child up to four years old. They can also accept minor correctable handicaps, but expressed a wish to know something of the child's background and family history.\textsuperscript{135}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{131} See Box 332, "October 1972 Sealed Case Record," Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota; and Folder 5, Box 360, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{132} Box 358, Folder 38, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{133} Box 359, Folder 8, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{134} Box 358, Folder 17, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{135} Box 332, Folder 46, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
While some of the case records also did not denote a preference for a specific child, I mention this “ordering” to highlight the ways in which children were constructed as products for consumption. The requirements and specifications of adoptive parents concerning age, race, sex, and ability status highlight the ways in which children become interchangeable commodities.

International Implications of the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex

In 2011 Pastor Kim Do-hyun, the director of KoRoot an organization that provides assistance to adoptees in Seoul, criticized international adoption characterizing it as “part of its economic development strategy.” This charge arises from the fact that as Korea gained economic prominence during the latter half of the twentieth century, the nation also saw its rates of children sent abroad for adoption to increase at similar rates. Moreover, Kim argues that the economic also benefited upwards of $20 and $40 million annually throughout the 1970s and 1980s due to fees associated with adoption. Due to the financial investment in maintaining international adoption, it becomes clear that to understand its continuance, we also must examine the impact of the transnational adoption industrial complex’s impact on Korea’s geopolitical standing. For example, as the number of children sent to the West reached its height of 6,597 children in 1976, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea criticized Korea for its new “export,” Korean children, to Western buyers. Ashamed of North Korea’s assertion that the South Korea

benefits from the selling of its children, Korea embarked on a policy to promote domestic adoption with the intent to discontinue its involvement in transnational adoption.\textsuperscript{138} By the end of the 1970s, the South Korean government “established a goal of reducing the number of intercountry adoptions by 1,000 annually while concurrently increasing domestic adoptions by 500 annually.”\textsuperscript{139}

With the objective to gradually decrease international adoption participation, Korea still lacked a strong infrastructure to care for children placed up for adoption. For example, the 1980 total budget listed 0.06% as the budget for child welfare.\textsuperscript{140} Criticism reached a new height in the mid-1980s. “Babies for Export: And Now the Painful Questions” was an April 1988 article in \textit{The New York Times} that caused guilt and shame among the Korean population for its critique against the country’s transnational adoption involvement as it set to host the 1988 Summer Olympic Games.\textsuperscript{141} By August 1988 during United States coverage of the Olympic Games, an NBC news commentator shed light on the adoption issue, prompting the Korean government to ask the four operating agencies to “temporarily suspend all intercountry adoptions…during the Olympics” to avoid negative international attention.\textsuperscript{142}

Due to the intensely negative criticism, the Korean people experienced intense public humiliation of being unable to care for its children. In September 1989, the

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Alstein and Simon, \textit{Intercountry Adoption: A Multinational Perspective}, 5.
government issued new guidelines to regulate transnational adoption and promote domestic adoption. These guidelines included: changing the age requirements for domestic adoption prospective parents; economic incentives for domestic adoptive parents, such as tax breaks; reducing transnational adoption by 400-600 children annually; and “placing only racially-mixed or disabled children internationally after the year 1995.” The government’s schedule for transnational adoption reduction is exhibited in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Domestic Adoption</th>
<th>Intercountry Adoption</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>6,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>4,100</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>6,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>5,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>2,900</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>5,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3,200</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>5,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>3,500</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>5,200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Schedule for Reducing Intercountry Adoption in Korea: 1989-1995

As the Korean government embarked on a path to terminate its involvement in ICA, this goal remains unfulfilled, even though the number of children leaving Korea was being reduced by government imposed quotas established after the 1988 Olympics. The extent that intercountry adoption exists as a naturalized institution highlights the fact the onus remains on the country of origin to improve the social welfare system in order to

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disengage from the practice.\textsuperscript{147} When the 1995 self-imposed deadline loomed ahead, the government passed “The Special Law on the Adoption Promotion and Procedure,” which encouraged domestic adoption without examination of the existing goal to gradually end transnational adoption.\textsuperscript{148} The number of children domestically and internationally adopted from 1995 to 2005 are shown in Table 3. The table illustrates the languishing nature of domestic adoption in Korean society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overseas</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2,287</td>
<td>1,564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2,365</td>
<td>1,694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,436</td>
<td>1,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td>1,686</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2,409</td>
<td>1,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2,443</td>
<td>1,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2,057</td>
<td>1,412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2,080</td>
<td>1,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>2,180</td>
<td>1,025</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Overseas and Domestic Adoption of Korean Children (1995 – 2003)\textsuperscript{149}

In 1997, the Korean government announced a new 20-year plan to progressively end transnational adoption by the year 2020.\textsuperscript{150} One year later, an estimated 2,180 children were placed for international adoption, while domestic adoptions lagged below 1,500.\textsuperscript{151}

Nearly three decades after the initial controversy over “exporting” children, in July 2006,

\textsuperscript{147} See Kim, D. S., “Contextualizing Adoption from a Korean Perspective.”
\textsuperscript{148} Sarri, et al., “Goal displacement and dependency in South Korean-United States intercountry adoption.”
\textsuperscript{149} Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Overseas Koreans Foundation in Kim, D.S., “Contextualizing Adoption from a Korean Perspective,” 18
the Ministry of Health and Welfare announced new measures to encourage domestic adoption, including monetary incentives for domestic adoptive parents, government subsidies for orphanages, and allowance of single parent adoptive parents.\footnote{152} To encourage domestic adoption, in 2007 the Ministry of Health and Welfare introduced an adoption quota limiting overseas adoption.\footnote{153} In 2008, the Korean government announced its new goal of terminating intercountry adoptions by 2012, which would mark the beginning of the country’s sixth decade as a “sending country.”\footnote{154} The country has yet to see the effects of this new goal, but the rates for children adopted to the United States in 2009 remained steady at 1,080 annually in comparison to 2007, when 938 children were adopted to the U.S.\footnote{155}

Government overtures to end the nation’s nearly sixty-year engagement with intercountry adoption has yet to come to fruition. However, I suggest that policymakers remain keenly aware of how the global spotlight may raise renewed questions concerning its “babies for exports.” This stems from when new adoption guidelines, otherwise known as the Special Adoption Law, were passed on June 29, 2011. Effective January 2012, the legislation aimed to shift Korea’s previous emphasis on adoption promotion to focus on family preservation. The \textit{Joong Ang Daily} reports: “The new law will also expand rights for single mothers and adoptees. Under the law, adoptees gain greater

access to birth records and women will have a seven-day period to deliberate on whether
to keep or relinquish their child. Korea currently has no such limitation.”

I suggest that these measures were strategically implemented prior to the convening of the 123rd
International Olympic Committee Session because Korea was one of the top three nations
selected to host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. Even as some may argue the Special
Adoption Law’s passage remains a coincidence and that Korea could not predict that
Pyeongchang, Korea would host the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, I surmise that the
government recalled the scandal that plagued their hosting of the 1988 Summer Olympic
Games, when the West castigated the nation for exporting children. Consequently, this
tenuous link between the Olympic global spotlight and adoption cannot be easily
dismissed. To do so would overlook the ways in which various systems and institutions
remain intertwined. Further, as a nation whose become known for hallyu (The Korean
Wave) and Samsung, renewed notoriety over its adoption program would serve as a
reminder of the nation’s past as a developing nation. A return to the global spotlight
following thirty years after the initial controversy would engender similar shame that led
to the temporary suspensions of adoptees in 1988. Consequently, even as the Korean state
makes overtures to focus on family preservation, it is reminiscent of years past when the
government attempted to lower and even end Korean intercountry adoption beginning in
the last decade of the twentieth century.

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156 Seung-hye Yim, "Korea Passes Law to Change Adoption Policy," Korea JoongAng Daily, July 1, 2011,
The legislation’s language was crafted not only by policymakers, but also included a coalition of single
mothers and adult adoptees.
From Outcasts to Overseas Koreans: The Shift in Adoptees’ Location in Korean Society

As Korea seeks to terminate its international adoption participation, the government simultaneously seeks to reincorporate these previously marked bodies into the nation. In 1998, then President Kim Dae Jung apologized to adoptees, reflecting a reverse shift from labeling adoptees as Korean outcasts to “overseas Koreans.”\(^{157}\) As “overseas Koreans,” adoptees reenter the Korean nation even though “they do not have any connection at all neither to Korea nor to things Korean, and nor to any overseas Korean community.”\(^ {158}\) In this process, adoptees regain access to a national Korean identity that was once only accessible to ethnic Koreans raised by Korean parents. This is buttressed by adoptees access to the F-4 visa and the revision of the Nationality Law in April 2010, which allows dual citizenship and becomes effective January 1, 2011.\(^ {159}\)

Eleana J. Kim notes the F-4 visa “allows adoptees, as overseas Koreans, to stay in Korea for up to two years with rights to work, make financial investments, buy real estate, and obtain medical insurance and pensions.”\(^ {160}\) The visa also exempts male adoptees from compulsory military service as well as disallows voting in elections.\(^ {161}\) In April 2011, the first thirteen Korean adoptees obtained their dual citizenship.\(^ {162}\)

Incorporating adoptees as “Korean” subjects transgresses the boundaries established by the biopolitical technology of transnational adoption and ignores their new national identities as Swedes and

\(^{157}\) Sarri, et al., “Goal displacement and dependency in South Korean-United States intercountry adoption”; Kim, Y.-k., “Adoption Restrictions to be Removed.”

\(^{158}\) Hübinette, *The Korean Adoption Issue Between Modernity and Coloniality...*, 162.


\(^{161}\) Hübinette, *The Korean Adoption Issue Between Modernity and Coloniality...*, 166.

Americans, for example. In this “claiming,” Tobias Hübinette argues the “Korean nation state is reterritorializing its deterritorialized compatriots.”\(^{163}\) Not only do adoptees gain subject status in that they are refigured within the overseas Korean diaspora, but this reterritorialization negates their subjectivity because of their automatic inclusion within the diaspora following their previous expulsion from the nation.

Yet, dual citizenship raises questions concerning the veracity of adoption and the documents that aided adoptees’ migration to the West. Speaking on whether dual citizenship is important for adoptees, Lydia, an interview respondent involved in the adult adoptee counterpublic, noted:

> That’s a tricky question. I’m a strong proponent of adoptees having rights in their countries of origins and the countries where they end up. So yes, but not necessarily dual citizenship as its been carried out in Korea for Korean adoptees. The citizenship relies on their orphan hojuk, which are a lie. And so you know, a lot of this is, if I had my druthers, we’d go back and not have fake orphan hojusks. But that legal fiction is really problematic for me because it’s going to create problems in the long run. There are children who find their families and it’s sort of gives the existing system a pass. Like just keep lying, they need this fake document so that they can come back and use it.\(^{164}\)

Her concern regarding accepting the legal fictions of adoption requires adoptees’ location in the Korean diaspora to become complicated. In other words, if dual citizenship and even the F-4 visa remains predicated upon the falsities in adoption records, what does this mean for adoptees who have reunited with their birth families? For example, reflecting on her own familial ties to Korea during an interview, Susan said:

> I’m uncomfortable with dual citizenship with regard to how the Korean government recognizes us as Korean citizens, but not necessarily as the children of our parents. Though it recognizes the orphan hojuk, it doesn’t necessarily recognize my family registry for those who have reunited or for those of us who have not reunited, but who care about this kind of recognition of that

\(^{163}\) Hübinette, *Comforting an Orphaned Nation…*, 195.

\(^{164}\) Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
kinship...For instance my mother right now is trying to find a way to add me to her registry. She can’t do that because I was illegally registered as an orphan [by the orphanage]...And she can’t register me as her child. If I do dual citizenship it’s not a way to sponsor her or recognize her, it will be further reification of my so-called orphan status. It will be further government recognition of that orphan hojuk identity, which is a false, kidnapped identity.165

Thus, the extension of dual citizenship and position of adoptees as “overseas Koreans” does not erase the persistent legacy of adoption. Dual citizenship obscures the processes both internal and external to the state that facilitated the adoption of adult adoptees. In particular by bestowing the gift of dual citizenship and even the F-4 visa to adoptees, the Korean government seeks to erase its complicity in removing multiple generations of children from the nation.

I suggest that the Korean government’s embrace of adoptees’ as overseas Koreans is rooted in its emerging commitments to multiculturalism. In particular, the nation has begun to rethink what it means to be “Korean” given the emergence of a Kosian (고시안) population, the products of relationships between a Korean man and immigrant bride from China or Southeast Asian country. Within the language of multiculturalism, overseas Korean discourse reconfigures adoptees as transnational, privileged migrants able to operate with ease in Western culture. Aiding this construction is the fact that English is the native language for an estimated two-thirds of adoptees, while adoptees sent to Europe boast bi- or even tri-lingual capabilities. Jun-Kyung Lee writes: “We are witnessing the very incipient stage of a process of gradual de-ethnicization of Koreanness, as Korean identity is being broadened to include plural cultures and multiple

165 Interview with author on August 14, 2012.
Lee further contends: “‘Koreanness,’ beyond its exclusive association with a single ethnicity, must be defined as a social, cultural, economic, and political identity that would include subjects of multiple ethnicities. We may call this process the ‘multi-ethnicization of Koreaness.’”

*Re/racialization and Consumption: New Adoptee Markets*

As adoptees returned to the “motherland,” the Korean government, adoption agencies and Korean organizations discovered a new cottage industry. This burgeoning assemblage further extends the reach of the transnational adoption industrial complex to a multi-million dollar industry that expands over the adoptee’s lifetime from entrance into the orphanage to adulthood. For example, adoption agencies’ post adoption service programs may include “motherland tours” to Korea to encourage adoptive families and adult adoptees to visit Korea and consume “Korean” culture, which remains heavily mediated by the agency itself. While providing support to adult adoptees returning to Korea is valuable, the irony arises when the organizations who disciplined one’s body to become an adoptable child is now working to discipline the now adult’s body into a “Korean” after years identifying as a Westerner.

Simultaneously operating within these spaces is the financial support of Korean corporations, such as Samsung, and global organizations like Nike to support the

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167 Ibid., 209.
The location of adoptees as a new market to capitalize upon is an emerging assemblage in understanding the circular nature of the adoption industrial complex. The once cast off children of the nation return as consumers, renewed citizens, and even adoptive parents. Furthermore, adult adoptee organizations may explicitly or implicitly shape the growth of the sustained adoption industrial complex by creating new economic markets of consumption of ethnic “Koreanness” or understandings of what it means to be “an adoptee.” But, access to these spaces, such as International Korean Adoptee Association Gatherings, remains marked by financial and socioeconomic success as travel to mini-gatherings and the tri-annual Gatherings in Seoul, Korea remain costly endeavors.

Adoptees’ negotiation of their unique positions as overseas Koreans is seen with the rise of adult adoptee run organizations operating in Korea, such as InKas (International Korean Adoptee Service), Adoptee Solidarity in Korea, and G.O.A.’L (Global Overseas’ Adoptees Link), as well as local and national adult adoptee organizations operating in receiving countries. Even as I mention these adult adoptee organizations, I recognize that I run the risk of charging them with profiting from this new assemblage. However, my interest rests in how the growth of these organizations inside and outside of Korea serves as another avenue for bodies to become disciplined. For example, as part of the 2010 IKAA Gathering, adoptee participants were provided with a Code of Conduct that noted: “Participants…are required, under the Code of

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168 In addition to the corporate sponsorship, the Ministry of Health and Welfare has sponsored the First International Symposium of Korean Adoption Studies, which was attached to the 2007 International Korean Adoptee Association (IKAA) Gathering in Seoul as well as provided support for subsequent IKAA Gatherings in 2010.
Conduct, to behave at all times in a way that upholds values of integrity, mutual respect, honesty, and common sense.” The Code of Conduct noted: “Do not orchestrate or participate in demonstrations or other disruptive behavior on-site at the Lotte Hotel.” This could be seen as a direct response to adult adoptee participation in protests concerning Korea’s continued intercountry adoption participation and lack of support to unwed mothers during the 2007 IKAA Gathering. In addition, organizations such as Adoptee Solidarity in Korea and TRACK are seen by many as provocative in their advocacy and commitment towards increasing rights of adult adoptees and birth families in Korea. These instances speak to Eleana J. Kim’s assertion that the “community has served to silence alternative views or identifications in the name of adoptee identity politics.”

Conclusion

This chapter exposed the origins of the transnational adoption industrial complex and demonstrates how children are rendered commodities. While the American military industrial complex and Korean social welfare state generated the conditions to create adoptable bodies, orphanages and adoption agencies in Korea and the United States further constructed the “adoptable orphan.” These sites operated in conjunction with American legislation to ease the flow of children and monetary exchange between the two nations. As each site of the transnational adoption industrial complex became operationalized to create a sustain culture and economy of adoption, Korea’s approach

169 Discussing the ways in which Korean media documents the IKAA Gatherings in Seoul, Eleana J. Kim found the planning committee sought to “manage and contain political interpretations of the event.”; Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging, 159.

170 Ibid.
typified “successful” international adoption programs. Adoption became a rote process whereby government and non-governmental organizations and actors facilitated the exchange of children with ease and contributed to Korea’s ability to maintain a weak welfare state.

Korean transnational adoption industrial complex’s distinction as a specialized assemblage positions the nation at the forefront of standards to understand intercountry adoption. Elizabeth C. Dunn writes: “[S]tandards thus illustrate the ways in which normative governmentality claims to reveal truth, to transform economic structures, and to be applicable across geographies with diverse histories and institutions.”\(^{171}\) This normative governmentality creates multiple, simultaneous discourses that regulate via internalized discipline within institutions. Standards produce a false sense of transparency to encourage the continued discipline that maintains the adoption industrial complex. Standardization also underscores how assemblages are also “capable of variable replication.”\(^{172}\) After reviewing the multiple mechanisms informing Korea’s TAIC, I argue that transnational adoption cannot be viewed as a static act without political, economic, or social impact within “sending” and “receiving” countries. The “Cadillac of adoption” serves as an example of best practices for other “sending” nation programs to ensure a streamlined service for American adoption agencies and families. In other words, varying, and sometimes unequal, power arrangements are sustained and redeployed in other global instances of international adoption. Smaller assemblages of the


\(^{172}\) Delanda, A New Philosophy of Society…, 44.
Korean transnational adoption industrial complex may become reconstituted into another adoption industrial complex formed from the relationship between various sending countries and receiving countries.

The worldwide implications of the industrial complex are seen in how governments react with revised adoption legislation upon criticisms a regarding the stealing and exploitation of children. Arguably learning from the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympic Games coverage, prior to the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic games, the number of adoptees from China to the United States lowered from its peak of 7,903 children in 2005 to 5,453 in 2007. During 2008 only 3,912 children from China entered the United States. In addition, China tightened its transnational adoption laws in 2007 to limit adoption to heterosexual couples.\textsuperscript{173} From this tightening of regulations it becomes clear that sending countries remain concerned with how negative publicity impacts their geopolitical world standing.

Scholars and policymakers alike must be attune to how the existing sending country programs in China and Ethiopia, for example, contribute to the adoption industrial complex’s sustained development. While each country has varying levels of social welfare infrastructure, I contend that the various nodes in the complex become reconstituted to preserve intercountry adoption participation. As scholars continue to investigate these specific country programs, aspects of the transnational adoption industrial complex continually become reconstituted in response to new criticisms. In

particular, the worldwide implications of the industrial complex is seen in the ways in which governments react with revised adoption legislation upon criticisms regarding the stealing and exploitation of children. For instance, responding to charges of trafficking of children and reproductive coercion, nations may temporarily suspend intercountry adoptions as in the cases of Vietnam and Guatemala. From this tightening of regulations or the suspension of programs it becomes clear that sending countries remain concerned with how negative publicity impacts their geopolitical world standing. Further, while national governments and adoptive parents often cite the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Inter-Country Adoption, “receiving” countries, including the United States, still maintain ties to “sending” countries who have yet to sign the Convention.  

The Hague Convention is provides worldwide standards to safeguard transnational adoption as a practice that serves “the best interests of children” and requires “sending nations” first find a home for the child within their nation prior to rendering a child adoptable for international placement. All nations “party to the Convention [also must] establish a Central Authority to be the authoritative source of information and point in that country.” Consequently, even as various protections are enacted in attempts to ensure the commodification and rote

174 The Hague Convention is provides worldwide standards to safeguard transnational adoption as a practice that serves “the best interests of children” and requires “sending nations” first find a home for the child within their nation prior to rendering a child adoptable for international placement. All nations “party to the Convention [also must] establish a Central Authority to be the authoritative source of information and point in that country”; Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Understanding the Hague Convention,” Intercountry Adoption, 2013, accessed April 08, 2013, http://adoption.state.gov/hague_convention/overview.php.

exchange of children does not occur, transnational adoption’s machine-like quality continues into the twenty-first century.
Chapter 2: The Making and Unmaking of Adoptees’ Citizenship

“Americans want to believe that immigration to the United States proves the universality of the nation’s liberal democratic principles; we resist examining the role that American world power has played in the global structures of migration. We like to believe that our immigration policy is generous, but we also resent the demands made upon us by other and we think we owe outsiders nothing.”
– Mae M. Ngai

The transnational adoption industrial complex made it possible for adoptees to enter the United States from the 1950s onwards in ways that were not available to other immigrants from Asia. I suggest that adoptees were migration exceptions as the dependent children to (white) American citizens. As part of this process, the rhetoric of adoption as a humanitarian act flourished with the United States portrayed as epitomizing freedom and opportunity. The promise of American democracy was juxtaposed with the perceived “communist threat” in “sending” countries. This meant that adoption was considered a better alternative to life in Korea. Many children felt the brunt of this rhetoric as they were told adoption was in their “best interests” and that if not for the kindness and generosity from their parents, they would have fallen through the cracks of economic poverty and degradation in the land of their birth.

Yet, even as the road to American citizenship was easily paved for adoptees, adoptive parents were responsible for naturalizing the child upon adoption to the United States. Failure to do so had deep ramifications, leaving adoptees undocumented and available for deportation to a birth country virtually unknown. While the scenario may seem to be only a nightmare, for some adoptees aspects of this situation are all too real. For example, Lim Sang Keum migrated to the United States at age twelve from South Korea in the late 1970s. Mixed race, Lim was a product of American militarism and imperialism. For over thirty years, he lived his life as an American known as Russell Green. However, unlike stories of “saved” Korean orphans, Green’s story is marked by a failure by the American government, adoption agency, and (prospective) adoptive parents to protect his rights as a child. A few months after his adoption, his adoptive parents returned him to the agency prior to the finalization of his adoption. Instead of a finalized adoption, this disruption resulted in Green’s entrance into the American foster care system. As a result, he became lost in the cracks and never became a naturalized U.S. citizen.2 Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, Caitlin Kee, and Kristin R. Pak note how at least thirty of the most pressing cases of deportation have garnered media attention.3 Kwon Dobbs, et al. write:

Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link in Seoul, South Korea reports 10 Korean deported adoptees visiting its office for help since 2000. KoRoot, an NGO and guesthouse in Seoul, has brought public attention to three deported Korean adoptees in the past year. One of these adoptees, Tim Yee, was discovered homeless in Itaewon and in need of medical attention.4

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4 Ibid.
As multiple cases of deportation garnered the attention of the adult adoptee community, adult adoptee activists and their allies sought retroactive citizenship for individuals like Green. While Green was not legally adopted due to a disrupted adoption upon arrival, I include him in this discussion because his entrance into the nation remains predicated upon adoption. Unlike Artyom Savelyev, the seven-year-old Russian adoptee, sent back to Russia by his adoptive mother, this disrupted adoption began Green’s pathway as an undocumented immigrant in the American foster care system.\(^5\)

In order to understand the significance of adult adoptees’ ineligibility for retroactive naturalization, I highlight the epigraph quote from Mae M. Ngai. Scholars, adoptees, adoptive parents and adoption professionals cannot forget nor overlook the impact of the American military industrial complex’s role in creating the conditions of the transnational adoption industrial complex. This chapter examines how the boundaries of the state extend outwards, yet remain closed to a select population of migrants.\(^6\)

Interrogating concepts of national belonging and citizenship, I engage with the work of Amy Kaplan concerning how the boundaries of culture at home and abroad are inextricably linked.\(^7\) Specifically, I am interested in her examination of how the Other becomes constructed against a backdrop of “domestic” and “foreign.” Utilizing domesticity as a metaphor, Kaplan traces the process of domestication of the non-white populace within the nation’s borders and abroad. My project shares Kaplan’s interest in

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the examination of the blurred boundaries between the United States and Korea. I argue that the adoption of Korean children is similar to the domestication of colonial subjects. This chapter bridges the understanding of the construction of a feminized Korea in need of monitoring and “help” to rescue its “unwanted orphans” with the domestication of the feminized adoptee as the acceptable Asian migrant. The adoptee is feminized as adoptive parents are positioned as the “saviors” of the child. The adoptee serves as a stand-in for the feminized Korean nation in need of aid from the masculine protector of the United States. The adoptee as feminine reinforces the ways in which their citizenship and legal standing is directly dependent on their adoptive parents.

To this end, I juxtapose understandings of Christian Americanism and adoptees’ entrance to the nation against a broader history of Asian American migration to the United States. I posit that the entrance of adoptees, which is facilitated through specialized legislation, represents a marked departure from the heavily regulated migration of Asian bodies from the period of 1875 to 1965. In many ways, adoptees serve as a harbinger for immigration legislation changes occurring in the mid-twentieth century onwards. First, drawing upon critical race and feminist scholarship, I explore the ways in which race impacts the citizenship naturalization process. I examine how real and imagined boundaries remain constructions aimed to exclude, include, and regulate a populace. By deconstructing racial hierarchies, I also complicate theorizations on critical whiteness by analyzing how adoptive parent white privilege impacts adoptees’ access to naturalization. Second, I reveal the inconsistencies in how de jure and de facto citizenship operates within the Asian American community in my examination of adoptees’ entrance
into the nation. To aid this line of inquiry, I draw upon a feminist intersectional approach to account for the varied positionings of adoptees as privileged and subordinated subjects as migrants and citizens. Lastly, I interrogate recent calls by adult adoptees and their allies to extend retroactive citizenship to internationally adopted adults who were not naturalized as minors.

The Legible Citizen-Adoptee as an E-Raced Person

To understand the linkages between citizenship, imperialism, and migration, a deconstruction of the racial hierarchies produced within and exported by the United States is necessary. Critical race scholar Charles Mills notes that racial boundaries are upheld by the existence of an implicit racial contract, which is naturalized within the social contract to regulate racial difference. Mills notes: “[The] Racial Contract restricts the possession of this natural freedom and equality to white men.” Buttressing understandings of the legible subject, the racial contract provides the tools in which white supremacy is solidified as a de facto practice. The contract simultaneously institutes an implicit and sometimes explicit racial hierarchy and illustrates the construction of race as an invention to secure white hegemony in its formalized deployment in society. Under this racial contract, a dichotomy of citizen versus non-citizen, white versus non-white, arose and continues to frame how government and institutions monitor non-white bodies. Historicizing American conceptualizations of race, Michelle Wright notes:

9 Ibid., 16.
10 Ibid., 63.
All of these dialectics begin with a Negro Other and the white subject who together compose an interdependent dichotomy, a dichotomy that is then denied so that the white subject can retroactively be posited as wholly independent in his derivation – a seemingly corollary that is in fact essential to the Western concept of the subject as a wholly self-actualized individual.11

This dichotomy undergirds American thinking of racial difference as the non-white Other remains “the exact antithesis of the white European (or, more specifically, German) subject.”12 The racialized person becomes a non-person, rendered illegible within this framework. Examining the way in which the racial binary bestows legibility is critical to understand how adoptees’ gain white privilege vis-à-vis their adoption into white families.

Tracing the ways in which adoptees operate as culturally white and purveyors of white privilege, this section begins with a deconstruction of “whiteness.” Since whiteness functions as the norm as seen in Mills’ discussion of the racial contract, whiteness is also marked as invisible.13 In my desire to complicate whiteness, I draw upon Ruth Frankenberg, who argues: “Naming ‘whiteness’ displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance.”14 Acknowledging the ways in which whiteness functions in the United States as an unmarked property provides greater means to examine the constructedness of race. To this end, Ladelle McWhorter asserts: “[T]he invention of the white race was, in effect, the invention of morphological race itself, a conception of race that was almost completely detached from both language and

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12 Ibid., 8.
geographical origin, one that relied almost entirely on bodily marks as the essence of racial membership.”\textsuperscript{15} By framing whiteness within an “us” versus “them” (non-white) dichotomy, the power of white supremacy arose in its unmarked and non-distinguishable nature as traditional “non-white,” yet European nationalities (i.e. Irish, Hungarian, Italian) became “white” at the end of the nineteenth century. Bestowing whiteness to these formally marked European bodies ensured white supremacy by creating a larger body politic invested in maintaining the status quo. Whiteness became inextricably linked to national belonging. By creating a populace eligible to utilize and exercise their legal rights, American legal tradition also curtailed other groups’ ability to exert their de jure citizenship rights in de facto racist practices. In what follows, I further deconstruct whiteness as we grapple with how adoptees access white privilege vis-à-vis their adoptive parents.

In my efforts to locate adoptees’ entrance into the nation, I argue adoptees’ are bounded to their adoptive parents vis-à-vis their existence as a feminized stand-in for Korea. I draw upon Martha Gardner’s deployment of the term “derivative citizenship” in order to understand how adoptees have access to the nation as dependents of their (white) adoptive parents. Specifically, I am interested in how for Gardner, “European immigrant women who could meet the race requirements for naturalization became citizens upon marriage to an American citizen.”\textsuperscript{16} Adoptees as children are similar to European immigrant women in that adoptees’ raced Asian bodies met the requirements for naturalization because of their adoptive parents’ whiteness and American citizenship.

\textsuperscript{15} Ladelle McWhorter, \textit{Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 73.
\textsuperscript{16} Gardner, \textit{The Qualities of a Citizen…}, 24.
Due to their representation of the future as American citizens, adoptees gained access to American naturalization vis-à-vis their “as if” kin status. David Eng writes: “[The adoptee] helps to consolidate the affective boundaries of the white, heteronormative middle-class nuclear family.”

While I will discuss how adoptees operate as biological surrogates within the white family in the next chapter, for the purposes of interrogating adoptees’ citizenship, it is important to note that this affective labor is reliant upon locating adoptees as children. Consequently, by mimicking the heteronormative, white family, adoptive parents and their adopted offspring could circumvent restrictions governing the immigration of racialized bodies from Asia. Gardner writes: “Citizen children are not only born or naturalized, they are also made citizens through the naturalization of their parents…the children of citizens acquired derivative citizenship and the right to enter the country outside the reach of immigration restriction.”

Nevertheless, I must remind readers that in countries including Korea, citizenship was not automatically bestowed to the illegitimate children of American serviceman and Asian women. Speaking to this legal barrier for many Amerasian children, Gardner notes: “Legally children derived citizenship from their father, and, before 1934, assumed their mother’s citizenship only in the case of illegitimacy. Beginning in 1907, minor children were required to travel to the United States within five years of obtaining their majority in order to preserve their jus sanguinis, citizenship rights.” Discussing the 1934 Equal Nationality Act and instances of illegitimacy, she further reports: “A child’s status had to be legitimated by her father before she would be entitled to legal recognition and

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19 Ibid.
derivative citizenship.”20 In comparison, adoptees’ derivative citizenship reinforces how their naturalization rests on their ability to ease the reproduction of their adoptive parents’ families. Discussing deportations and alien residents in the United States in the mid-twentith century, Ngai writes: “In stressing family values, moreover, the policy [to suspend deportations] recognized only one kind of family, the intact nuclear [Anglo-Saxon] family residing in the United States, and ignored transnational families.”21 Thus, adoptees’ ability to aid the reproduction of the white normative family positions them differently than other migrants. To this end, adoptees’ citizenship is bounded to the ethnosexual – the intersection of racial/ethnic and sexual boundaries – due to their status as derivative citizens.22 Further, linked to the white, normative family, adoptees were considered exceptional migratory subjects under the tutelage of upstanding and presumably Christian American citizens who would instill American values.

To aid my examination of adoptees’ derivative citizenship, I investigate feminists’ critical engagements with T.H. Marshall’s theorization on liberal citizenship.23 Marshall understands liberal citizenship as a guarantee of economic, political and social rights, which encompass individual rights to freedom, self-determination, political participation, and access to a minimum of social and economic welfare. However, Marshall notes: “Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All

20 Ibid., 231.
21 Ngai, Impossible Subjects…, 87.
22 Joane Nagel, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersecions, Forbidden Frontiers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Global, local, militarized, colonized spaces are all arenas where ethnosexual intersections arise. Joanne Nagel notes that spatial and legal boundaries work towards disciplinary bodies and populations in specific legal, social and economic arenas as seen in the regulation of intermarriage, for example.
who possess the status is endowed. There is no universal principle that determines what those rights and duties shall be.”  

Recognizing the inequalities produced by citizenship, Marshall further writes:

> For modern contract is essentially an agreement between men who are free and equal in status, though not necessarily in power. Status was not eliminated from the social system. Differential status, associated with class, function and family, was replaced by the single uniform status of citizenship, which provided the foundation of equality on which the structure of inequality could be built.

I find Marshall to be clearly aware of the discrepancies of access to de jure and even de facto citizenship. In this respect, I agree with Ruth Lister, who notes citizenship is a contested concept that “involves both agency and structural constraints and the interplay between the two.” For Lister, a women-friendly citizenship disrupts the exclusionary and disciplinary techniques that regulate an individual’s ability to exercise their full rights as citizens. Lister argues that one must destabilize traditional citizenship in order to interrogate how an individual’s multiple positionalities affect one’s access to full citizenship. My interest is similar to Lister as I seek to expose the inherent contradictions that constrain adult adoptees’ agency as naturalized citizens of the nation.

Recognizing the variegated access individuals have to exert their de jure citizenship rights, I am also interested in how the sexual contract interacts with the racial contract. Providing a feminist critique to the social contract, Carol Pateman contends: “[S]exual difference is the difference between freedom and subjection.” She adds:

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25 Ibid., 21.
“Women are property, but also persons’ women are held both to possess and to lack the capacities required for contract – and contract demands that their womanhood be both denied and affirmed.”

I situate this argument with critical race scholarship concerning whiteness and citizenship. Cheryl I. Harris contends: “White identity and whiteness were sources of privilege and protection; their absence meant being the object of property.”

Harris further argues: “Whiteness…property if by ‘property’ one means all of a person’s legal rights.”

George Lipsitz echoes Harris, writing: “Whiteness is invested in, like property, but it is also a means of accumulating property and keeping it from others.”

Property no longer means tangible, physical property. Rather, property becomes linked to the ability to exercise one’s rights and autonomy over oneself. To return to feminist critiques of citizenship, the notion that white women were both property as mothers, wives and daughters, yet also property owners of individual rights, exposes citizenship’s contradictions.

Controlling the Other: Migrating Asian Bodies

As I investigate adoptees’ derivative citizenship, this section historicizes adoptee migration within broader understandings of Asian migration to the United States. This project is in dialogue with scholars examining how Asian bodies are subject to processes

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29 Ibid., 60.
31 Ibid., 280.
that regulate their racialization in order to fit into American conceptualizations of race.\textsuperscript{33} Existing in tension with the white/black binary rubric to understand race relations, Asian bodies became subsumed into language discussing their “whitening” or “browning” of the nation.\textsuperscript{34} For example, when Chinese first settled in Mississippi they initially received treatment similar to African Americans in the segregated South. Stephen E. Cornell and Douglas Hartmann write that when Chinese sought reclassification as “whites,” ethnic Chinese “alter[ed] their own behavior and relationships to more closely fit White models and [developed] a set of parallel institutions that could serve their own community in ways similar to the institutions serving whites.”\textsuperscript{35} Nevertheless, Sucheng Chan notes: “Chinese children were not admitted into white schools in Mississippi until 1950.”\textsuperscript{36} Such a disruption of the racial contract demonstrates how racial classifications were fluid, even as aspects of girding the maintenance of racial hierarchies remained static.

Even as the Mississippi Chinese sought to assimilate into white American culture, they, like other Asian ethnics in the nineteenth century, disturbed the racial contract found in the United States. Unable to neatly fit Asian bodies into the binary categories of black or white, the American government sought to regulate and control entry from Asia.


\textsuperscript{34} O’Brien, \textit{The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans Living Beyond the Racial Divide}. For example, while discussing mixed race black/white Americans, Naomi Zack suggests such deviation from the black/white schema of racial inheritance is debilitating because the assertion of a non-monoracial identity was impossible in the early- to mid-twentieth century as American society prohibited the ambivalent identities of mixed-race people; Naomi Zack, \textit{Race and Mixed Race} (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).


\textsuperscript{36} Sucheng Chan, \textit{Asian Americans: An Interpretive History} (Boston: Twayne, 1991).
I contend this is directly linked to racialized assumptions regarding Asian immigrants’ “foreignness” and unassimilability. In doing so, the American government also created the first undocumented immigrants.\(^{37}\) Interested in Asian ethnics ability to enter the nation and obtain/exercise citizenship rights, I limit my investigation to the legal policies that regulate Asian bodies. My interest rests in how Asians challenged American legal norms predicated on a black/white binary and how adoptees were cast as exceptions.

Migration from Asia lacked an overarching national law to regulate and monitor the number of Asian ethnics entering the United States until the end of the nineteenth century, when multiple immigration acts targeting Asian migration were enacted by U.S. Congress.\(^{38}\) Between 1790 and 1870, naturalization practices differed at the state level. For example, “California could rigidly refuse naturalization to Chinese residents while Massachusetts routinely granted citizenship to Chinese from the 1850s onwards.”\(^{39}\) Nevertheless, beginning on the West Coast, a series of discriminatory state laws were enacted to limit the numbers of Chinese and Asian Indians, for example, in cities and communities. Such xenophobia impacted Asians, more generally, via the denial of naturalized citizenship and pathologization as “alien” residents of the United States. The federal enactment of the Page Law (1875) saw a specific Asian ethnic group targeted – Chinese – under national legislation. In particular, the law implicitly focused on curbing the immigration of Chinese women, who were deemed prostitutes because many of the

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\(^{37}\) Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*…


women living in Chinatowns across the United States were trafficked into prostitution. A fear of the growing number of Chinese men working in U.S. industries, such as railroad and mining construction, also fuelled notions of a Yellow Peril, whereby Chinese laborers were extinguishing job opportunities from “real,” implicitly white, Americans and depressing wages. This fear culminated with the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. This legislation continued with the Geary Act of 1892 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1902. During this period, Japanese migration flourished until the 1908 Gentleman’s Agreement, which halted issuing passports to Japanese laborers who sought entrance to the United States. Yet, even as this restrictive legislation became enacted, the Supreme Court upheld birthright citizenship of persons of Chinese descent in 1898.

Concerns over Asian migration culminated in legislation regulating the entrance and reproduction of Asian ethnic groups. First, the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act (Immigration Act) prohibited immigration from persons originating from “a geographical area that included South Asia from Arabia through Southeast Asia and the islands in the Indian and Pacific Ocean, but excluded the American possessions of the Philippines and Guam.” The 1917 immigration act also banned Asian Indian migration. Second, a separate “Ladies Agreement” was enacted in December 1919 between the United States and Japan, which effectively ended the admittance of “picture brides” to the United

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41 Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*.
States. This agreement began on March 1, 1920.\(^{45}\) Third, “the Quota Act of 1921 placed numerical limitations on immigration for the first time and set temporary quotes for each immigrant group based on national quotas.”\(^{46}\) Fourth, the 1924 Immigration Act included reduced quota limits and barred aliens ineligible for citizenship, “a euphemism that barred virtually all Asian immigration.”\(^{47}\) This law effectively curtailed Asian migration given the 1790 Naturalization Law.\(^{48}\)

As these early laws were promulgated to limit migration into the United States, the government also took steps to prevent the growth of subsequent generations of Asian Americans in the United States. To combat worries over interracial marriage, the nation enacted the 1922 Cable Act, which “stipulated that female U.S. citizens who married aliens ineligible to citizenship [Asian ethnics] would lose their own citizenship.”\(^{49}\) Sucheng Chan notes: “Women of European or African ancestry, who were eligible for naturalization, could regain their citizenship should they divorce or if their alien husbands died, but women of Asian ancestry could not since they themselves were racially ineligible for citizenship.”\(^{50}\) In 1932, an amendment to the Cable Act allowed any women regardless of race to restore their natal citizenship. The act was repealed in 1936. Nevertheless, in the case of women of Asian descent, Gardner notes: “Expatriated and excluded, Asian American and nonwhite (or nonblack) women who married men

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\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History*, 132.

\(^{48}\) In many ways, the law is neatly paired with enacted Alien Land Laws in California and other states in the 1910s and 1920s, which limited landholding to American citizens, prohibiting alien residents (i.e. individuals ineligible for citizenship) from landowning rights.

\(^{49}\) Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 106.

\(^{50}\) Ibid.
ineligible to citizenship were unable to avoid race-based exclusion policies; after 1922 they could not return to the United States.”

What is interesting about the language girding Asian migration is the way in which racialized terminology was deployed to describe people from Asia. Specifically, beginning in the with the April 1862 State of California act concerning Chinese coolie labor, persons of Chinese origin were defined as part of the “Mongolian” race. Ronald Takaki notes that the term “Mongolian” remained synonymous with “Asiatics,” “coolies,” and “Chinese.” Racialized terminology also separated East Asians from Filipinos, commonly labeled as “Malays.” This differentiation raised questions in California regarding the application of anti-miscegenation laws in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, by the beginning of the twentieth century, migrants from Asia became subsumed under race-based legislation as nationally motivated legislation against Chinese laid the groundwork for subsequent immigration laws. This consolidation of various Asian populations under the term “Oriental” is best demonstrated by how Asian immigrants were processed and detained at Angel Island. The immigration station delineated the binary between “Occidentals” and “Orientals” in its housing. Angel Island, like the 1917 and 1924 immigration acts constructed a new concept of “Asian” or “Oriental” as a racial category. To this end, legal scholar Daniel Kanstroom notes: “[Both

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.; For an understanding of how this binary operates in American Orientalist legal rhetoric, please see: Gotanda, “Exclusion and Inclusion: Immigration and American Orientalism.”
the 1917 and 1924 immigration acts] made racial exclusion a central component of twentieth-century immigration, naturalization, and deportation law.”

A more explicit restriction of Asian migration occurred with the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, which excluded Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Asian Indian, and Filipino immigration. David Palumbo-Liu argues: “[T]he 1934 act marks a significant attempt to uniformly bar Asian immigration, and redefines America’s notion of ‘Asian’.” This would mark the first time Filipinos became classified as “aliens” as previously they existed as U.S. nationals following the Spanish-American War. Nearly ten years later, the U.S. government further complicated understandings of birthright citizenship with the forced internment of first and second generation Japanese Americans.

As immigration restrictions flourished, Asian Americans utilized the U.S. court system to challenge the legality for exclusion and marginalization. For example, the Naturalization Law of 1790 was challenged in the Supreme Court in *Ozawa v. United States* (1922) and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923). The Court ruled against Takuro Ozawa, an ethnic Japanese United States resident, because Ozawa was “neither a free white person nor someone of African descent.” The Court’s decision affirmed Asian Otherness, while at the same time, upheld the existing black/white racial schema. The following year, the Supreme Court heard *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind* (1923) regarding the eligibility of Asian Indians for United States citizenship. Prior to the early half of the twentieth century, European Americans acknowledged Asian Indians as “full-

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56 Kanstroom, *Deportation Nation: Outsiders in American History*, 133.
58 Ibid.
59 Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History*, 93.
blooded Aryans” because they were thought to be part of the “Mediterranean branch of the Caucasian family.” The Court found the term “Aryan” to only describe linguistic and not racial characteristics. Nevertheless, the decision noted that although Thind may be Aryan, he was nonetheless not white and not entitled to citizenship. Recognizing how Thind complicated “whiteness” and citizenship, Palumbo-Liu writes:

The Thind case of 1923 illustrates well the dilemma American racists faced in trying to exclude South Asians, and the elasticity with which they imbued the legal fabric of the United States. Several cases were brought before the courts arguing that Indians should be eligible for naturalization because, in the triadic categorization of race – Caucasian/Mongolian/Negro – they should, because of geographic and ethnographic reasons, be considered Caucasians.61

These cases located Asians outside of the nation, underscoring how the distinctions between domestic and foreign at home and abroad are inextricably linked. This was further demonstrated when courts examined the status of Filipinos in the United States. Even though they existed as U.S. nationals, Erika Lee and Judy Yung note: “A 1925 Supreme Court decision had ruled that Filipinos, like other Asians, were ineligible for citizenship.”62 In addition to these cases concerning naturalization, Asian immigrants also filed suits at the state level to assert their economic and political rights.63

Given the immigration restrictions, opportunities for naturalization did not arrive until the close of World War II. First, passage of the Magnuson Act of 1943 provided citizenship to the United States’ Chinese population.64 The Magnuson Act also overturned the exclusion of Chinese from entry to the United States with the

61 Palumbo-Liu, Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier, 39.
62 Lee and Yung, Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America, 288.
63 Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History.
64 Ibid.
establishment of a quota system. Second, naturalization was subsequently granted to Asian Indians and Filipinos in 1946 as well as Guamanians in 1950. Third, the 1952 Immigration and Naturalization Act provided all ethnic Asians with naturalization rights. At the same time, it also included immigrant quotas, which restricted the number of individuals migrating from Asia to 2,990. Only after the passage of 1965 Immigration Act were immigration restrictions eased for the Eastern hemisphere and the previous exclusionary laws, discussed earlier in this section, repealed. Lisa Lowe notes: “Immigration exclusion acts and naturalization laws have thus been not only means of regulating the terms of the citizen and the nation-state but also an intersection of the legal and political terms with an Orientalist discourse that defined Asians as culturally and racially ‘other’ in times when the United States was militarily and economically at war with Asia.”

Bearing this in mind, adoptees’ location as exceptions becomes clearer, when considering the ways in which adoptive parents sought to mitigate any restrictions or

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65 Ibid.
66 Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History, 146. At the same time these low quotas operated, the War Brides Act of 1947 aided female Asian migration to the United States; Shirley Jennifer Lim, A Feeling of Belonging: Asian American Women's Public Culture, 1930-1960 (New York: New York University Press, 2005). However, only Chinese women were included in the War Bride Act, while war brides from Japan and Korea entered through “special acts of Congress that established temporary windows of opportunity through which American soldiers could bring home their Asian wives”; Ji-Yeon Yuh, Beyond the Shadow of Camptown: Korean Military Brides in America (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 2. Additionally, Filipino nurses entered and sometimes settled in the United States as a result of their ability to enter the United States as skilled migrants through the U.S. Exchange Visitor Program prior to 1965; Catherine Ceniza Choy, Empires of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).
67 Following the 1965 Immigration Act, the United States saw the first influx of Asian refugees from Southeast Asia as a result of the Vietnam War. Additionally, the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 and the Refugee Assistance Act of 1980 aided migration from Southeast Asia; Zia, Asian American Dreams..., 51.
delays to their child’s naturalization as a U.S. citizen. Adoptees were thought of as “Americans,” while their wider Asian brothers and sisters were labeled as foreigners.

*The Exceptional Exception: Adoptees as Involuntary Immigrants*

The adoption of Korean children contradicts the exclusionary legislative practices. Beginning a decade prior to the 1965 Hart Cellars agreement, individual pieces of legislation alongside various refugee acts facilitated Korea-U.S. intercountry adoption practices. These adoption-related acts can be viewed as one of the first steps of liberalization of American immigration policies due to the Cold War. As Americans reconciled domestic race relation tensions against their paternalism in Asia, the fight for democracy saw a loosening of borders to save the most needy – orphans. Within this section I first discuss the application of a feminist intersectional approach to understanding adoptee migration and their status as flexible citizens.69 I explore the linkages between derivative citizenship and Christian Americanism with the honorary white status bestowed upon adoptees as almost white, but not quite. I then examine legislation that facilitated adoptees’ entrance into the United States, which promoted the circumvention of existing anti-Asian measures.

As I investigate adoptees’ derivative citizenship, I contend that identity categories such as race, class, and gender, are linked to the construction of the following concepts: nation, citizenship and family. My deployment of hybrid intersectionality is tied to how such categories and concepts impact on relationships between institutions, individuals, 

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69 See Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. 110
and nation-states within discussions of transnational adoption. I explore adoptees’ status as both privileged and subordinated subjects. Specifically, I juxtapose their raced bodies with the racialized legislative practices that regulated and informed the creation of the Korean adoptive family. I seek to expand the autoethnographic work of Lidia Anchisi and Holly Pearson, who explore how intersectionality operates within the lives of Korean adoptee scholars, in my interrogation of the wider adoptee community. In doing so, I draw upon feminist claims concerning the importance of the “politics of location.” I am interested in Chandra Mohanty’s concern in how “historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries” impact one’s self-definition. In the lives of adoptees, these real and imagined boundaries are continuously in dialogue with one another, regulating and informing an individual’s experience due to the differences found in de jure and de facto citizenship. Adoptees access to the nation is circumscribed by their status in the adoptive family. Understanding the disjunctures produced by adoptee bodies concerning access to citizenship and the nation will provide insight into the variegated positioning adoptees have in their lives as children versus adults to attaining and maintaining their legal standing in the United States.

Legislating Acceptability: Adoptees’ Entrance into the U.S.

Operating in conjunction with Christian Americanism are representations of adoptees as “orphans” or “refugees.” These depictions originate from the common generalizations of overseas adoption, whereby children are available for transnational adoption due to “armed conflicts, political and economic crises and social upheavals” as well as unwanted mixed race children of soldiers and local women. The trope of the adoptee as “orphan” and “refugee” continues to operate in adoption discourse. However, following the aftermath of the Vietnam War, refugee children cannot be adopted unless proof exists stating legal relinquishment and/or abandonment. This legal stipulation arose after the influx of abandoned children in orphanages gave rise to subsequent custody disputes between biological and adoptive parents regarding the Vietnamese children associated with Operation Babylift at the end of American involvement in Vietnam. Vietnamese parents, unsure of their own survival, placed their children in orphanages. Many of these individuals lived and the custody disputes arose because these parents never officially “abandoned” their children and viewed orphanage placement as a better alternative to ensure the care of their children during tenuous times.

In looking at language used by the United States government concerning international adoption, the term “orphan” is used to describe the legal status of the adoptee in order for an adoption to occur. The U.S. Department of State’s legal definition

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of “orphan” is: 1) The child has no parents due to the death or disappearance of, abandonment or desertion by, or separation from or loss of both parents; or 2) The sole or surviving parent is incapable of providing proper care and has, in writing, irrevocably released the child for emigration and adoption. Slippage occurs with the conflation of the term “orphan” and the assumption that all adoptees were abandoned or relinquished readily by biological parents, and as we saw in Chapter One, this relinquishment may be a result of coerced reproduction. This slippage is possible because although the U.S. Department of State notes “orphan” status is determined based on U.S. immigration law, the State Department’s Bureau of Consular Affairs notes: “A foreign country’s determination that the child is an orphan does not guarantee that the child will be considered an orphan under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), and eligible to come to the United States to live. Foreign country may use different legal rules to determine if a child is an orphan.”76 Thus, it becomes necessary to separate the legal definition of “orphan” and the common understanding of “orphan” in order to avoid assumptions about “saving” children. For instance, when examining more recent controversies of international adoption, Guatemalan children were wrongly labeled as orphans under the guise of adoption. In many cases, these children had living parents who lacked knowledge of what was actually occurring in the sending country before it was too late and their rights were terminated.77

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In the case of transnational adoption between Korea and the United States, the streamlined process between the two countries “practically guarantees that a child will meet the necessary requirements,” which raises questions regarding whether children placed for adoption are actual “orphans” as defined by the common understanding of the term or “orphans” in the legal sense. For example, United States Olympic Bronze Medal winner, Toby Dawson, was placed for adoption even though he had an existing Korean family because during an outing with his biological mother, the pair were separated. When his biological father searched area orphanages for Dawson, he was never found. Dawson serves as an example of the slippage between the legal definition of “orphan” and “orphan” in the sense the child has no ties to the “sending” country. The narrative highlights the difficulty in confirming “orphan” status of adoptees and is indicative of the misapplication of the term “orphan,” which exacerbates notions concerning the humanitarian nature of international adoption.

A more recent example of the slippages that exist concerning the term “orphan” and children existing in orphanages within sending countries was seen immediately following the 2010 Haitian earthquake. While I will further discuss the case of Haiti in my analysis of adoptee online activism in Chapter Five, I would like to focus on how the rush to “rescue” children placed some in legal limbo. For example, some of the 54 Haitian children who arrived in Pennsylvania and placed in Pittsburgh’s Holy Family Institute remained there for over a year due to their tenuous legal status and the fact that

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not all were previous matched with adoptive families.\textsuperscript{80} These orphans, like others from Haiti entered the United States under “humanitarian parole,” which “effectively [permits orphans] to enter and stay in the United States on special visas while their U.S. adoptive parents complete the paperwork here, rather than abroad as is usually required.”\textsuperscript{81} Prior to President Barack Obama signing the December 2010 Help Haiti Act, these children did not receive the same path to citizenship as other adoptees. Rather, as humanitarian paroles, these children were “ineligible for U.S. citizenship until they lived with U.S. families for at least two years” and remained under the age of eighteen.\textsuperscript{82}

Returning to my initial line of inquiry, orphan and refugee rhetoric complemented Christian American beliefs and notions of the United States as a liberal democracy. From 1953 onwards, separate laws were promulgated to support the adoption of Korean children. The United States Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act (or Public Law 203) in August 1953. This Act “allowed for 4,000 orphans, younger than 10 years old, from any country with oversubscribed quotas, to be adopted in the United States by American citizens.”\textsuperscript{83} The act defined the term “orphan” as an individual who had suffered the “death or disappearance of both parents, or because of abandonment or desertion by, or separation or loss from both parents, or who has only one parent…[who] is incapable of providing care” and provided consent to adoption.\textsuperscript{84} The Act also limited the number of


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Kim, \textit{The Origins of Korean Adoption…}, 9. “Children adopted before 1924 were expressly excluded from the definition of ‘child’ outlined under the 1924 Quota Act”; Gardner, \textit{The Qualities of a Citizen}, 231.

\textsuperscript{84} Appendix I: Refugee Relief Bill of 1953 As Passed by Congress and Sent to the President, Box 14, Folder 8, Refugee Relief Act 1945-1958, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
nonquota immigrant visas for eligible orphans to two per family. Individuals exceeding this number in their adoptions required special legislation to secure the adoption of their Korean children, which is seen in the case of Harry and Bertha Holt’s adoption of eight mixed-race Korean orphans.\(^85\) Subsequent iterations of the Refugee Relief Act extended the availability of nonquota visas and “raised the age limit from 10 to 14, until a permanent immigration law for ‘eligible orphans’ was enacted in 1962.”\(^86\) The Act also sanctioned proxy adoptions, which allowed adoptive parents to adopt “their children sight unseen and all the legal work of obtaining visas was handled by the proxy.”\(^87\)

Following the end of the Korean War, multiple pieces of legislation were enacted to aid the adoption of foreign children. In June 1959, the U.S. Congress passed the Orphan Bill, limiting the number of foreign-born adoptee migrants to 2,000 and continued proxy adoptions.\(^88\) By September 1961, due to pressure from American child welfare agencies, proxy adoptions were eliminated from legislation because it was believed these types of adoptions, which were heavily utilized by Holt International, overlooked “the best interests of the child.” As international adoption law and naturalization law unfolded in the United States, Soon Ho Park notes: “The INS Act of 1962 effectively treats the immigration of adoptees as ‘immediate relatives’…These new immediate relatives are free from numerical limitations; thus, the child may enter the United States freely rather than being forced to wait for an opening [under existing


\(^{86}\) Ibid.


immigration quotas]. Yet, even as adoptees’ are located as “immediate relatives” to American citizens for the purposes of adoption, they are unable to sponsor their birth relatives if reunited with them in adulthood. The dissolution of the adoptee’s birth family upon adoption severed any hope for sponsorship if reunion occurred under family reunification immigration measures. Jodi Kim writes: “The very production of the adoptee as a legal orphan, which severs the adoptee from any kinship ties and makes her an exceptional state subject, renders her the barest of social identities and strips her of her social personhood.” This barrier re-emphasizes the fact that the adoptee’s real parents are now the adoptive parents and underscores the ways in which the adoptee reproduces the white, heteronormative family.

As adoptive parents sought assistance from their Congressional representatives, adoption agencies also advocated on behalf of the families. For example, the International Social Services, Inc. American branch president wrote to Senator Edward Kennedy in 1967 and 1969 as he introduced revisions to the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act. Specifically, ISS – American Branch was invested in the inclusion of “a provision enabling the early naturalization of citizen children adopted in the United States by American families.” In the letter initially sent to the Senator on October 30, 1967, the president of ISS – American Branch wrote:

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89 Ibid., 50. In 1961, international adoption regulations also were placed under the auspices of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) of the Department of Justice; Ibid., 45-46. 
90 The Amerasian Immigration Act 1962 and Amerasian Homecoming Act 1987 stand alone in that there passage remains inextricably linked to United States paternalism in Vietnam and the criticism against Operation Babylift as the majority of the “orphans” airlifted were not in fact orphans, but had living family members in Vietnam.
91 Kim, *Ends of Empire* …, 169.
Our experience indicates that it would benefit all concerned if naturalization proceeding could be initiated at the time the adoption is completed. This would facilitate the complete integration of the child into the family, which is the purpose of adoption. Most of the children arriving for adoption will be in their new homes for some time before the adoption application is filled...[D]uring the two year period following adoption they are in a somewhat ambiguous position: legally the child of American citizens but still under the ‘protection’ of a foreign country which is not in a position to exercise any responsibility...The logical time for adoptive parents to apply for the naturalization of the child is when legal adoption is being completed. Too often the waiting period results in postponing the naturalization for years. If, in the meantime, the circumstances change or the adoptive parents die, the child finds himself in a precarious situation without the protection of American citizenship.

A version of this text was also sent to the Honorable Michael A. Feighan in the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, even as ISS – American Branch lobbied for immediate naturalization of adoptees upon their adoption finalization, this was not to come to fruition within the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the advocacy conducted by the ISS – American Branch is a marked departure from 1962. In correspondence from ISS – American Branch Associate Director, Susan T. Pettiss to Ann Davison from ISS – Korea, Pettis reassures Davison that parents will not overlook naturalization, writing:

There’s no reason for us to think that adoptive parents do not follow through on naturalization procedures. We have found that they are generally most eager to achieve this, as it has many practical advantages in terms of obviating the yearly alien registration procedure, simplifying travel arrangements for the family when going abroad and consolidating the homogeneity of the family unit. However, it would be impossible for us to follow up on each case to see when this naturalization has been completed. 

This change in rhetoric from ISS – American Branch concerning naturalization is noteworthy. Perhaps it speaks to their concern of the “best interests of the children” as in their case records, it became apparent that the organization also provided information to

93 Correspondence from Associate Director, Susan T. Pettiss to Ann Davison, International Social Service - Korea, Box 34, Folder 23, General 1957-1974, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
the local agencies aiding adoptive parents regarding naturalization. Dissemination of information concerning naturalization and other legal procedures concerning transnational adoption remained at the core of ISS – American Branch post-adoption services. For example, the organization developed a handout in the 1970s on the “Procedures Affecting Foreign-Born Children Adopted in the United States” dated October 1972, which specifically urged: “As an additional protection for the child, it is urged that naturalization be established as soon as possible under the law.”

I focus on the early period of adoptee migration to juxtapose adoptees’ entrance into the nation as drastically different from that of other Asian Americans. Yet, the belief that adoption exists to aid the construction of families continued into the end of the twenty-first century. The ability to reproduce the white, normative family became easier with the passage of the Child Citizenship Act of 2000, which affects the naturalization of transnational adoptees under the age of eighteen. The United States Department of State notes: “[The Act] was designed to make acquisition of U.S. citizenship easier and to eliminate extra steps and costs.” Adoptees under the age of eighteen may obtain citizenship if “at least one of the child’s parents is a United States citizen” if the child: 1) lives in the legal and physical custody of the American citizen parent; 2) is admitted into the United States as an immigrant for lawful permanent residence; and 3) the adoption is final. These legislation changes best demonstrate adoptees’ status as exceptional migrants. The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 became effective on February 27, 2001. By

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95 The Act eliminates the need for many parents to also apply separately for the adoptee’s naturalization.
streamlining the Immigration and Nationality Act, the amendment streamlined adoptees’ path to naturalization.

Nevertheless, recognizing the affective, ethnosexual aspects of adoptees’ citizenship, it would be remiss not to critically interrogate adoptees’ involuntary migration to the United States. For example, looking at the historical examples of forced migration, such as the “orphan trains” at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, Tobias Hübinette compares the adoption agency with slave hunters, finding these forced migrants (i.e. adoptees and slaves) to become involved in an “efficient global transportation system of shipping routes.”96 I am wary of this conflation, as the historical contexts of eighteenth century slavery and modern intercountry adoption are markedly different. Although both result in the movement of bodies, the affective and, sometimes, physical labor of adoptees cannot be compared to the forced, indentured, violent and physical labor endured by slaves. While I recognize that adult adoptees continue to document the physical, sexual and emotional abuse suffered at the hands of their adoptive parents, the result of the forced migration for adoptees and slaves cannot be compared due to the varying historical and present day circumstances that fuel each economy.97

97 Hansen, comment on “Minnesota Politics”; Kim, E., Ten Thousand Sorrows: The Extraordinary Journey of a Korean War Orphan; and Vance, Twins Found in a Box: Adapting to Adoption. Moreover, news reports, articles, and internal and external communication from International Social Service – American branch reveal deadly abuse suffered by adoptees at the hands of their adoptive parents as well as how the “unfit” nature of these parents by domestic agencies prompted them to search abroad for a child; Box 4, Folder “Wayne Hiurichs – Correspondence, Etc.,” International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota; Box 4, Folder ISS – General Administrative, 1964-66, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota; and Box 10, Folder 31, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
Instead, I maintain adoptees remain colonized subjects vis-à-vis the deployment of Christian Americanism, given new names and subsequently new identities as they are re/born into Western subjects by their American adoptive parents. To aid this analysis, I draw upon Franz Fanon’s description of “colored students in France.”  

98 He writes: “Society refuses to consider them genuine Negroes. The Negro is a savage, whereas the student is civilized.”  

99 In this sense, the Korean adoptee as Other is characterized as the “perpetual foreigner” and never truly American. However, culturally white and rendered hybrid, the adoptee is considered almost the same, but not quite. Adoptees’ entrance into the nation and subsequent access to U.S. citizenship reflects their colonization. Not only do adoptee bodies fail to locate themselves in the black/white schema of American race relations due to their ethnic Koreanness, these individuals also disrupt traditional understandings of who is “Asian American” because of their transracial families. Raising new questions concerning derivative citizenship, affective labor, and what it means to be truly “white” or “Asian,” the colonization of adoptees recognizes the displacement of these children and adults as they negotiate and reconcile the impact of transracial, transnational adoption in their lives.

“Good Parents” and Non-Citizen Children: Calls for Retroactive Citizenship

The contingency of adoptees’ entrance to the nation as tied to their parents’ white privilege is underscored in debates concerning adoptees whose parents failed to complete the citizenship process for their then minor children. In 2011 the adult adoptee

98 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 50.
99 Ibid., emphasis added.
community and allies began a petition for retroactive naturalization for these adoptees.

The petition discussed how deported adoptees arrive to “countries unknown to them in every way: language, culture, family or friends.” Furthermore, the petition states:

One of the requirements of the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 (CCA 2000) was that the adoptee be under the age of 18 its effective date, February 27, 2001. Transnational adoptees 18 and older were not granted citizenship under its provisions. Some, but not all, obtained citizenship through their own efforts or those of their adoptive parents. Of those who did not, many were unaware that they lacked this legal protection… Strict immigration policies under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 have placed internationally-adopted individuals without U.S. citizenship at increased risk of deportation. This law does not allow adoption or the unique circumstances that led to an adoptee's lack of citizenship to be taken into consideration in determining outcomes.101

I highlight this petition to underscore how adoptees’ entrance into the nation remains indelibly linked to the adoptive parents’ white privilege. When these adoptees became aware of their tenuous immigration statuses as adults, this white privilege is revoked. In one of the most extreme cases, the petition recounts the life of Joao Herbert, a Brazilian adoptee who entered the United States at the age of eight, recounting: “A charge for attempting to sell marijuana, although a first offense, landed him in immigration detention, after which he was deported to Brazil in 2000. Joao Herbert was murdered in Brazil in May 2004.” Moreover, as adoptees actively work towards obtaining legal status in the United States, this does not guarantee legal safety. The petitioners note: “[Matthew Scherer] obtained permanent resident status, but upon traveling to Korea was identified by the Korean government by his original Korean name and now is blocked by

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Korean law from returning to the U.S. and threatened with conscription into the Korean army.” These two examples make visible the ways in which citizenship becomes an elusive goal for adoptees under government discipline as adults of color.

Even as the petitioners sought to raise awareness of the plight of deportees, the petition’s demands invoke adoptees’ white privilege as exceptional immigrants as children. The petitioners list of demands included: “1) Take appropriate action to immediately grant U.S. citizenship to all intercountry adoptees not included [in] the provisions of existing laws; and 2) Following the granting of citizenship, direct appropriate U.S. government agencies to: a) Assist intercountry adoptees with obtaining proof of citizenship; b) provide intercountry adoptees traveling overseas with the permits required to allow their reentry into the United States; and return all deported intercountry adoptees to the United States, regardless of the cause of deportation.” The stipulations, require the American government to delineate between adoptees and other undocumented persons of color deported to their native countries. These demands implicitly speak to adoptees access to derivative citizenship that facilitated their entry into the United States. Nevertheless, the petition illustrates how adoptees no longer inhabit their position of exceptional migrants. Rather as adults, transnational adoptees become Other – another voiceless, undocumented person of color.

As children/minors at the time, and therefore involuntary migrants, adoptees lacked either the knowledge or the resources to obtain naturalization for themselves.

\[103\] Ibid.
Instead, their adoptive parents were placed with this responsibility. However, these individuals, who were considered more “fit” than adoptees’ biological parents, failed to fulfill one important legal need for their children. Instead, these parents propelled their children into legal statelessness – sometimes even furthering the legal limbo adoptees’ experienced in their birth countries (e.g. mixed race children who lacked access to Korean citizenship upon birth). This precarious legal situation was highlighted in the April 2013 petition of Mike Frailey, a Vietnamese Babylift era adoptee. Frailey’s petition asks for: “Automatic citizenship to all adopted individuals regardless of age with special and expedited processing for individuals who were brought here by the U.S. government during Operation Babylift in April of 1975.”

While more narrow in scope, Frailey’s petition specifically highlights how adoptive parents’ rhetoric of rescue actually positioned their children in a precarious, undocumented position.

Increasingly, mainstream media has highlighted the plight of non-citizen adoptees. For instance, Kim Sung-soo, executive director of Transparency International-Korea, penned an editorial in The Korea Times recounts three instances of deportation to Korea, including the case of Matthew Scherer. Kim argued that the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 should be amended to “give the benefits and protection of citizenship to all law-abiding international adoptees.” In many ways, by focusing on those who do not run afoul from the law, Kim raises a unique question concerning

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whether adoptees interactions with the American legal system should contribute to their deportation if they are discovered to be undocumented. Moreover, retroactive citizenship is not solely an issue for Korean adoptions. For example, Indian adoptee, Kairi Abha Shepherd, faces deportation due to a felony charge for forgery. Her mother died when she was eight years old, prior to finalizing Shepherd’s naturalization as a U.S. citizen. As additional cases of undocumented adoptees surface, increased attention is required to examine how these once “saved” children are once again being cast out to the world.

Anxiety over adoptees’ access to American citizenship should not solely focus on the failure of adoptive parents, American adoption agencies and the U.S. government. We also need to re-examine how the Korean state and orphanages remain accountable. Jane Jeong Trenka reports: “Korean adoption agencies did not receive the naturalization papers of 18,000 Korean children sent for adoption to the U.S., even though this paperwork is required under Korean law.” In her editorial, Trenka also discusses the implications of Korea’s most recent adoption law. She notes that for the first time in Korea’s sixty year history of adoption, adoptees are now eligible for the IR-3 visa, which grants automatic American citizenship. This shift from IR-4 visas, which require adoptee’s naturalization in the U.S., is a result of the fact adoptions must be finalized in

Korean court. However, Trenka discusses the campaign by Mission to Promote Adoption in Korea to excuse adoptive parents from appearing in court, which would also mean these parents would not have to travel to Korea. Yet, Korea is one of a the few nations that historically did not require parental travel. For instance, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Honduras, Russia (before it closed U.S. adoption), China, Colombia, Burundi, Costa Rica, India and Hong Kong all have travel requirements. Speaking to this, Trenka writes:

“People who are entrusted with a life should not consider a stay in their child’s country of birth to be an inconvenience, but rather an opportunity to learn about their child’s heritage and culture.”

*Being American as a Feeling of Belonging*

While these calls for citizenship are sparking the adult adoptee activist community and their allies, I also believe it is important to locate this debate within wider conversations of adoption amongst adult adoptees. This is not to say adult adoptees do not believe retroactive citizenship is important; rather, the adult adoptees’ I spoke with had varied understandings of why such citizenship should be bestowed on undocumented adoptees. For instance, discussing his ambivalence, Kevin noted: “It’s not that I don’t care, I do see how it is important – you know...especially, the retroactive citizenship. How those things are important to people. And because it is important to them, I’m not necessarily out there fighting for it, but it doesn’t mean that I don’t want it for them.”

John echoed Kevin’s sentiments: “I think it’s the right thing to do. It’s not the adoptee’s

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111 Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
fault that they weren’t able to file the paperwork.”

Correspondingly, Claudia noted: “I am 150% behind it. I feel like, especially as children and one of the most vulnerable populations, you cannot retroactively hold them responsible for not jumping through those legal loopholes.”

For other adoptees, it became evident that processes of transculturalization directly affected their perspectives on why retroactive citizenship is an important issue. In particular, parental racial blindness and emphasis of how racial difference was merely accidental because “underneath their skin, they were all the same” impacted adoptees’ sense of self. With an emphasis on national belonging, Amy said:

I definitely think that it is something that is very important…I couldn’t imagine…in my opinion being American or you know hyphenated Asian American…but really being American and finding out as an adult that suddenly you’re not eligible to live here and having to go to…not just a different country, but a completely different culture than what…how you’ve been raised with your family and the country that you’ve lived in your whole life…when in my opinion you really are American.

This statement reflects how adoptees’ conceptualizations of themselves as “American” are bounded to their cultural whiteness and familial upbringing, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Americanness is not tied to legal citizenship; rather, it is linked to social citizenship and cultural capital. Similarly, Liz stated: “Well obviously, I’m for retroactive citizenship. I think the basis has been fascinating – that rhetoric of forever families and what it means to be in your forever family. If that’s the global America or your nuclear white family.”

Invoking the notion of the adoptive family as the “forever” family, Liz directly speaks to rhetoric concerning how these parents were

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112 Interview with author on August 26, 2012.
113 Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
114 Interview with author on June 23, 2012.
115 Interview with author July 23, 2012.
deemed “good,” “fit,” and “reliable” in comparison to biological parents or the Korean state.

Yet, adult adoptees’ also discussed the politicized nature of such citizenship campaigns. Speaking directly to the impact of retroactive citizenship within the adult adoptee community, Megan said: “It drives me crazy that adoptees don’t consider themselves immigrants sometimes. So most of my activism is focused in one way or another on that. It’s the area I’m most well versed in. Immigration and citizenship is of course closely related and we’re seeing it how it’s been affecting adoptees more and more.”

By linking adoptees to other immigrants, Megan compared the experiences of undocumented adoptees to those of the individuals who would be positively affected by the DREAM (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors) Act. To this end, she said: “I believe both groups are entitled to stay in the U.S. indefinitely as citizens.” However, Megan does not place responsibility on adoptees’ parents – biological or adoptive. Instead, she argued: “The people who chose that we would come to the United States are the adoption agencies…in the U.S. and in Korea. So this was a corporate decision. For that reason, there is even more of an obligation – moral obligation – to allow us to stay here, if that’s what we want because not all adoptees want that.” Further discussing how an amendment to the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 should be more expansive to cover all individuals who entered the U.S. for adoption, noted: “I don’t believe deportation should be the punishment anyhow, especially in the case of people

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116 Interview with author on June 28, 2012.
who came to the U.S. without their [consent]…or who were under sixteen or eighteen
years old – something like that.”

The inclusion of how adoptees experience “citizenship” on the micro-level
supports my interest in locating adoptees’ status as privileged and subordinated subjects.
Linking citizenship to a “feeling of belonging” rather than something bestowed by the
state via “naturalization,” adoptees demonstrate how their families’ investment in them as
“future Americans” influenced their sense of self. Yet, their voices reveal how
conversations concerning retroactive citizenship do not affect everyone in the same way,
underscoring their various levels of political engagement. However, in many of their
reflections, it becomes clear that they position themselves as exceptional immigrants in
that retroactive citizenship seems almost natural and matter-of-fact. Even as Megan
expresses hesitancy to provide a blank check for adoptees’ retroactive citizenship, she
also invokes how a “moral obligation” exists for retroactive citizenship to be extended for
interested individuals.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

The deconstruction of citizenship by scholars concerned with processes of
racialization and gender provides inroads to locating Asian Americans within the
black/white schema found in the United States. While neither black nor white, the
location of Asians in the nation disrupts understandings of race as the government and
citizens sought to regulate their presence via immigration and national legislation. Even

¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.

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as the nation still operates under this bipolar divide, the entrance of Asian bodies continues to propel reconsiderations of race similar to the ways in which Harris, among others, forges a critique of how white women’s citizenship is fraught within inherent tensions concerning the property associated with whiteness and biological sex.

At the same time, Asian American Studies scholarship continues to aid theorizing on ethnic Asians’ access to political, social and economic citizenship. The excavating of Asians in American history provides new interventions to locate how Asians’ access to citizenship remains bounded to racialized and gendered stereotypes originating in American middlebrow culture. Placed in conversation with the works of Mills and Fanon, it is clear that whiteness was also constructed against the Asian Other, which helped aid the development of transnational adoption as an operation of rescue.

Therefore, when understanding how adoptees’ status as derivative citizens creates the conditions that facilitate their entrance into the United States, a “flexible racial self-understanding” is needed. Korean adoptees, like other transracial adoptees “are forced to integrate the racial difference between themselves and their adoptive family…[which] upsets the conventional wisdom that racial self-identification ought to be acquired wholesale from a genetically tethered family.” Existing scholarship on citizenship produced by feminists, critical race theorists and Asian American Studies scholars provides new interventions to locating adoptees through a hybrid intersectional theoretical approach. Accounting for adoptees’ varied positionings as cultural whites and

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120 Ibid., 93.
Asian Americans, hybrid intersectionality accounts for how adoptees’ undergo processes of racialization differently as children and adults.
Chapter 3: Beyond Normative? Redefining *Real* Kinship

"Adoptions challenge the natural order; adoptions across race lines do so all the more. So one thing we can look at is how people ‘renaturalize’ adoption, make different families ‘normal,’ including families across race."

- Barbara Katz Rothman

Historically families formed through adoption were known as fictive kin due to their deviation from biological, sexual reproduction. Since the first modern adoption statute passed in Massachusetts in 1851, adoption practices in the United States became clouded in secrecy, leading to the normalization of closed adoptions. This secrecy contributed to the pathologization of adoptive families due to rhetoric concerning *real* versus *fictive* kinship, whereby *real* kinship encompasses families marked by genetic relatedness. To shield their perceived abnormality, adoptive families were originally

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1 A version of this chapter was accepted to the edited volume *Critical Kinship Studies: Kinship (Trans)Formed* by Charlotte Kroløkke, Lene Myong, and Stine Wilum Adrian.


formed via race-matching as any visible difference would mark the family as deviant. However, domestic, international, and/or transracial adoptions have become increasingly popular methods for heterosexual white couples to create families. By the mid-twentieth century in the United States, transracial adoption gained attention with the domestic adoption of Black and Native American children into white homes. Simultaneously, transnational adoption entered the American imaginary at the end of the Korean War (1950-53) with the adoption of an estimated 130,000 Korean children by white, American families.

The adoption of Korean children differs politically from the transracial domestic adoption of black and Native American children. In other words, this particular form of adoption “does not carry the historical ‘baggage,’” even though “there are other issues of wealth, power, race, deception, kidnapping, class exploitation, colonialism, and imperialism.” Nonetheless, understandings of race remain directly implicated in the adoption of Korean children. Hawley Fogg-Davis writes: “Most whites prefer healthy white infants, and when they discover that such babies are in short supply they are more likely to adopt children of Colombian, Korean and American Indian ancestry than to adopt African American children.” Asian children are considered the “safe” option and more marketable not only because of the model minority myth, but also the belief that

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6 Race-matching remained so stringent that families and babies would be matched not only based on race and phenotype, but also matched via the religion of both the adoptive and biological parents.
8 Simon and Altstein, Adoption across Borders: Serving the Children in Transracial and Intercountry Adoptions, 144.
9 Fogg-Davis, The Ethics of Transracial Adoption, 12.
Asians are better able to assimilate into white culture.\textsuperscript{10} The ability to gain access to “whiteness” is important in the “adoptability” and “marketability” of Korean children. Yet, as a result of crossing racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic borders, adoptees continue to be marked as Other in the West.\textsuperscript{11} Signe Howell writes: “The adoption of Korean children represented a dramatic rupture with previous practice insofar as for the first time racially and culturally different children entered Western families to be brought up as if they were their own.”\textsuperscript{12}

Looking at how adoption troubles traditional notions of kinship, this chapter explores how Korean adoption complicates understandings of race and kinship as the primary American adopters of these children have been white families. The presence of adoptees in the white American family reinvents heteronormative conceptualizations of white and Asian American families, which are traditionally conceived of as same-race, genetically-related units.\textsuperscript{13} Yet, even as these families disrupt the standard paradigm of kinship, they also reify the notion that families are comprised of heterosexual, married parents, as these are the only individuals who are permitted legally to adopt from Korea. I examine how Korean adoptive families seek to gain legibility as “real” families despite the absence of genetic ties. By framing adoption as disrupting the binary of real versus fictive kinship, this inquiry investigates the disjunctures Korean international adoption produces when rethinking the concept of family. Speaking to the binary of fictive versus

\textsuperscript{10} Tobias Hübinette, The Korean Adoption Issue between Modernity and Coloniality...

\textsuperscript{11} See Toby Alice Volkman, ed., Cultures of Transnational Adoption (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{12} Howell, Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective, 16.

\textsuperscript{13} My deployment of the term heteronormative is rooted in the work of Stevi Jackson, who notes: “Heteronormativity defines not only a normative sexual practice but also a normative way of life”; Stevi Jackson, "Interchanges: Gender, Sexuality and Heterosexuality: The Complexity (and Limits) of Heteronormativity," Feminist Theory 7, no. 1 (2006): 107, doi:10.1177/1464700106061462.
real kinship, Shelley M. Park notes: “[A]doptive relationships…until recently, were governed by the principle that such relationships should mimic…the relationships of the biological kinship unit.”\textsuperscript{14} This assertion acknowledges the historical marginalization of families who differ from the traditional “natural” family narrative. Emphasis on biological relatedness reinforces notions of adoptive families as merely a “less than” version of family in the American landscape.

Even as a focus on “blood ties” remains linked to traditional notions of kinship, these understandings of “family” are continually discussed in the contemporary period. The concept of “family” is reassembled to account for “families by choice” – socially constructed close relationships of adults and children without blood ties – as well as other iterations of family that allow an individual to have more than one “family.”\textsuperscript{15} In the case of adoptees, a broader definition of family provides them with access to claiming both their biological and adoptive families. However, at the same time, the primacy placed on birth families as an adoptee’s “family” is challenged. For example, in her study of adult adoptees in Scotland, Janet Carsten found:

The adoptees did not perceive these relationships [with their reunited birth families] to be in any sense equivalent to those that many of them had with their adopted kin or with their own birth children. Most of those whom I interviewed

\textsuperscript{15} The concept of “families by choice” includes extended kin relationships found in queer communities as well as communities of color; see Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon, "Cultures of Intimacy and Care beyond ‘the Family’: Personal Life and Social Change in the Early 21st Century," \textit{Current Sociology} 52, no. 2 (2004), doi:10.1177/0011392104041798. For example, black feminists document the “other mothering” conducted within African American communities by family and community members; Patricia Hill Collins, \textit{Black Feminist Thought}.... Further, Chinese paper sons also were considered \textit{fictive kin} due to their non-genetic relationship between father and son in efforts to circumvent American immigration restrictions; Jennifer Ting, "Bachelor Society: Deviant Heterosexuality and Asian American Historiography," in \textit{Privileging Positions: The Sites of Asian American Studies}, ed. Gary Y. Okihiro, Marilyn Alquizola, Dorothy Fujita Rony, and K. Scott Wong (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1995).
no longer held (and many never held) any illusions about the potential of the relations that they had established with their birth kin.\textsuperscript{16}

Noting how her respondents maintained a better connection with their adoptive kin networks and children, Carsten’s study may reify adoptive families as “benevolent saviors.” Nevertheless, her findings also raise new possibilities concerning how kinship is created through intimacies and relationships and not through legal or biological ties. In discussing natural versus social ties Carsten notes: “What is most striking about the stories of ‘new kinship’ to which I have referred is not so much the newness of the kinship that results, but the very explicitness of the moves by which people are able to define who is kin and who is not, and what kinds of kinship count and what kinds do not.”\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon write: “[K]inship can be said to be subject to the same globalizing effects that are transforming definitions of the nation-state, though an intensification of transnational flows of labor, capital, information, and media.”\textsuperscript{18} This fluid definition of kinship will provide a new avenue to understand what it means to be a “family.” Yet, even as adoptees and their families recognize kinship’s fluidity, traditional definitions of kinship give primacy to biological relatedness. Keeping this in mind, as this inquiry moves forward I will explore how adoptees reconcile these expansive definitions of kinship against traditional definitions that predicate family upon biological ties.

\textsuperscript{16} Janet Carsten, \textit{After Kinship} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 104.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 180.
This chapter exposes how fictive kinship effectively erases the adoptive family. In doing so, I make two distinct interventions to understandings of the international, transracial adoptive family’s kinship structure. First, I contend that the adoptive family is a queer, postmodern formation that destabilizes heteronormative assumptions of family and operates outside legible understandings of kinship vis-à-vis their circumvention of procreative heterosex. Deploying queer theory to examine adoptive parents’ desire to gain legitimacy under the traditional kinship rubric, I draw from David L. Eng and Alice Y. Hom’s notion of queer as “a political practice based on transgressions of the normal and normativity.” I position this argument in conversation with Soojin Pate, who deploys a Foucauldian analysis that traces the genealogy of Korea’s adoption program to the period immediately before and after the Korean War. Interested in militarized humanitarianism, Pate documents how American influence in the orphanages promoted the Korean adoption process “as a project of normalization” to “frame Korean adoption as a regime of the normal.” She traces how adoptees became fetishized objects as part of the normalization project in efforts to sustain what she deems as the “heterobiological  

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19 I draw upon the work of Judith Stacey as she explores how divorce, remarriage and civil partnerships serve as a source of new complex, kinship relationships; Judith Stacey, In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Judith Stacey, Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America, Second ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Judith Stacey, Unhitched: Love, Marriage, and Family Values from West Hollywood to Western China (New York: New York University Press, 2011).  
21 Pate, "Genealogies of Korean Adoption: American Empire, Militarization, and Yellow Desire."  
22 Ibid.
nuclear family” – the white, biologically related family. According to Pate, the adoptive family is a privileged family formation vis-à-vis the perceived non-normative nature of the biological, Korean family. In her deployment of queer theory, Pate limits her analysis to examining the normalization techniques that render orphans into adoptable bodies.

Departing from Pate, I argue adoptive families in their failure to become the “heterobiological nuclear family” are queer formations. The application of queer theory exposes the contradictions found in kinship and social reproduction vis-à-vis the adoptive family’s circumvention of heterosexual reproduction. Thus, while these families contribute to the reproduction of the “family,” this construction remains a mere facsimile of real kinship due to the obvious transracial, transnational composition of the familial unit. However, it is not this failure to obtain the “normal” family girded by real kinship that renders the unit as queer. Rather, it is precisely through the desire for normativity that the Korean adoptive family in its inherent queerness creates new avenues to redefine traditional conceptualizations of “family.” The adoptive family challenges the boundaries of real versus fictive kinship and requires individuals to deploy a more expansive definition of “family” as part of its location as a postmodern construct.

Second, I discuss how transraciality – the dislocation adoptees’ experience in identity formation as racially Asian/culturally white subjects – impacts notions of family in the lives of adoptees and their parents. Transraciality affects how “adoptees do not learn as children what it means to identify positively as a member of an ethnic and racial

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23 Ibid., 207.
group and to cope effectively with prejudice and discrimination.”

24 Aware Michael Awkward also deploys the term transraciality to “describe the adoption of physical traits of difference for their purpose of impersonating a racial other,” I argue this emphasis on racial performativity – “a mode of masquerade” – is one aspect of the ways and which adoptees gain access to cultural whiteness. 25 Awkward’s transraciality inadequately captures the complexities of attempts to traverse what appear to be static racial boundaries because of his emphasis on the constructedness of racial categories. I further contend that transraciality is not necessarily a paradoxical or a celebratory moment. I depart from adoption scholar and activist John Raible’s understanding of transracialization, which he defines as “a positive outcome that can happen when a person of one race spends a lot of time with individuals of another race.”

26 Even as Raible highlights the how multi-racial families may produce greater understandings of the social constructedness of race within adoptive family, transracialization may also inadvertently overlook how the transracial adoptee may experience internal and family tension when reconciling racial/ethnic and cultural identities. At the same time, I am wary of Richard M. Lee’s discussion of the “transracial adoption paradox,” which occurs when “[adoptees] are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture.”

27 Denoting the experiences of adoptees as

paradoxical leaves little room for understanding that these contradictions are not debilitating or constraining to identity development. Instead, transraciality provides a framework to critically examine how racial difference functions within the adoptive family as well as how issues of race, ethnicity, and culture impact identity construction.

Third, I explore the racial performativity conducted by both the adoptee and adoptive family to prove their “normaley” within broader negotiations of “whiteness” and “Asianness.” Transnational, transracial adoption disrupts what Kimberly McClain DaCosta calls “the racialization of the family,” which accounts for “how racial premises came to be buried in our understanding of family, in which genetic-phenotypic sharing is coded to signify cultural sharing, intimacy, and caring.”28 I situate the examination of the racialization of the family in conversation with David Eng’s discussion of the racialization of intimacy to locate non-normative bodies, including the adoptive family, within kinship structures.29 He notes: “The racialization of intimacy marks the collective ways by which race becomes occluded within the private domain of private family and kinship today. Attention to the racialization of intimacy highlights how racialized subjects and objects are reinscribed into a discourse of colorblindness.”30 Nevertheless, it overlooks the ways in which processes of racialization render the family deviant from real kinship due to how the racialization of the family is operationalized in society. In other words, the racialization of intimacy only highlights the erasure of race, whereby

30 Ibid, 10.
race becomes neutral and difference merely accidental in liberal constructions of citizenship.

To account for the transracial composition of the family, I find that McClain DaCosta’s concept of the racialization of the family captures how racial blindness occurs within the adoptive family. Racial blindness describes how adoptive parents deploy colorblind rhetoric as well as overlook the implications of racial difference in the lives of their children. Adoptive parents’ racial blindness may be either passive or active. Adoptive parents passively deploy racial blindness by not addressing the racial difference, refraining from participating in activities related to the child’s ethnicity, and living in a racially isolated area. Active blindness occurs when parents ignore their child’s questions about their country of origin and operate as if the child had no other life prior to their adoption. The term racial blindness reflects the ways in which adoptive parents deploy color blind rhetoric as well as overlook the implications of racial difference in the lives of their children. This racial blindness may also be a result of parental silent racism, which Barbara Trepagnier defines as “unspoken negative thoughts, emotions, and assumptions about black Americans that dwell in the minds of white Americans, including well-meaning whites that care about racial equality.”

Trepagnier writes: “Color blindness derives from a racist ideology that is at times racist but that is not necessarily always racist. The individuals…are only color blind in that they did not want to draw attention to race difference for fear it would be racist to do so.” In this regard, I also draw upon Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, who discusses the notion of white

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32 Ibid., 57.
*habitus* in relation to color-blind racism. He defines white habitus as “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that *conditions* and *creates* whites’ racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters.” I argue that white habitus and colorblindness are explicitly linked when understanding the ways in which racial blindness is operationalized within the Korean adoptive family.

The racialization of the family accounts for the disjunctions produced within international, transracial adoption. A deeper interrogation of how racialization processes operate within the family is required to account for how adoption redefines the meaning of white and Asian American families. Traditionally, Asian Americans and their families are predicated upon two biological/social parents of Asian descent. Korean adoptive families deviate from this pattern as the majority of adoptees grew up with white adoptive parents. This transracial composition influences adoptees’ racial identity. For example, researchers found 78% of adopted Koreans “considered themselves to be or wanted to be white as children – although the majority grew to identify themselves as Korean Americans as adults.” As a result, I suggest the definitions of white and Asian American families must be reframed to account for transracial, transnational adoption.

Last, I explore how adult adoptees articulate their definitions of “family” based on my collection of adoptee oral histories. In doing so, I reveal how they discuss family outside of an emphasis on racial/ethnic differences/similarities, but via language

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34 A study conducted of attendees at the First International Korean Adoptee Association Gathering found that three-quarters of adoptees entered white families; Freundlich and Lieberthal, *Survey of Adult Korean Adoptees: Report on the Findings.*
35 McGinnis et al., *Beyond Culture Camp: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption.*
predicated upon real versus fictive kinship structures. Their insights provide an additional perspective to how racial difference is operationalized and recognized within adoptive families. In particular, I examine how white privilege and cultural whiteness are bestowed on the adoptee. The interviews also reveal how adoptees construct kinship with birth families and the wider adult adoptee community. The discussion of kin relations outside of the adoptive family illustrates the ways in which adoptees fluid understandings of kinship are implicated in other facets of their lives.

*Positioning Adoption Within Queer Theory*

Locating adoptive families as queer formations creates new possibilities to understand non-normative kinship structures. The Korean adoptive family, in particular, serves as a case study to understand how this dichotomy of real versus fictive kinship is outdated and limiting, even as it still is implicitly invoked through the use of new reproductive technologies to ensure a couple produces a genetically related child. A queering of the family demonstrates how non-normative families enter/exit legitimacy and legibility against a meta-narrative of normative families – heterosexual, monoracial, genetically related families. I locate adoptive parents as queer, drawing upon Lee Edelman who writes: “[Queers are those who are] stigmatized for failing to comply with

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heteronormative mandates.” Transracial, transnational adoptive families are bodies marked as defective in their disengagement from sexual procreation. Yet, through queering kinship formations it becomes clear that even as non-normative family formations gain prominence in society, real kinship hierarchies are sustained and reproduced.

An Alternative Reproductive Futurism

The concern to replicate the genetically related, monoracial family originates in the historical regulation of race through marriage. Ladelle McWhorter (2009) notes: “Sexuality…was a means for coding bodies to the population and for cementing kinship and community ties but also because it was a means for redesigning the population both as individuals and as a whole.” Even as social reproduction occurs through adoption, the circumvention of sexual reproduction stigmatizes the family as non-normative. Social reproduction, like social parenting, occurs when a non-biological child is raised within the family as if he/she were the family’s biological or genetically related kin. Recognizing multiple forms of social reproduction occur in various communities, this inquiry is focused on how normative Western (white) married, heterosexual couples are rendered deviant if they fail to procreate genetically related kin via heterosex.

Sexual reproduction remains the way in which legitimacy is conferred to their kinship structure. Patricia Hill Collins notes: “Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own

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biological children.”39 Collins’ emphasis on the production of the biological family is in agreement with Martha Albertson Fineman, who writes: “I use the term ‘sexual’ to modify family to emphasize that our societal and legal images and expectations of family are tenaciously organized around a sexual affiliation between a man and woman.”40 Further, Eve Sedgwick notes: “Think of that entity ‘the family,’ an impacted social space in which all of the following are meant to line up perfectly with each other: a surname; a sexual dyad…a circuit of blood relationships;…a mechanism to produce, care for, and acculturate children.”41 Examining “the family” disengaged from blood ties shatters the notion of “family” as a monolithic structure of genetic relatedness and welcomes adoptive families into the kinship narrative.

Given the primacy placed on the sexually reproduced family in mainstream society, queer theory exposes the reproductive disjunctures produced by the adoptive family. The importance of sexuality in traditional kinship echoes Judith Butler’s notion of “futural imaginings,” whereby heterosexuality is explicitly linked with reproduction, and consequently the future.42 With this understanding, I draw upon Edelman’s interest in “reproductive futurism” as synonymous with the continued heteronormative reproduction of society.43 In their failure of procreative sex, the adoptive couple is rendered deviant for not biologically reproducing. Yet, Edelman fails to integrate an intersectional analysis, encompassing only “the predominately white middle and upper-middle classes of

42 Butler, *Bodies that Matter…*, 228.

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contemporary of US culture.” However, it is precisely because of his failure to consider racial or class difference that I utilize the concept of reproductive futurism to explore the white adoptive couple. The utilization the implicit white norm to discuss reproductive futurism by Edelman mirrors the way in which heterosexism permeates mainstream family ideology as seen in discussions of real versus fictive kinship. The invisibility of whiteness within reproductive futurism also accounts for how transnational, transracial adoption is invested in the production of the “right” and white family, whereby adoption similar to other new reproductive technologies exists as a classed, and raced reproductive phenomenon. The total costs associated with adopting from Korea would cost the average American at least 38% of their year’s salary in 2010 as the real median average income for a married family was $72,751. Speaking to these high costs, Eleana J. Kim notes: “[T]ransnational adoption offered a (new) reproductive technology – one that has become an increasingly commodified ‘choice’ existing alongside a number of other, stratified consumer options for would-be parents.”

Circumventing the heart of reproductive futurism – the notion that all human beings biologically beget the Child – the non-normative nature of Korean adoptive parents’ heterosexual union renders the family as queer. I emphasize the non-normative heterosexual relationship because only married, heterosexual couples may adopt from Korea. This is not to say single individuals and same-sex couples do not adopt

47 Edelman notes that the Child “embodies the citizen as an ideal”; No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, 11.
transracially or internationally; however, given this inquiry’s interest in the Korean adoptive family, I limit my discussion to non-normative heterosexual relationships and their perceived deviance in their failure to reproduce some, if not, all of their children gestationally. Even if these adoptive families include biological children, the existence of non-biological children still marks the family as abnormal because Korean adoptees contribute to the transracialization of the family. Additionally, while adoptive parents may divorce and sexual identification may shift, the heterosexual nature of their marital union remains one of the strict criteria allowing these families in particular to adopt from Korea.

Korean adoptive families are outliers that exist at what Butler describes as “outside the disjunction of illegitimate and legitimate.”48 Legitimate under national and state laws, I contend such legitimacy does not necessarily extend into the social realm, where the sexual family metanarrative still exists. Bearing this in mind, Barbara Katz Rothman notes: “If you’re not ordinary, you have to show just how ordinary a family you indeed are. That ‘ordinariness’ is an accomplishment. You’re going to be aware of what most people take for granted.”49 This differential between de jure and de facto understandings of family creates a hierarchy between families formed by biology versus adoption. In many ways the Korean adoptive family remains located in Fineman’s examination of changes to the (hetero)sexual family:

To a large extent, the new visions of the family merely reformulate basic assumptions about the nature of intimacy. They reflect the dyadic nature of the old (sexual) family story, updating and modifying it to accommodate new family ‘alternatives’ while retaining the centrality of sexual affiliation to the

49 Rothman, Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption, 6.
organization and understanding of intimacy. This process of reiteration and reformulation reveals the power of the metanarrative about sexual affiliation and the family.⁵⁰

Similarly, Sharon Elizabeth Rush contends: “Although nontraditional families are more socially acceptable today than they were in the 1960s, most members of society seem to adhere to the ideal of the traditional family. It is still preferable that mom and dad are married to each other and have their own children.”⁵¹ The desire to mimic the metanarrative undergirding common understandings of family reflects the Korean adoptive family’s interest in gaining legitimacy and legibility alongside genetically related families.

Reproducing the Future: Hierarchies of Kinship

Invested in social reproduction within non-normative heterosexual families, a queer theoretical approach also raises the question of whether a homonormative framework is applicable to discuss Korean adoptive parents and their desire to create and sustain “an authentic family.” Lisa Duggan frames homonormativity as a “politics that does not contest dominant heternormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them.”⁵² Similarly, Jasbir K. Puar finds homonormativity is complicit with the “reproduction of heteronormative norms.”⁵³ A homonormative framework provides

⁵⁰ Fineman, The Neutered Mother, The Sexual Family, and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies, 147.
insight into how non-normative kinship formations desire legibility within normative legal and/or social understandings of “family.” While adoption, more broadly, as a method for same-sex family formation may be considered homonormative in their reproductive futuristic desires, heterosexual adoptive parents’ normative desires reflect their heteronormative aspirations.

Yearning for normative acceptance as real kinship formations, the Korean adoptive family exists as a site of repro-narrativity, which Michael Warner defines as “the notion that our lives are somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of generational succession.” The reproductive futurity of repro-narrativity is reflected in Warner’s discussion of reprosexuality – the interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity. Yet, rhetoric concerning the reproduction of a certain kind of raced and classed family shapes the ways in which adoption is as an abnormal construction of repro-narrativity. Due to the heteronormative aspirations of adoptive parents, these individuals embody a deviant reproduction. In other words, I suggest rethinking Warner’s concept of reprosexuality to account for how the adoptive family exists on a continuum of deviant heterosexuality.

Discussing Chinese bachelor societies, Jennifer Ting notes that these communities were rendered deviant for their non-reproductive and non-conjugal composition when compared to the normative heterosexuality within the “family.” The concept of deviant heterosexuality lends itself to understanding adoptive parents’ non-procreative sex and social reproduction within the conjugal family. However, at the same

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55 Ibid., 9.
time adoptive parents participate in the values of reprosexuality, which causes the adoptee to gain white privilege and cultural whiteness. Due to this complex negotiation of biology and culture within the adoptive family, I find the Korean adoptive family, in particular the parents, embody deviant reprosexuality. By introducing the concept of deviant reprosexuality, I suggest that reprosexuality must be expanded to account for the social reproduction of family across racial, ethnic, cultural, and national borders whereby the “biological mirror” of parent and child is disrupted.\textsuperscript{57} This differs from the reproduction of the family within multiracial or mixed race households in that the genetic relationship shared between parent and child provides an opportunity for the continuance of repro-narrativity and normative reprosexuality.

Even as Korean adoption socially begets the Child, this set of kinship relations only replicates existing beliefs regarding real kinship based on regulations concerning who shall be permitted to adopt children. Guidelines for adoption from Korea require married couples to be married at least three years and have fewer than two divorces between them. Further, the United States Department of State states: “Prospective adoptive parents must be between 25 and 44 years old...[and] have an income higher than the U.S. national average and be sufficient to support the adoptive child.”\textsuperscript{58} Such regulations reflect the deviant reprosexuality occurring within the adoptive family as normative kinship standards are applied – the notion that parents must be married and heterosexual. To this end, these families may be less illegitimate or postmodern than their


remarried or single parent counterparts because adoptive parents of Korean children must adhere to “normative” family requirements. The guidelines automatically construct the Korean adoptive family as facsimiles of real kinship as Korean adoptive parents fit idealized assumptions concerning family. Yet, because of the visible racial/ethnic difference found in the majority of these Korean adoptive families, the families’ deviance for not biologically reproducing all, if not some, of its children may render these families illegible as real kin structures.

From this perspective, it becomes evident that hierarchies exist within the monolithic notion of the “postmodern family.” The inclusion of various family formations, such as same-sex families, adoptive families, and families formed via the use of new reproductive technologies demonstrates how far families have strayed from the metanarrative that undergirds political and social mores. The “postmodern family” provides new avenues to locate hetero-, homo-, and non-normative kinship structures, transracial, interracial, and intercultural articulations of family. In this respect, I return to the discussion at the beginning of this chapter regarding the fluid definition of family emerging that locates family as a set of relationships versus biology. This nuanced understanding of family as predicated on intimacies versus genetics provides access for non-normative and queer formations of the family into family rhetoric. Yet, the existence of hierarchies reveals how legibility and legitimacy is provided to distinctly non-normative, queer families. The postmodern nature of these families remains contradictory as aspects of these particular families operate in tension with one another. For example, even as divorced, blended, and/or queer families gain visibility on mainstream television
and film, reproductive medical technologies and adoption impact common understandings of biological relatedness and family. Families formed via new reproductive technologies may remain genetically tied, while also circumventing sexual procreation and even gestational motherhood. This family simultaneously is rendered deviant, yet normative for the parents bypass traditional hetero-procreative methods to biologically beget the child. Moreover, LGBTQ individuals and heterosexuals have access to these new reproductive technologies, which challenges traditional notions of family as heterosexual, genetically related units. Franklin notes: “[T]he rapid development of new genetic technologies has placed a premium on familiar anthropological questions, such as the meaning of genealogy, parenthood, or a so-called blood tie.” Further, Carsten writes that new reproductive technologies result in both “technologization of nature” and a “naturalization of technology.” Such processes seek to legitimize non-normative heterosexual and homosexual reproduction to underscore how biological and genetic relatedness becomes privileged in discourses of the reproduction of the family.

Conversely, even as adoption raises concerns over the importance of genetic relatedness, their seemingly normative construction offers the Korean adoptive family access to legibility that may not be extended towards single and/or same-sex families

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59 For example the ABC primetime sitcom *Modern Family* follows a “traditional” nuclear family, one marked by divorce and interracial marriage, and a gay couple with an adopted daughter from Asia.
who continue to be pathologized in mainstream “family values” rhetoric. By seeking to recreate legible families through various means, families formed by technology and/or adoption create, which Cynthia Enloe terms, “micro-pyramids of inequality.”

Discussing the power differentials produced under this rubric, Enloe writes: “Hierarchies are multiple, because forms of political power are diverse. But the several hierarchies do not sit on the social landscape…diversely multiple but unconnected. They relate to each other, sometimes in ways that subvert one another, sometimes in ways that provide each with its respective resiliency.”

Bearing this in mind, I maintain that the legibility provided to postmodern families cannot be universalized. Due to this uneven conferral of legibility as well as legitimacy, Korean adoptive families become normalized due to the Korean adoption program’s stringent adoptive parent criteria.

The Impact of Transraciality on the Adoptive Family

Transraciality provides a framework to critically examine how racial difference functions within the family as well as how issues of race, ethnicity, and culture impact identity construction. Transraciality captures how the processes of transculturalization and re/racialization remain in continuous dialogue with one another to construct the adoptee’s hybrid identity. I deploy the term transculturalization instead of acculturation or even assimilation because I am interested in the extreme nature of how adoptees,

62 To this end, Judith Stacey (1998) writes: “White, middle-class families…are less the innovators than the propagandists and principal beneficiaries of contemporary family change. African-American women and white, working-class women have been the genuine postmodern family pioneers, even though they also suffer from its most negative effects”; Brave New Families…, 252. See Fineman, The Neutered Mother, The Sexual Family, and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies.


64 Ibid., 31.
acculturated into the normalizing nature of whiteness, negotiate their relationship with Korean/Asian American culture and history. I draw upon the work of A. Irving Hallowell in my discussions of transculturalization. Discussing Indianization and the inclusion of white Americans and African Americans within American Indian cultures in the nineteenth century, Hallowell defines transculturalization as “the process whereby individuals under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society, and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree.”

Transculturalization occurs via the projection of “whiteness” on the adoptee due to the deployment of adoptive parents’ racial blindness and the abnegation of adoptee birth culture. The term racial blindness reflects the ways in which adoptive parents deploy color blind rhetoric as well as overlook the implications of racial difference in the lives of their children.

At the same time, in my review of the sealed case records, I found adoptive parents expressed a conscious understanding of how racial or cultural difference may affect their child’s life. Within their home studies, adoptive parents disclosed how racial and cultural difference would be mitigated upon adoption finalization. One family from the West Coast in the late 1970s was honest with their social worker, who recorded: “The child placed with them, though, probably will not have many opportunities to know other people of Korean background. The [family] will do what they can to help the child know

about his own culture." This family, aware of the prospective impact of racial and cultural difference, clearly desired to facilitate an open conversation about adoption. The response to racial and cultural difference was not always the same across prospective adoptive families during this time period. For instance, discussing another family, a different caseworker noted: “In essence, [they] see adoption as the difference, not race. It doesn’t matter to them if the child is Caucasian or Asian. They point out that with a brunette child, they will run the range of coloring with the three children.” The term “coloring” underscores how the parents are attentive to skin hue, not racial difference. In other words, race is just another “color,” not a distinct social formation. This statement also reflects how colorblindness may have prevented their ability to comprehend the fact that having brown hair and eyes like their white siblings did not mitigate being racially distinct from other family members. In early case studies from the late 1960s, I found a parallel understanding of racial and cultural difference. For instance, discussing a family in the Midwest, a social worker noted:

Some racial prejudice exists, but in most cases is not intense, and, when present, seems directed toward the Negro individuals rather than other non-American nationalities. There are seven or eight Korean nationals in the immediate vicinity…[including adoptees]…Community attitude towards nationalities other than Negro seems predominately favorable.

Based on this account, one can only assume that the family was unaware with how racism would affect Korean children because they were non-black. Such an understanding of race is not surprising given how prospective adoptive parents noted that a Korean or

67 Box 360, Folder 14, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
68 Box 255, Folder 75 Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
Asian child would be accepted versus a black child. Nonetheless, this same family also expressed an interest in learning more about Korean culture and customs to aid the adoptee’s transition into American life.

Furthermore, I discovered that adoptive parents expressed a commitment to an open dialogue concerning adoption with the child. For example, discussing a prospective adoptive couple, a social worker noted: “They feel it is important that the adopted child know of [his/her] adoption…[The prospective adoptive parents] have traveled to other countries, are very interested in all cultures and traditions…They also have friends who have adopted both local and Korean children.”

Similarly, another social worker wrote: “They believe in being honest with a child and respect his right to know about himself and cultural background…There are Korean children in the school and neighborhood.”

Parents also expressed a desire to gain Korean cultural capital. For instance, the prospective adoptive parents of an elementary aged child expressed an interested in taking a Berlitz language course in Korean.

Bearing this in mind, I want to return to my initial discussion of racial blindness. While adoptive parents recognize that their adopted children would benefit from interactions with other adoptees in their communities and express an interest in learning more about Korean culture, it is not clear how these parents act on these “interests” following adoption completion. I utilize the term “interests” to raise questions concerning

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69 Box 360, Folder 21, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
70 Box 360, Folder 11, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
71 Box 328, Folder 2, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
whether or not these parents expressed their awareness to social workers to facilitate placement of children with ease rather than complicating their home studies. Parental efforts to encourage ethnic negotiation contradict statements by adult adoptees regarding the lack of diversity and existence of racism in their local communities. Thus, even as awareness for multiculturalism is evident in the late 1960s and 1970s, this interest, for example, is mitigated by the parents’ blindness towards how racism against blacks may impact their children.

Consequently, due to the “racialization of the family” that occurs as part of the transculturalization process, I suggest that the adoptee will make Western culture his/her own as a result of de/Koreanization via colonization. I contend adoptees are comparable to the native intellectual. Frantz Fanon writes: “Like adopted children who only stop investigating the new family framework at the moment when a minimum nucleus of security crystallizes in their psyche, the native intellectual will try to make European culture his own.”72 Removed from their “native” cultures, both are trained, acculturated and established their sense of self in the dominant, colonizing culture. Not only are families a social space for learned behavior, transculturalization provides the adoptee access to white privilege and a culturally white identity, something that is unbeknownst to many non-whites in the United States and the West.

Thus, to a degree, transculturalization is a form of “racial and cultural genocide” because the de/Koreanization process renders the adoptee as a “blank slate” ready for a new identity upon his/her adoption. Yet, I am wary of utilizing a strong term such as

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“genocide.” To understand the impact of transculturalization, however, it would be remiss to ignore the forced nature of adoptees’ migration and the various institutions and individuals that erase birth parent experiences and country of origin. Speaking to this ethnic and culture erasure, Jessica Freedman writes: “I realize that even though our physical appearance may be similar, I’m still very different from them because unlike them, I have an American last name, I am an American – I am an adopted Korean-American girl.” Kari Ruth echoes this sentiment, noting: “I get mistaken for a Korean a lot.” These examples from adult adoptees demonstrate how transculturalization ensures the continual emphasis of the adoptees’ (white) Americanness vis-à-vis racial blindness performed within the nuclear family.

Re/racialization occurs as adoptees explore their Korean heritage in adulthood as agents of their consumption versus as children responding to parental influence (i.e. attending culture camps or language school from a young age). Although adoptees are raced as Other based on societal presumptions concerning their phenotype, this involuntary racialization reflects the way in which adoptees do not willingly identity as Korean/Asian American. Such prescribed notions of identity do not reflect the adoptees’ actual sense of self. Re/racialization thus follows the transculturalization adoptees underwent during childhood and adolescence. Multiple opportunities are presented to adoptees as they enter the re/racialization process. For example, adoptees may engage

with the adult adoptee population in local, national or global adult adoptee organizations. Simultaneously, these adoptees may also choose not to partake in a recognized community and instead learn more about Korea through other means, such as taking East Asian studies or Korean language classes at their local university. The abovementioned examples are not all encompassing and may not reflect all of the various ways in which adoptees undergo re/racialization. However, these examples are meant to provide some understanding into how adoptees continue to negotiate their racial/ethnic identity.

Performing Race, Performing Family

Returning to my earlier discussion of the adoptive family’s heteronormative aspirations, I suggest that the deviance of social reproduction arises from the need to rethink what it means to be in a monoracial family.76 Even as monoraciality of the family is disrupted, it is simultaneously upheld vis-à-vis adoptive parents’ racial blindness and transculturization. To this end, adoptive families mimic normative kinship in their desire to emerge as an authentic family.77 The act of trying to pass by adoptive families is embodied in other marginalized groups attempts to “pass” in heteronormative society, whereby “whiteness” and “heterosexuality” are placed in as dominant discourse against “blackness” and “homosexuality.” For example, adult Korean adoptee Becca Higgins Swick notes: “I was raised as a Caucasian. By that I mean that when we talked about family things, we always talked about my mother’s and my father’s families, so my being

76 Unlike mixed race families, who at the outset recognize their transracial or multiracial composition, the transracial, transnational adoptive family desires to gain legitimacy within real kinship structures based on genetic and racial connectedness.

77 Homi Bhabha notes mimicry is rooted in the desire for a formed and recognized “Other” that is almost the same, but not quite; The Location of Culture (London: Routledge, 1994).
Korean was never introduced into the picture."⁷⁸ This elision of racial difference between parent and adoptee ignores the history of racialization in the United States as adoptees encounter how race informs their lived experiences and interactions with institutions and society-at-large.⁷⁹

While interest in increasing adoptive parents’ cultural competency grew at the end of the twentieth century, prior to this, adoptive parents were told to assimilate their children and “raise them as their very own.” One result of this new multicultural emphasis is “culture keeping” – “[the partial replication of] the cultural education internationally adopted children would receive if they were being raised within a family of their own ethnic heritage.”⁸⁰ While culture keeping along with other multiculturalist techniques may be one avenue for parents to ensure this de/racialization does not occur, this practice serves to provide only certain aspects of the culture to the adoptee. For example, Heather Jacobson found many mothers of Chinese adoptees believe in an authentic, static notion of “Chinese-ness.”⁸¹ Correspondingly, in researching “culture camps,” Lori Delale-O’Connor writes: “[T]hese camps make explicit the types of culture that are valued in American society…[and] highlight those aspects of children’s birth cultures that do not contradict or create dissonance with mainstream American culture.”⁸²

Even as culture keeping appears beneficial, it risks “eating the other,” when the notion of

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⁸¹ Ibid., 113.
culture remains static or representative of a singular Orientalized perspective.\textsuperscript{83}

Recognizing how culture keeping involves the tokenistic inclusion of “diversity,” Katz Rothman raises the following questions:

And just what is this heritage we celebrate in our adopted children? What is it that the parents of the Chinese girls are celebrating with their pandas, that all of these adoptive parents, with the foods and music and folk tales and clothing, are bringing home with their children from all over the world? Is it culture? Does a baby have culture? We’re doing this celebration of heritage for children who left their native lands long before they learned to speak, let alone developed food preferences for things Peruvian or Chinese. Where does this culture reside in the baby?\textsuperscript{84}

Ethnic commodification allows adoptive parents to explore and appropriate specific aspects of “authentic” Asianness into their families. Nevertheless, for adoptive parents such as journalist Karin Evans culture keeping is one way for parents to “[cultivate] respect for that culture and [impart] as much information as possible during childhood is a way to keep the doors open should the [adoptee] wish to step through.”\textsuperscript{85} Regardless of culture keeping’s intent, since it arose after the majority of Korean adoptees entered adulthood, many like Swick recall multiple instances where their parents elided familial racial difference.\textsuperscript{86}

Seeking to enter the heteronormative kinship structure and gain legitimacy, these families desire to remedy difference to demonstrate their “normalcy.” This occurs at the

\textsuperscript{83} bell hooks, \textit{Black Looks: Race and Representation} (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992).
\textsuperscript{84} Katz Rothman, \textit{Weaving a Family: Untangling Race and Adoption}, 167.
\textsuperscript{86} Bishoff and Rankin, \textit{Seeds From a Silent Tree}…; Cox, \textit{Voices From Another Place}…. St. Paul, MN: Yeong and Yeong Book Company; Hei Sook Park Wilkinson and Nancy Fox, eds., \textit{After the Morning Calm: Reflections of Korean Adoptees} (Bloomfield Hills: Sunrise Ventures, 2002); Korean Culture Network, \textit{I Didn’t Know Who I Was}; and Ellen Lee, Marilyn Lammert, and Mary Anne. Hess, eds., \textit{Once They Hear My Name: Korean Adoptees and Their Journeys toward Identity} (Silver Spring, MD: Tamarisk Books, 2008).
expense of the child vis-à-vis transculturalization as seen in Swick’s comment concerning how she was “raised Caucasian.” To be raised Caucasian only highlights the white privilege operating in her life, whereby whiteness is the unnamed norm. The adoptee will make Western culture his/her own because families are a social space for learned behavior. At the same time, adoptees gain access to white privilege and a culturally white identity, something that is unbeknownst to many non-whites in the United States and the West.

The Performative Nature of Transraciality: Speaking as Subjects, Negotiating Illegibility

Due to their ability to shore up the white heteronormative family, adoptees gain legibility as subjects by asserting a culturally white identity. In doing so, adoptees’ bodies are further disciplined from unassimilable forever foreigner to an “almost the same, but not quite” white. In this regard, adoptees must examine their racial/ethnic status against the white normative framework produced by their transnational, transracial adoptions.87 Adoptees’ gain subject status vis-à-vis cultivating a white mask. Similar to the native intellectual discussed by Fanon, the white mask will only allow adoptees to mimic whiteness, but never gain white subjectivity.88 Regardless of the agency the Other – the adoptee – achieves, the individual will be marked by his/her deviancy – their non-whiteness. The white mask remains an “inauthentic promissory note.”89 Further emphasizing the mimesis the colonized undergoes, Fanon interrogates the importance of

88 Ibid. See also: Wright, Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora, 113.
89 Wright, Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora, 122.
language in the lives of the colonized to gain subjectivity. Language and diction remain a performance, even as the colonizer remains apathetic towards the colonized mastery of language. Gaining fluency of French, in the case of Fanon, the colonized body resists common tropes inscribed onto the Black body. Operating with this constrained agency, the colonized body continually negotiates between moments of subjectivity as fluent French speakers, while remaining limited by society’s prescribed understandings of race that render their marked bodies as illegible. While Fanon finds this to be debilitating and paralyzing because only by wearing a “white mask” can the colonized attempt to gain subjectivity within the existing racial contract, I contend the negotiating of whiteness is central to locating adoptees’ transracial and transcultural experience. The white mask transfers the adoptive parents’ white privilege onto the adoptee as a child. This mask represents adoptees’ cultural whiteness and continued negotiation of the tensions produced as a racially marked body.

Korean adoptees’ desire to embody the white ideal is rooted in their parents’ desire to replicate the heteronormative family. Tobias Hübinette contends that adoptees’ pastiche of whiteness is similar to the performances of “ethnic drags and cross-dressers, transvestites or even transsexuals or the transgendered who are troubling, mocking and parodying supposedly fixed racial, ethnic, and national identities and belongings.” The performative nature of the heteronormative family underscores the importance of how racial difference renders the family fictive in a world predicated upon biological

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90 Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*.
relatedness. In their performance of “whiteness,” adoptees represent what Butler describes as “an ideal that no one can embody” as the parody of “whiteness” fails in its mimicry.\footnote{Judith Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (New York: Routledge, 1990), 139.} For the adoptee can never be white in that he/she will never gain “white” physical countenance, even if he/she obtains cultural whiteness. More broadly, the adoptive family fails to adhere to traditional scripts of whiteness in its departure from heterosex. Rather, no longer a monoracial unit, this new white American family pushes the boundaries of traditional kinship, in that the culturally white identity bestowed upon the adoptee’s body inscribes the non-white child into the white family. Whiteness can no longer be viewed in a binary construction of white versus non-white. Instead, whiteness becomes blurred, whereby the social construct of whiteness becomes broadened to understand how cultural white identities impact the white American family.

In their negotiation between understandings of “realness” whether as a family or as a “white,” adoptees and their families remain in continual tension between dominant discourse and their family formation. For example, when adult adoptee memoirist Katy Robinson discusses her initial return to Korea in \textit{A Single Square Picture: A Korean Adoptee’s Search for Her Roots}, she notes: “As the buzz of voices increased, so did my awareness of the foreign faces around me. Then it hit me – these people looked like me…I was no longer the lone Asian in the crowd.”\footnote{Katy Robinson, \textit{A Single Square Picture: A Korean Adoptee’s Search for Her Roots} (New York: Berkley Books, 2002), 6; emphasis added.} I emphasize Robinson’s excitement regarding ethnic homogeneity because the lack of racial/ethnic similarity within the adoptive family is masked and ignored. Such an approach only obscures the obvious,
visible difference and discourage productive conversation to how the family dynamic as well as familial interactions with the outside world – extended kin, community members, and strangers – changes due to the presence of a non-white person in an overwhelmingly homogenous family. Upon return to Korea and the initial experience of physically “blending in,” the adoptee is startled at how he/she is able to appear as if he/she “belongs.”

Yet, this mask takes a different color when critically interrogating adult adoptees’ Korean language performance in Korea. Attempting to gain subject status as a Korean in Korea, the adoptees’ use of Korean language becomes clouded in their desire to speak like the native Korean. Legibility becomes revoked when the adoptee speaks accented Korean that could lead to misrecognition. Their legibility is also questioned if their flawless “안녕하세요” (Hello) prompts a Korean national to respond in Korean. These exchanges leave adoptees in bewilderment as how to respond because their linguistic ability remains circumscribed by their limited knowledge to say hello, goodbye, and thank you, for example. The precarious mask of Koreanness renders the adoptee unreadable as “Korean,” while at the same time, their raced body in Korea as Korean places them outside dominant understandings of “American” in the East. Even if the adoptee notes they are “입양인” (“adoptee”), they actively locate themselves at once both inside and outside the nation. For example, discussing her return to Korea, Ami Inja Nafzger writes: “Everyone is Korean, so physically you look like you belong. I felt that way for a while, but the moment you open your mouth, it’s obvious you don’t really
belong.” Nafzger’s reflection underscores how the mask the adoptee wears serves to mark the adoptee as an illegible subject.

Situated in this liminal space as a non-culturally Korean, non-Korean national, Jane Jeong Trenka chronicles her experiences as a “functionally illiterate, deaf and mute” adoptee living in Korea in her second memoir, *Fugitive Visions: An Adoptee’s Return to Korea*. However, for Trenka, Korean proficiency is not a marker of authenticity as she bridges her culturally white upbringing and Korean body. Trenka writes: “Because of [my adoption] I have consciously decided not to try to assimilate; I cannot do it twice in one lifetime. During my time on the margins of Korean society, I have lived among others who also cannot undo what has already been done to them.” No longer is “blending in” critical in asserting a specific national and/or cultural identity. Language is only a marker of difference, not a marker of subjectivity. In her eyes, being Korean is no longer tied to language Fanon’s display of a “white mask.” Nevertheless, as Trenka reconciles her hybrid identity whilst living in Korea, she writes: “In Korea, I am an overseas Korean. I am an overseas adopted Korean. In Korea, I cannot speak Korean. In Korea, I am not a real Korean.” By not speaking Korean, other Koreans mark Trenka as a deficient replication because of the belief that all Koreans, regardless of upbringing, should know their mother tongue as seen in the interaction many adoptees have with Korea locals.

96 Ibid., 174; emphasis added.
97 Ibid., 31; emphasis added.
However, not all adoptees experience an immediate sense of dislocation or the same types of displacement. This became evident in conversations with my interviewees. For example, Kevin noted: “I was curious to see was whether or not when I got there if I would experience any culture shock just seeing so many Asians for the first time. Or if I would I feel different or strange in any sort of way. But when I got there it felt pretty comfortable in that respect. I didn’t feel like I stuck out.”

The lack of self-consciousness was similarly discussed by Megan, who recalled: “The best thing that came from that trip [in 2000 through the adult adoptee organization Also Known As, Inc.] was that I was able to really feel like I could claim Korea as my own because I actually had experienced it.”

Yet, reflecting on her visit to Korea with her white husband, Lydia noted a different type of racialized encounter in Korea. Discussing the assumption that she should “secretly know Korean” due to her ethnicity, Lydia said: “If we ever got lost, I would walk fifty feet behind my husband, so that he could walk around looking lost by himself and then people would self select – English speakers would self select – to go help him. So that was really frustrating as an adult.”

This disjunction was also mentioned by Susan: “I think that when I first got off the plane and began interacting with other Korean nationals, their shock that I couldn’t speak Korean, that I couldn’t function in the same way they did as nationals just for basic thing like buying a bus ticket, I think that was a direct confrontation with the loss that I had known about in the abstract, but in terms of being their physically in Korea, really grappling with it and embodying it.”

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98 Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
99 Interview with author on June 28, 2012.
100 Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
101 Interview with author on August 14, 2012.
The abovementioned examples from adult adoptees are not intended to demonstrate or reify adoptees’ as inherently missing a piece of themselves. Instead I draw from adoptees’ experiences to examine how transraciality directly functions in their lives as identity is in process and not on a linear plane to reach wholeness. Transraciality thus accounts for the myriad of ways adoptees remain located within the transnational, transracial adoptive framework’s interstitial borderlands, straddling multiple cultures – Western, Korean, and adoptee. An exploration of racial performativity underscores how transraciality is implicated in not only the life of the adoptee, but also inextricably tied to the family in its entirety.

In this regard, I situate my understanding of adoptees’ negotiation of identity in direct opposition to Eng’s deployment of psychoanalysis to explore what he considers “the terrain of racial melancholia and loss” in the life of the adoptee.\(^\text{102}\) He argues racial melancholia remains more acute for adoptees because “the transnational adoptee disrupts the aesthetic continuity of the white nuclear family.”\(^\text{103}\) Discussing the family’s internal racial differences, Eng notes:

> This racial divide creates a set of distinctions between Koreanness and Whiteness that must also be traced back to a kind of castration crisis, in which the latter category emerges as the privileged and governing trope. For the Asian transnational adoptee, whose racialization is both produced and denied at once by her adoptive white family, issues of recrimination and blame become remarkably complicated.\(^\text{104}\)

The term “recrimination and blame” underscores how only the adoptee faces a “castration crisis” and not the adoptive parents or entire family unit. The divide created by this


\(^{103}\) Ibid., 150.

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 127.
“crisis” results in Eng’s emphasis that the adoptee always desires to know one’s genetic origins. Any discussion of race contributes to fear on the adoptees of being viewed as ungrateful towards his/her adoptive parents. If the act of adoption is linked to a castration crisis of racial and ethnic difference, transnational and transcultural differences are obscured and hidden.

Further, Eng provides no recourse to account for adoptive parents’ ability to impart a positive racial or ethnic identity on the adoptee. Discussing the lack of engagement adoptive parents have with their child’s birth culture, Eng argues this failure exacerbates the adoptee’s melancholia. This underscores the “recrimination and blame” adoptees feel when he/she acknowledges the racial difference that remains silenced within the family. Adoptees exist in isolation as a result of their adoptive parents’ failure to recognize racial difference, whereby difference is subsumed under the notion of sameness, Eng alludes to the adoptive family as incapable of being viewed as Asian American since many of the adoptive parents of Korean children did not identify themselves with “their children’s Asianness.” He finds the family to lack access to claiming an Asian American identity. Even if adoptive parents identify with “Korean/Asian culture,” this identification is superficial and is rooted in their purchasing of tangible artifacts and clothing and not necessarily understanding the history of Asians in the United States.

Nevertheless, I argue that the adoptive family is Asian American. By focusing only on whether the adoptive parents view themselves as racialized subjects continues to ignore the racialization that occurs when the adoptive family as a whole is viewed by
society-at-large. In this respect, even Eng notes: “Unlike prior histories of sexual or racial passing, however, the inscription of the closet in transnational adoption seemed to be less about the problem of detecting a hidden sexual or racial trait than about our collective refusal to see difference in the face of it.” Recognizing the salience of race in societal perceptions of the adoptee’s body is critical in my contention that the adoptee and his/her family are Asian American. Because the adoptee is continually read as Korean/Asian through the involuntary racialization process, the adoptive family is unable to pass as a real kinship structure. Discussing her personal experiences with transracial adoption, Barbara Katz Rothman writes: “As long as there is a color line in America, we’ll be straddling those worlds, and white families will have to raise their black children for worlds their mothers and fathers can never fully enter.” While Katz Rothman believes that she and her partner are unable to fully enter this world, I argue that these families do become part of Asian America or in the case of Katz Rothman, these families become part of Black America. By adopting transracially and transnationally, Korean adoptive parents must look inwards and examine the ways in which white privilege circulates and permeates their lived experiences and its impact on their children. According to Sara Ahmed: “To see racism, you have to un-see the world as you learned to see it, the work that covers unhappiness, by covering over its cause. You have to be willing to venture into secret places of pain.” Through self-reflexivity, adoptive parents gain the ability to empathize with the racist encounters adoptees face. The lack of monoraciality propels the adoptive family to be reinscribed into the Asian American family.

105 Ibid., 2.
As Asian American identity is reinvented to ensure the experiences of adoptees are included to reflect the changing demographics of Asian Americans, the notion of the Asian American family must change as well. If the child is reinscribed into understandings of who is Asian American within the nation, then it is only plausible that their families can be viewed as Asian American. These families, while not Asian American in the traditional sense in their deviation of monoraciality, embody the twenty-first century Asian American family – a family that is not inclusive of two biological parents of Asian descent. Adoptive families are also joined by mixed-race families in this sense for both rewrite historical understandings of what it means to be authentically Asian American. However, it is because the “racialization of the family” is maintained within a white framework that their deviant reprosexuality is evident.

Adult Adoptees Reflections on Family

“Family is people that have taken care of you to a great extent. I wouldn’t define it as happening just while growing up. I feel like you can make family later on. A collective group of people that are there for one another and take care of you.”
- Laura, September 6, 2012

Legitimacy and legibility remain in conversation with conversations concerning “realness” and questions of “what if.” As we redefine what it means to be an Asian American or white family vis-à-vis the practice of transnational, transracial adoption, it is also important to locate how adoptees discuss and reflect on the everyday realities of family. The adult adoptees I spoke with described the ways in which their definitions of family evolved. Reflecting on their childhood perception of family, adoptees found

themselves discussing how their adoptive parents and early childhood relationships influenced how they constructed the concept of “family.” For example, Megan notes: “I think so. I think as children we always consider our family as our immediate – people who lives in our house with us, maybe our grandparents, cousins, all of those people with relationship names. And as you get older, you become aware – your family becomes your spouse.”\(^9\) Kevin discussed his own understandings of legitimate families:

\[\text{T]here was a period when I first found out I was adopted that I had to define for myself what “real” was…when you’re young, when I found out my first thought was that my adoptive parents were not my “real” parents. And I mentioned that to my mom one time, and I really hurt her. It took me awhile to figure out who “real” parents were. So I guess I never really thought about the definition of “family” as far as parents go, I sort of took my adoptive parents as my “real” parents, birth parents as just that – they gave birth to me, and they are blood related, but that’s as far as it goes because they haven’t had any hand in my development or who I am as a person.\(^9\)

Although many adoptees mentioned how family became an often-questioned topic, for one adoptee it was clear that his adoptive family was his only family. Tom noted: “I just assumed family was whoever you were living with when you grew up…The factors would be whoever takes care of you when you’re growing up. From a simplistic point of you because when you’re growing up you’re kind of small. You don’t have that deep of thoughts and think whoever is surrounding you is family.”\(^1\)

Societal perceptions of “family” directly impacted on adoptees. The impact of the “dictionary” definition of family was evident in Rebecca’s reflection: “You can’t really get away from how family is described and conceptualized in the media, popular culture,

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\(^9\) Interview with author on June 28, 2012.
\(^9\) Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
\(^1\) Interview with author on July 14, 2012.
in the books that we read." A slippage also existed with how adoptees may view their adoptive family as their only family. Liz said: “Yes, I think in the beginning I would have only said my adoptive family. I almost said my blood family, I meant legal family.”

Kevin echoed such an immediate reaction to biology: “I guess blood…people who are blood related to the people who have adopted me.”

However, a common thread in their definitions was a focus on individuals who stand by one’s side. Amy said: “[Family] is people you love and they love you and raise you…you know. I guess make sacrifices for you and you for them.” Similarly, Liz defined family as “the people in your life who mean the most to you, who you have long term significant relationships with.”

John also noted: “Family, I think for me, is someone who has your back. Someone who can support you. It doesn’t have to be blood…It’s definitely someone who is always going to be there to support you no matter what kind of decisions you make in life.”

Even as the notion of family evolves, for some adoptees it rests on understandings of obligation and connection. Family is no longer a singular unit nor even composed of concepts of biology or adoption. For instance, Lydia said:

I think family is both an obligation and an experience. And you can create an obligation through experience. For instance, the family that adopted me because I spent my formative years with them, I share a lot of experiences – good ones and bad ones – that no one else in the world shares. I think those ties obligate us to one another in a way that I’m not obligated to other people that I may be closer to emotionally. So, when my parents get sick, I’ll take care of them and I will drag my feet the whole way, but I’ll take care of them. But I also think family is

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112 Interview with author on July 12, 2012.
113 Interview with author on July 23, 2012.
114 Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
115 Interview with author on June 23, 2012.
116 Interview with author on July 23, 2012.
117 Interview with author on August 26, 2012.
something you’re born into. So, I have family that I don’t know. And I think it is possible to have family that you don’t know.\textsuperscript{118}

Recognizing adoptees’ multiple families, Lydia sheds light onto how biological families enter into adoptees’ definitions of family. Discussing how she currently defines family, Claudia noted: “I consider part of my particular family – my husband and our – my adoptive family, so my two parents and my sister, my adoptive sister. As well as my Korean family, which would include my birth mom and my half sister, her daughter, and my birth father, his wife and their two children. And then [my husband’s] family.”\textsuperscript{119} As she discussed her family, Claudia also provided insight into how her definition evolved, noting that at one point her parents and her stopped speaking to one another for long periods of time. Yet, reflecting on her sustained relationship with them, Claudia commented: “I think I had a renewed appreciation for that permanence, where even if they hated me, they felt some sort of responsibility to keep talking to me – to keep those lines of communication open.”\textsuperscript{120} In many ways, Amy’s discussion of family speaks to Claudia’s last revelation about family: “I guess you see hardships and what you go through as family…you kind of…at least for me, realize family is people who voluntarily stay around and help you and love you and care for you.”\textsuperscript{121}

The inclusion of adoptee perspectives that explore how their definitions of family evolved provides insight into how adoptees concretely experience their transracial, transnational families. In other words, at the micro-level, family is no longer tied to conceptualizations of white or Asian American. Rather, by discussing how family is tied

\textsuperscript{118} Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
\textsuperscript{119} Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.
connections of origin – biological and adoptive – and choice, adoptees speak to how family is no longer the normative, real kinship structure tied to the nuclear family. Their emphasis on intimate bonds and friendships speaks to how familial structures are adapted and adopted by non-normative relations to construct stronger relationships. When separating racial affiliation and identification from adoptees’ conceptualizations of family, we also see the ways in which traditional understandings of kinship become absorbed in non-normative families.

Conclusion

Overall, this chapter is in accord with recent scholarship exploring the global inequalities of transnational adoption in its examination of the Korean adoptive family as a privileged site of kinship. In doing so, I explored how the terms fictive and real have been reconfigured to create hierarchies within postmodern family formations concerning their ability to mimic heteronormative, real kinship formations. Not only do these families disrupt common understandings of the genetically related family, they also complicate the racialization of the family as a monoracial unit. According to John Terrell and Judith Modell: “Adoption is…a phenomenological category betwixt categories, a category that straddles the fence, a category in…society that dooms those who fall within it to be both kin and non-kin – real and ‘fictive’.”

Situated at the borderlands of kinship, adoptive families are at a crossroads challenging the heteronormative ideal of family.

122 Terrell and Modell, “Anthropology and Adoption,” 158.
Seeking to gain entrance into heteronormative family through their suppression of racial difference, adoptive parents become entangled in issues of racial difference as the image of the traditional white family becomes disrupted. At the same time, their desire for normativity obscures parent/child racial difference. This racial silencing is critical as it accentuates how the adoptee and the family remain marked by their transracial existence. Nevertheless, dominant discourse does not inhibit the development of an Asian American identity for the adoptee or the family. Yearning to biologically beget the child, who “embodies the citizen as an ideal,” adoptive parents also become Asian American regardless if they actively participate in the assertion of this identity. The Asian American identity becomes inscribed on Asian American families through the adoption process. Marked as queer, adoptive families become racialized even if the parents do not embrace this racialization much like how the adoptee undergoes involuntary racialization.

Only through reading these families as queer and postmodern will new interventions be made to understand how sexuality, reproduction and kinship remain intertwined. Even as new theorizations of kinship highlight contemporary understandings of familial relationships are fluid, these definitions overlook how adoptive families desire legibility and legitimacy as normative kin relations. By rupturing the constructed nature of traditional kinship, adoption demonstrates the disjunctures that exist between kinship and biological relatedness vis-à-vis deviant reprosexuality. As a result, adoption complicates the monoraciality of the family due to processes of the “racialization of the family” and transculturalization.

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While this inquiry centers on the estimated 75% of adoptees who entered white families, I recognize that a deeper exploration of adoptees that entered black and Asian families is necessary. I contend the application of transraciality to these family formations will produce new insights into how processes of racialization occur in the United States. For example, Korean adoptee firefighter, Emile Mack, was profiled by KoreAm magazine about his experiences growing up in a transracial, African American home. Discussing the racialization he underwent in childhood, Mack recalls: “There were people who didn’t know me or my family, and they didn’t tease me because I had black parents, but they teased me because I looked Asian. So it was the typical thing, ‘Hey Chinese, hey this, hey that.’ And then my friends would respond, ‘He’s black!! His parents are black, leave him alone!!’” Exploring the Korean-Black experience for adoptees will add depth to existing studies engaging Korean-Black relations following the 1992 Los Angeles riots. At the same time, discussing Korean adoptees entrance into the Asian American family will add new insights into how these families may be similar to same-race domestic adoptive families predicated upon race matching. The performative nature of these families may be in some ways more complex for the adoptee unlike their counterparts in transracial families may lack knowledge of their adoption or because of the intra-ethnic difference feel more Chinese American than Korean American, for example. Reaching out to this community of adoptees and their families in the future will also serve as a comparison to the experiences of intraethnic and interracial families outside of the dominant norm pervading Asian American interracial marriages.

Part II: The Assertion of Adoptee Identity in Print and Online Media
Building upon the concept of transraciality, this second section deepens my exploration of the adult adoptee counterpublic. I suggest that adult adoptees continually resist the binary characterization of “angry, maladjusted, ungrateful” versus “happy, well-adjusted, grateful.” Instead, adoptees demonstrate the fluidity of identity by inserting their lived experiences into adoption discourse via their autobiographical writings. The dichotomy originates in the colonization of adoptees to fulfill the heteronormative family’s “promise of happiness” as discussed in the preceding chapter. As colonized bodies, adoptees encounter expectations of gratefulness by the outside world, which in turn demonstrate how adoptees exist as oppressed subjects. I refer to Sara Ahmed in my discussion of adoptees’ oppression for she notes:

To be oppressed requires you to show signs of happiness, as signs of being or having been adjusted…If an oppressed person does not smile or show signs of being happy, then he or she is read as being negative: as angry, hostile, unhappy, and so on. Happiness becomes the expected “default position” for those who are oppressed, such that it comes to define the sphere of neutrality. You are either happy: or you are not.²

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1 Thank you to the peers in my History 881 in Autumn 2009 and Winter 2010 as I revised this chapter. Aspects of this chapter were presented at the Edward B. Hayes Graduate Research Forum, which was held by the Council of Graduate Students at the Ohio State University in February 2012.

Based on this understanding, adult adoptees’ childhood and adulthood reflections on the negotiation and encounter of stereotypes and processes of racialization challenge this notion of “happiness.” By showcasing the various lived realities they face, adult adoptees fail to fulfill normative requirements of being “adjusted” as Americans. For example, Heather Jacobson notes the parents of Russian and Chinese children found Korean American adoptee writings provide “cautionary tales” regarding assimilation. Jacobson’s discussion of adoptive parents’ negative reactions towards adult Korean adoptee autobiographical narratives emphasizes how the sharing of experiences may intentionally lead to adoptees’ pathologization.\(^3\) Narratives that diverge from the adoptive family as “the promise of happiness” results in adoptees’ mischaracterization as “angry,” “bitter,” or “ungrateful.”\(^4\)

As I foreground the limitations of binary categorizations, I will first deconstruct what it means to be “happy and grateful” or “angry and ungrateful.” The continual emphasis on viewing adoptees in such an either/or framework illustrates how “being happy” is subjective and is what Sara Ahmed discusses as a “moral distinction” predicated upon a person “being happy ‘in the right way’,” whereby those who find themselves aligned against adoptive parents and adoption practitioners are labeled unworthy.\(^5\) For adoptees to be “happy,” they must reflect an image of gratefulness concerning their adoptions. To be happy is linked to accepting the narrative of adoption

\(^3\) Jacobson, *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference*.


promulgated by mainstream adoption discourse. This particular narrative would require complying with the notion that adoption was the best alternative to a life in their birth countries. I am wary of the slippage that arises through the interchangeable use of “happy” and “grateful” to describe adult adoptees. Rather than advocate for a distinction between the two terms, I argue that it is within the slippage’s messiness that we see the ways in which both happiness and gratefulness mark a specific type of experience – “the mythic, saved orphan.” Those who adhere to mainstream discourse’s descriptions of transnational, transracial adoption as positive and a form of rescue also are invariably labeled as well-adjusted. As a result, to make a distinction between the terms voids the way in which mainstream discourse deploys the terms interchangeably to characterize adoptee experiences.

Speaking in contradiction to this narrative marks the speaker as “ungrateful” for the opportunities provided to him/her vis-à-vis adoption. “Ungratefulness” is bestowed to adoptees who raise questions concerning identity negotiation and instances of emotional, physical or sexual abuse within the adoptee family. In many ways the label “ungrateful” minimizes and obscures adoptees’ positive identity development struggles and incidents of physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse within the adoptive family. Due to this reductive construction framing adoptees’ public emotions on the subject of adoption, individuals who produce counternarratives to the celebrated discussions of adoption are characterized as “angry.” Discussing the concept of “anger,” Ahmed notes:

Your anger is a judgment that something is wrong. But in being heard as angry, your speech is read as motivated by anger. Your anger is read as unattributed, as if you are against x because you are angry rather than being angry because you
are against x. You become angry at the injustice of being heard as motivated by anger, which makes it harder to separate yourself from the object of your anger.6

By concealing their anger to fit under the rubric of being “well-adjusted,” adoptees risk “passing” to comply with the moral distinctions associated with happiness. The adoptee thus “work[s] to support the belief that everything is fine – when it isn’t.”7 The masking of binaries obscures the absence of what is said. In doing so, it erases the feelings and unarticulated moments in one’s lived experiences. Yet, if adoptees’ even slightly intervene in mainstream understandings of adoption, they disrupt an unspoken contract between adoptee and adoptive parent. Similar to Ahmed’s discussion of “straight hospitality” to queers, I find that adoptees’ as adults become “guests” expected to adhere to a specific script concerning their discussion of the politics of adoption. Ahmed finds: “To be a guest is to experience a moral obligation to be on your best behavior, such that to refuse to fulfill this obligation would threaten your right to coexistence.”8 Adoptees’ disruption of dominant adoption discourse threatens their ability to peacefully exist in the realm of adoptive parents and adoption practitioners.

Recounting their experiences in written text, adult adoptees disrupt the binary categorization and capture a more nuanced lived experience. Revealing the intricacies that impact their identity formation, adult adoptees may invoke themes of both happiness and anger. Adoptees may inadvertently be characterized as angry by articulating an experience not found in the mythic adoptee narrative. Through inserting their personal histories within the dominant narrative, adult adoptee writings serve as a counterpoint to

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6 Ibid., 68.
7 Ibid., 76.
8 Ibid., 106.
dichotomous generalizations. This analysis draws from Jodi Kim’s work that “conceptualizes Asian American critique as an unsettling hermeneutic,” which “generates a new interpretive practice or analytic for reading Asian American cultural productions, and the very formation of contemporary ‘Asian America(n),’ in new ways.”

Reading the anthologies against the grain as an Asian American cultural production, I suggest that adult adoptee writings trouble the humanitarian narratives found within traditional adoption discourse.

In this chapter I closely interrogate two adult Korean adoptee edited anthologies: *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees* (1997) and *Voices From Another Place: A Collection of Works From a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries* (1999). These texts are the first two publications edited by adult adoptees. Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin’s *Seeds from a Silent Tree* (1997) includes thirty accounts from adopted Koreans, who grew up throughout North America and Europe. Featured adoptees describe a range of experiences, including their struggle to find their place in the world, return to Korea, and encounters with racism. *Seeds from a Silent Tree* is heralded for its assertion of adoptee agency to generate and represent a text reflective of the myriad of voices found in the overseas Korean adoptee community-at-large. The anthology is included for analysis because it is one of the earliest works written in English that recognizes adoptees as agents of their experiences. At its outset the editors wrote that “there is no ‘right’ way” when it comes to reconciling one’s adoption

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9 Kim, *Ends of Empire...,* 5, emphasis original.
10 Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds From a Silent Tree...*; and Cox, *Voices From Another Place...*
11 Of these narratives, 29 are authored by Korean American adoptees, with one narrative by a Belgian-Korean adoptee. Of the Korean American adoptees, seven narratives are written by men and twenty two are authored by women.
Reflecting on the collection of poems, essays, and artwork in the volume, the editors also remind readers: “[T]he identity of Korean adoptees defies rigid categorization.” While other adult adoptee memoirs were written before this collection was published, the examination of a single-author text can obscure the multitude of voices found in such heterogeneous community.

The second anthology, *Voices From Another Place* (1999) edited by Susan Soon-Keum Cox, was produced to coincide with the first International Gathering of the First Generation of Korean Adoptees in September 1999 in Washington D.C. First generation adoptees arrived to the West immediately after the post-Korean War period through the 1970s. The thirty narratives were selected by the Gathering planning committee. The writings reflect an overall search for self-discovery and the need to speak for themselves about their lived experiences as adults. Recognizing how adoptees are infantilized, the narratives are meant to highlight how adoptees grow into adulthood. These particular writings capture the voices of the first generation of adoptees who formalized themselves into a reterritorialized community across space, place, and time. In other words, this anthology was one of the initial avenues that allowed adoptees’ to create a formalized voice accessible to English speakers across the globe. Further, the First Gathering was a seminal moment in adult adoptee history, whereby adoptees’ who previously may have engaged one another via listserves, came together and shared their experiences growing

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12 Bishoff and Rankin, *Seeds From a Silent Tree*..., 1.
13 Ibid., 2
14 The second gathering was held in Stockholm, Sweden in 2001. The third, fourth, and fifth gatherings were held in Seoul, South Korea in 2004, 2007, and 2010. Since the second gathering, the Gatherings have been organized by the International Korea Adoptee Association planning committee, which includes representatives from worldwide adult Korean adoptee organizations.
15 Korean American women wrote twenty-two of these narratives, while seven Korean American men authored narratives. The remaining narrative is written by a Belgian-Korean adoptee.
up in North America and Europe. Existing as a historical marker for when adoptees first engaged with one another en masse, I selected this anthology to highlight the voices of the first and second waves of adoptees – those who arrived from the post-Korean War period throughout the 1980s.

First, I situate this analysis within feminist and Asian American literary criticism to capture how adoptees’ voices exist outside of “official histories” that locate adoption as an act of humanitarianism. In doing so, I explore how adoptees’ discuss how transraciality affects their identity development and understanding of what it means to be adopted, Korean and American. This chapter aims to further the work of Elaine H. Kim, who argues adoptee narratives reshape Korean American literature. I also locate this study within Adoption Studies, which focuses on how adult adoptee writings are stories marked by loss, birth searches and desire for the “American childhood.” Instead, I suggest that these works serve as counterpoints for they highlight the complexities.


transracial, transnational adoption produces in their explicit and implicit discussions of racism and prejudice.

Second, from my reading of the texts, I suggest that this literature reworks understandings of what it means to be “happy” or “unhappy” as adoptees’ rehistoricize and recontextualize their experiences. As I explore how adult adoptees’ disrupt the binary characterization found in mainstream adoption discourse, this inquiry engages two sub-themes: migration and return migration. In doing so, I investigate how two concepts – re/birth and inauthenticity – permeate the writings of adult adoptees. I also foreground how gender operates within the negotiation of adoptees’ transraciality throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Guiding this interrogation are the following questions: 1) How do adoptees discuss their adoption to the U.S.; 2) Do these texts produce insights into the Asian American experience; and 3) Does adoption status impact their understanding of “Korean” identity?

Third, I explore how adult adoptees may construct a new mythic adoptee norm in their expression of the community’s heterogeneity. This new norm recognizes the complexities of transraciality. In doing so, the norm incorporates commonalities experienced within the adult adopted population.

Finally, I investigate how the selected texts: 1) represent a form of “talking back” – “the expression of our movement from object to subject – the liberated voice”; and 2) engage in narrative repair, producing “counterstories [that] redefine a past that has been,
until now, characterized incorrectly. “Adoptees locate themselves as experts of their experiences and reframe what it means to be a knowledge producer. In doing so, adult Korean adoptees reposition themselves in the overseas Korean diaspora and as reinsert their personal experiences into the multiple histories of Asian immigrants living in the United States.

The Context of This Inquiry

I seek to elucidate the specific interventions produced by the act of “speaking” in the creation of the adult adoptee counterpublic. This work advances the call made by Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yang Shin, the editors of Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption (2006), who note:

Over the past fifty years, white adoptive parents, academics, psychiatrists, and social workers have dominated the literature on transracial adoption. These ‘experts’ have been the ones to tell the public – including adoptees – ‘what it’s like’ and ‘how we turn out.’…The voices of adult transracial adoptees remain largely unheard. Our cultural production has been marginalized and essays discussing our personal experiences of adoption have remained undistributed and largely unknown.

The determination in which Trenka, et al. write in regard to foregrounding adult adoptee voices harkens to the early works by feminists of color. For instance, at the beginning of This Bridge Called my Back (1981), Cherie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa write: “The anthology was created with a sense of urgency. From the moment of its conception, it was already long overdue. Two years ago when we started, we knew it was a book that

20 Trenka, et al., Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption, 1, emphasis original.
should already have been in our hands.”²¹ I highlight this parallel to underscore how adult adoptee writings are necessary for other adoptees as they work towards constructing their multiple, intersecting identities. In doing so, adult adoptees reshape perceptions of what it means to be an adopted person through the written word.

Adult adoptee writings construct a new collective identity through what Michael Omi and Howard Winant term “rearticulation, which produces new subjectivity by...[taking] elements and themes of her/his culture and traditions and infuse them with new meaning.”²² Their rearticulation calls attention to the heterogeneity that exists in a traditionally homogenized group. By rearticulating their lived realities, adult adoptees demonstrates how their experiences are multidimensional, unable to be categorized in an “either, or” framework. They become reconstituted as a new population requiring recognition similar to other marginalized groups that coalesce around aspects of identity. This rearticulation produces a new typology to understand the adoptee counterpublic.

By deploying a feminist Asian American literary framework, I gain new insight into examinations of adoptees’ identities. Adult adoptee autobiographical works, like feminist writings, bridge the “truth,” “the real,” and “identity.”²³ The rearticulation performed within these texts recalls how the feminist autobiographical project, according to Leigh Gilmore, “is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and

²¹ Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), x xv.
²² Omi and Winant, Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s, 99, emphasis original
contradiction as strategies of self-representation.” Sidonie Smith reinforces Gilmore’s contention that autobiography is concerned with unearthing strategies of self-representation, providing a space for “restaging subjectivity” and the “staging of resistance.” From this approach, I read each narrative as a primary source document. Each essay exists as an adoptee’s own “telling.” Providing a glimpse into the ways in which adoptees negotiate issues of identity, family, and national belonging.

A feminist reading also illustrates how literature is one avenue for adoptees to reconcile the tensions in forming their identities as Asian Americans. Similar to other Asian American writers, adoptee writings repudiate Western constructions of “Americanness,” while providing inroads for individuals to deconstruct the “Asian American” identity. Helena Grice finds autobiography is a means by which Asian Americans reclaim “space for self-articulation and representation, against a history of external representation, stereotyping and partiality.” As Asian American literary critics recognize the depth and breadth of the Asian American, and subsequently Korean

American, experience, I suggest that adult adoptee writings remain at the forefront of this trend. Elaine H. Kim asserts: “The increasing hybridity and heterogeneity of Korean and Asian American identities...challenges old categories and notions of who can be called a Korean American writer.”

Adult adoptee writings expose an emergent and growing strand of the Asian American experience – the adopted person as an Asian ethnic in a transracial household. It is through this lens – feminist, Asian American – that I utilize these primary source documents as sites to further understand how adoptees’ disrupt traditional tropes of adoption and what it means to be Asian American. Further, this interdisciplinary method provides a unique opportunity to reconcile micro-level themes found in the narratives within the wider macro-level understanding of adoptees as the mythical orphan. Such an approach illuminates how the heterogeneous adoptee population also inadvertently reconstructs another meta-narrative that privileges specific experiences related to their adoption negotiation from childhood to adulthood.

While adult adoptees make inroads regarding the inclusion of their experiences within broader conceptualizations of Asian America, I also interrogate how concepts of racial/cultural passing and impersonation impact the lived realities of adoptees. In regards to passing, I refer back to the discussion in Chapter Three regarding how adoptees and their families desire to pass as a real family. Adoptees operate as cultural whites with white privilege associated with the unmarked nature of given names upon adoption as well as access to the privileges of whiteness vis-à-vis their parents’ American citizenship.

For instance, passing within the family and immediate community, adoptees recall “forgetting” they were Asian/Korean within these localities. I also draw upon impersonation to understand how as Asian American subjects, adoptees’ negotiate notions of authenticity as Asians, Koreans, and Americans. I locate this particular line of inquiry within Tina Chen’s argument that Asian Americans commit acts of impersonation as they negotiate American racialization processes due to their historical location as inassimilable subjects, which inhibits access into the national body politic.\textsuperscript{31}

Impersonation exists as a form of resistance for it recognizes the heterogeneity found under the umbrella term “Asian American” and provides room for the continued revision of the definition of “Asian American.” I employ both concepts – passing and impersonation – in my reading of adult adoptee writings to capture the experiences evoked by their transraciality. In this respect, I depart from Chen, who differentiates passing and impersonation, locating passing within a specific mixed race experience of black/white versus a wider understanding of passing as something that can be done by cultural whites in a variety of ways outside of skin color.

While adult adoptee writings destabilize notions of who is traditionally considered “Asian American,” the insertion of these narratives within Adoption Studies decenters discussions of domestic adoption. Adult Korean adoptees reshape the adoption narrative “toward a more complex story of movement between (temporary) positions, of desire that is shaped by hegemonies of race, blood, and nation, and the impossibility of ever

completely belonging in the places where we find ourselves.”

This chapter is in conversation with scholars, including Mark Jerng and Kim Park Nelson, who carefully negotiate how adoptee writings run the risk of pathologization. Jerng elucidates a need to disentangle adult adoptees from a pathology linked to a continued search for wholeness. Jerng advances Adoption Studies literary analysis to a critique of how pathological language concerning adoptees’ psychic travels may be limiting and requires a further interrogation to see how adult adoptees complicate mainstream adoption discourse. Similarly, Park Nelson is attuned to how the voids and absences found in adoptees’ lived experiences mark their writings. She seeks to intervene in conversations concerning the melancholia and loss associated with an adoptee’s search for self.

Reconciling adult adoptee writings interventions in Asian American and Adoption Studies, I suggest that the anthologies cannot be viewed as individuated strands of experiences. Rather, I contend that the two anthologies selected for analysis, Seeds from a Silent Tree and Voices from Another Place, are part of a wider discourse concerning the assertion of adult adoptee subjectivity. Adoptee literature seeks to challenge common understandings of transnational adoption. Yet, I am uneasy about how previous scholarship focuses too much on the “melancholic adoptee” or the disjunctures between the ideal and reality of identity negotiation. My work departs from such research in its focus on how adoptees express their negotiation of identity within a somewhat linear fashion of search and return via two themes of migration and re-migration. While the term migration signals adoptees’ involuntary entrance to the United States, the term re-

32 Yngvesson and Mahoney, “‘As One Should, Ought and Wants to Be’…,” 103. See also Choy and Choy, “Transformative Terrains…”

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Locating the Self in Autobiographical Narratives

“I am a person who speaks a language not foreign, but one which is natural to me...English...need some lessons?

I am a person whose last name is correct, even though you believe it should be “Lee,” “Chang,” or “Kim.”

- Todd D. Kwapisz

The epigraph quote from Todd D. Kwapisz illustrates the assumptions adoptees face concerning racial phenotype and national belonging. The overemphasis on what is “natural” – the English language – exposes the assumed correlation between Asianness and foreignness. The epigraph highlights how adoptees’ encounter public confusion over their seemingly “American” last names. While the curiosity over adoptees’ “American” names may seem genuine, looking below the surface, the racialized nature of the question emerges. If Kwapisz’s last name really was “Chang,” “Lee,” or “Kim,” no questions would be asked due to the association between “Asian” sounding names and raced Asian bodies. The forever foreigner myth associated with Asian Americans may also result in

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the adoptee being asked: “What is your ‘real’ name?” This brief examination of the epigraph underscores how adoptees’ transraciality functions within their daily lives.

Interested in the nuanced and varied nature of the Korean adoptee experience, I explore adoptees’ migration and remigration through an examination of two concepts – re/birth and inauthenticity. Marking the start of adoption, re/birth signals the disruption of adoptees’ lives as Korean nationals when they were reborn as Western subjects vis-à-vis the airplane journey from Korea to the United States. Adoptees gain transraciality and encounter questions of inauthenticity from childhood to adulthood. An examination of tensions concerning authenticity or inauthenticity concerning racial impersonation as Asians or Americans will yield insight into how adoptees characterize themselves within broader understandings of Asian Americans living in the United States.

Re/Birth: Exiting the Airplane

“At the age of 4, Lee Hyun Joo was sent to America to be adopted. Her name became Crystal Chappell. Like thousands of other Korean adoptees, her birth family and culture were left behind. Not until she was a young adult did she realize that something was missing from her life.”
- Crystal Lee Hyun Joo Chappell

Korean American adoptees have pasts prior to their arrival to the United States. However, because this entry marks the start of their lives into their adopted families, they are re/born. As involuntary migrants, adoptees shed their Korean names and language for a new name and the English language. For example, adoptees gain first names like

34 Tuan, Forever Foreigners or Honorary Whites?: The Asian Ethnic Experience Today.
Thomas, Adam, Rebecca, and Jennifer and last names like Murphy, Smith, Robinson, and Marshall. This is not limited to those who were infants upon adoption; rather, through my examination of case records, I have seen how children as old as 11 years old found themselves renamed.\textsuperscript{36} The quote from Crystal Lee Hyun Joo Chappell reflects this re/birth— the beginning of (a new) life in \textit{becoming} American. Chappell lost her memories upon entering the United States, noting: “I came to believe that I had been born on the day I was adopted, at age 4.”\textsuperscript{37} Adoptees are removed from their roots, history and culture as Koreans en route to a new history and culture and the roots of their adoptive parents. Given new names, new identities, Korean American adoptees become objects, lacking agency, as discussed in Chapter One.

Transferred via airplane from Korea to the United States, this migration represents the adoptee’s immediate disengagement from the only life they knew. At the same time as this occurs, the adoptee may lack awareness of what the airplane journey signifies in their life. For example, adopted at age six, Amy Mee-Ran Dorin Kobus recalls that she was unaware of what was happening upon her arrival, noting: “My escort pushed me toward a group of white people and said in Korean, ‘This is your new family.’ She then turned and walked quickly away.”\textsuperscript{38} This reflection is followed by her description of her adoption as an “uprooting and transplanting from Korea to America.”\textsuperscript{39} The disconnect between familial belonging and nation is exacerbated by pronounced language difference.

\textsuperscript{36} Box 360, Folder 24, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
\textsuperscript{37} Chappell, “Now I’m Found,” 126.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 43.
For instance, Thomas Park Clement notes: “Language was the most difficult barrier to my integration into my new wonderful world. I had a lot of trouble expressing my feelings and I didn’t know that language was the problem.”\textsuperscript{40} The immediate disengagement between nation, language, and family without consent or knowledge is highlighted in the reflections from Dorin Korbus and Clement. With no forewarning or comprehension of the concept of adoption, the forced migrant status of adoptees is exacerbated for they exist as non-consenting partners in the exchange of children or rather themselves.

Confounded with a new name, language, culture, and family, adoptees are in flux neither here nor there as this re/birth represents their positioning in the interstitial. Airports and airplanes thus become the signifying source of adoption. Many families commemorate the adoptee’s arrival as airplane day for this is the day that the “children came home.” Discussing how this event was marked in her family, Amy noted:

When I was growing up we celebrated my birthday and the day that I was adopt—the day I came to this country, well came here [sic]. So I was born in February and I was adopted in May. So we celebrated my birthday in February and then, my parents called it Airplane Day, in May, which was the day, you know, that I arrived off the plane. So every year we’d go to a, like, very authentic Korean restaurant. Most of my immediate family would come, so it would be a really big deal, a really big celebration…and I would get presents and things like that. Almost a bigger deal than my birthday was, for whatever their reasonings were. So I always thought of it as very fun and very positive.\textsuperscript{41}

Within my own family, this day is called “Gotcha Day.” While the terminology may appear to celebrate an event, this day also marks the time when adoptees also left their country of birth and families behind. For instance, Crystal Lee Hyun Joo Chappell writes:


\textsuperscript{41} Interview with author on June 23, 2012.
“Culture shock and the trauma of gaining a new family, home and identity erased my memory. In essence, I came to believe that I had been born on that day I was adopted, at age four.”

Representing arrival to the United States as the pinnacle of how adoption meets the “promise of happiness” of the adoptive family, “Airplane Day” or “Gotcha Day,” obscures one of the many losses adoptees encountered as children. The celebration emphasizes the quintessential Americanness of the child without reflection on any residual memories or relations from Korea.

Re/birth also highlights the influence of Christian Americanism in parenting rhetoric. For example, Mi Oak Song Bruining notes: “My parents told me I should feel grateful and lucky to be adopted and should not feel sad about anything…My adoptive parents believed that they rescued me.”

The adoptee is forced to acclimate within the West via transculturalization due to their involuntary migration to the United States. Echoing Chappell, Wayne A. Berry notes that while growing up in a small Minnesota town, he wanted to be an American and how his only memories are of life in the United States after he was re/born as a Western subject.

In the context of re/birth, transculturalization processes underscore how adoptees were not “born,” but created in Korea by social workers at orphanages as seen in Chapter One. I deploy the term “created” because many adoptees have realized also that even as toddlers or young children they were renamed upwards of three times – first, by their biological parents;

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42 Chappell, “Now I’m Found,” 126.
44 Wayne A. Berry, "Completing My Puzzle…," in Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology, ed. Tonya Bishoff and Jo Rankin (San Diego: Pandal Press, 1997).
second, upon entering the orphanages, where sometimes children were “swapped” with others to be sent abroad; and thirdly, by their adoptive parents.

Furthermore, Korean adoptees recount that their Western birthdays are not representative of their physical birth date. Only upon returning to Korea do adoptees learn their correct birth dates after reuniting with birth families and/or acquiring their adoption files from orphanages. While one could easily argue that this newly discovered information is another re/birth, I argue that the revelation only highlights the manufactured deceit that aids the adoption process. This deceit remains linked to the continuation and growth of the transnational adoption industrial complex. Specifically, it harkens back to Chapter One’s discussion of internal International Social Service communications between the American and Korean branch regarding concern over the immediate post-war orphans’ birthdates and “actual” ages. Discussing how this misinformation affected her identity construction, Leah Kim Sieck writes: “I feel like these little details that everyone uses to anchor their existence with, like birthdays or home towns, grow into big floating question marks.” Re/birth relegates names, birthdates, and birth years to the periphery in that they occur prior to adoption, even though these details are held to high esteem in the West. In other words, while accounts of a biological mother’s pregnancy and birth process are valued and recounted, these same life events are overlooked as minor or unimportant in the lives of adoptees. Rather,

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the re/birth is what is important in the involuntary migration (adoption process), not the actual birth in Korea.

Given their re/birth, the concept of family is central to understanding adoptees’ transraciality. Specifically, aspects of transraciality originate in adoptees’ discussions of childhood and adolescence. For example, seeking to “fit in” as an American, Amy Mee-Ran Dorin Korbus denied her ethnic heritage while growing up. Stereotyping Asians as quiet and passive, she desired to become “American” through her outspokenness. This internalized behavior is also reflected in how she sought to perfect her American English accent, changed her style of dress and utilized white face powder to construct physical whiteness. Her performance of whiteness is symptomatic of “aesthetic assimilation,” which occurs within communities of color. Nancy Caraway defines aesthetic assimilation as the subjugation of a Black woman’s “Blackness” as a result of an internalized racism whereby whiteness equates beauty. In the case of women of Asian descent, double eyelid surgery and skin whitening creams are two methods utilized to embody the white, Western, feminine ideal. This emphasis on whiteness underscores the racialized and gendered nature of aesthetic assimilation.

Negative body image reflects how female adoptees, including Dorin Korbus, have limited access to positive Asian role models in their nuclear families and local communities. While their performance for whiteness bestows a hypervisible status to the

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47 Dorin Korbus, “Hello Good-Bye Hello.”
49 Ibid.
adoptee as seen in Dorin Korbus’ use of face powder, the desire for invisibility reflects the yearning to be part of the dominant ideal. Whiteness is tied to invisibility because of its unmarked nature and existence as the norm in American society. At the same time, “Asianness” is tied to hypervisibility with racialized stereotypes of Asians as the “yellow peril” circulating within American popular culture. Thus, even as Asians also encounter stereotypes concerning their invisibility as linked to the model minority stereotype, the hypervisibility of physical difference is what female adoptees seek to erase by embracing whiteness.

Seeking to perform “whiteness” outside of the cultural whiteness and white privilege inscribed on their bodies, female adoptees’ longing reflects how processes of re/birth is linked to notions of impersonation and passing. The failure of adoptees’ racial performativity as “white” highlights the ways adoptees’ cultural whiteness is incomplete due to their inability to physically change their racial countenance. Instead, adoptees undergo an act of impersonation vis-à-vis their attempt to constitute themselves as one type of Asian American subject – invisible, capable of “blending in” to their white, suburban surroundings.\(^{51}\) The tensions produced between the adoptee’s racial, ethnic, and cultural identities underscore Chen’s discussion of how impersonation involves “a dynamic exchange between competing definitions of itself."\(^{52}\) For example, aesthetic assimilation is reiterated in YoungHee’s narrative as she recounts her obsession with her body image and her desire to be white.\(^{53}\) She writes: “I obsess over white women. I

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\(^{52}\) Ibid., 5

compare every inch of my body to theirs…Theoretically I was white, my family is white, the community I grew up in was white.”

YoungHee’s cultural and psychological whiteness prominently figures into her low self-esteem and lack of positive racial/ethnic identity. This psychological whiteness is linked to the internalized belief that the adoptee is white like any other person in their family. Only upon looking at one’s reflection does this myth become broken. For example, Ellwyn Kauffman remembers how “the mirror was the inescapable reminder of where I had come from.” Similarly, Mary Lee Vance writes: “As long as I didn’t look in the mirror, I could pretend that I looked no different from the rest of my family or friends, with an exception of a nonbiological sister who had also been adopted from Korea.” The mirror becomes an inescapable object, a continual reminder of what one is not regardless of what one believes she is – white.

Returning to a discussion of YoungHee, it is important to note that her struggle is not unique as many female Korean adoptees write about their desire to have larger, rounder eyes, non-coarse hair, and a more prominent nose. Internalized self-loathing impeded to her ability to gain a positive sense of self throughout adolescence, which manifested itself in her “hatred of other Asians because they forced [her] to see [herself] in them.” At the end of her narrative, YoungHee acknowledges that her internalized oppression resulted from her cultural white upbringing where she realized that “looking a

54 Ibid., 86, emphasis added.
57 YoungHee, "Laurel," 88.
certain way was more valued.” In this respect, I find that impersonation or wearing the “white mask” as discussed in Chapter Three is critical to locate adoptees’ articulations of belonging within the United States.

While the internalization of white beauty standards shaped female adoptees’ assimilationist practices, male adoptee narratives focus more on their struggles to be “all-American” and recount the use of the terms “Chink,” “gook,” and “Jap” to describe them. Even though these epithets appear gender neutral, the historical deployment of racialized stereotypes in the United States remain highly gendered and the nerdy Asian male or the use of the epithets remain tied to origin stereotypes castigating Asian American men as either the “yellow peril” or “model minority.” For example, Todd D. Kwapisz’s lists numerous perceptions Americans have of him due to his ethnicity – “the one who started WWII or the Vietnam War,” “martial art expert,” and “the exchange student with [his] host family.” Jim Milroy echoes the need to assert his belonging in the United States, writing: “People will believe that stones are cars before they’ll accept that my brother, or sisters, or father or mother is my real family.” For male adoptees, to belong does not require an aesthetic assimilation; rather it necessitates an active negotiation of racist practice and rhetoric found in the United States. This is not to say

58 Ibid.
that female adoptees do not encounter racialized, sexual harassment or the impact of racism in the United States; however, I am more concerned with how in male adoptee narratives a focus on national belonging as linked to continual encounters of racism, while female encounters with racism are primary articulated through aesthetic assimilation.

I read practices of re/birth and negotiation of national belonging as part of a larger process of locating Asian Americans in the United States. Negotiating their transraciality, Korean American adoptees assertion of *Americanness* is deployed in the ways in which their valorization of white physical characteristics and denial of the salience of race. This internalized racism may negatively impact the development of positive self-esteem. In the negation of their Koreanness, adoptees sought to pass and be viewed as an individual who belongs in a portrait of America. These acts of impersonation are linked to adoptees’ investment in avoiding racism or as a result of internalized racism. To this end, I draw upon discussions of Asian American literature and research that discuss Asian Americans desire to be viewed as Americans and/or “blend in” within mainstream, white America. Consequently, I am reluctant to argue that adoptees’ valorization of whiteness proves that adoptees are continually melancholic subjects in search for wholeness. Rather, this recognition of Asian Americans’ negotiation of “Americanness” arises from discussions of the ways in which Asian Americans negotiate Orientalist projections of what it means to be Asian in the United States.

In the case of adoptees, transraciality is central to understanding the process of identity formation as encounters not only with family members and the community, but
also with strangers implicitly influence how adoptees cultivate a sense of self. The legitimacy of adoptees’ as white and Asian remains in flux as discussed in the previous chapter on family. Not only do adoptees’ encounter continual and constant questioning regarding why their faces and names do not “match,” but also whether they know their “real” families. Working in combination with these complex social encounters, adoptees face internal questions over their legibility as cultural and even psychological whites as a result of the powerful image reflected back in the mirror. This persistent questioning remains distinct from other Asian Americans in that the binary of real and fictive kinship does not enter the equation concerning legitimacy within the family. Even if an Asian American is biracial, the biological tie he or she maintains to his or her biological/social parent protects the individual from conversations associated with “real” parents. The cultural milieu in which these individuals are socialized in remains markedly different than the adoptee. Discussing her upbringing, Loey Werking Wells aptly summarizes this difference between adoptees and other Asian Americans: “I knew by my looks alone, and my status as a Korean adoptee, I was not really the WASP I was being brought up to be.” A distinct contrast arises in that the adoptee’s forced migration and socialization within an all white family provides him/her access to a cultural and psychological whiteness that may not be readily accessible to people of color more generally.

The initial migratory journey from Korea to the United States marks only the beginnings of a journey negotiating one’s transracial, transnational existence as an

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involuntary member of the Korean diaspora. As this displacement occurs, whether living in the United States, Korea or elsewhere, adult adoptees encounter prescribed identities as a result of dominant discourse’s depictions of Americanness and Koreanness. Operating within this framework, adoptees work towards reconciling their multiple positionings as adoptees, Americans, and ethnic Koreans. The reader witnesses how adoptees negotiate their transraciality to understand that to be inauthentic is to create their own nuanced Korean American adoptee identity. The historical conflation of Americanness with whiteness and the adoptee’s cultural whiteness formulates his/her outsider within status. For instance, appearing to live the American childhood, Wayne A. Barry comments: “I thought I was the only Korean adoptee who grew up on a farm, played high school football and had a Caucasian girlfriend.”64 This belief that he is somehow unusual highlights how adoptees must negotiate the impact of transraciality in their self-reflection on identity.

The Inauthentic Subject: Reconciling Adoptees’ Koreanness and Americanness

As adoptees’ negotiate their legibility as Americans, for many, a trip to Korea raises the possibility of closure and a greater understanding of an individual’s sense of self and remains reflective of adoptees’ re/racialization. However, for others a trip to Korea is not necessarily wanted nor needed. An individual’s choice does not make one more or less Korean, but reflects what it is – choice. Discussing the return to Korea, Jerng writes: “It has become unnatural not to search, thus limiting recognition to this particular

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64 Berry, “Completing My Puzzle…,” 121.
Although returning to Korea is not an essential component in the adopted
Korean narrative, many adoptees correlate recovering their past with their return to the
“motherland.” The return is symbolic, a tangible link to his/her biological parents. Travel
to Korea can occur a myriad of ways, but some adoptees return to Korea via homecoming
programs. Other adoptees return to Korea to teach English, volunteer at an orphanage or
attend university to learn Korea and perhaps pursue an advanced degree. Nevertheless,
returning to Korea does not necessarily equal a positive memory since for some adoptees
negative encounters affect their understanding of what it means to be “Korean.”

As adoptees return to Korea, questions of inauthenticity arise because this journey
sparks new questions surrounding adoptees’ Americanness and Koreanness. Perceived as
“Koreans” based on countenance, adoptees remain outsiders within in a country, where
for the first time, they “blend in” phenotypically (See Chapter Three). After returning to
Korea, Wayne A. Berry notes that he is not a true Korean. His comment captures what
many adoptees discuss, the differences between themselves and “Korean Koreans” or
“Asian Asians.” For Berry, a true Korean understands the cultural nuances of Korea and
speaks fluent Korean in the eyes of many adoptees. Echoing Berry’s differentiation
between native Koreans and adoptees, Mark Fermi also questions his ability to claim that
he is Korean. Fermi writes: “Korean people ask me if I am Korean. I said, ‘Yes, I am’
and question their reaction to my answer. I know I am Korean, although some of my

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65 Jerng, Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging, 173.
actions do not show it. I can only say a few words in Korean.” Cultural whiteness affirms Americanness, while at the same time, inhibiting adoptees’ ability to become true Koreans, which for adoptees remains inextricably linked to fluent language proficiency and comprehension of Korean cultural nuances. Wary of claiming an “authentic” Korean prototype exists, adoptees remain cultural outsiders. Their transraciality and re/birth erased an ability to claim Korean cultural capital with ease as Korean nationals. For instance, reflecting on her two return visits mixed-race adoptee Jane Owen finds:

I am also somewhat frustrated by the double standard that they hold about Korean-born, now American, adoptees. They want us to be ‘Korean’ by learning the language, eating and enjoying the food, and learning about the customs, and yet they would not keep us as their own and take us into their families to love, nurture, and raise as their own children. They seem to deny that we are Americans by culture, mind set, and family history, primarily because of their rejection of us as orphans. We are only Koreans in appearance.

The disappointment apparent in Owen’s recount of what it means to be an adoptee in Korea underscores the tensions produced between differentiating oneself from a “Korean Korean” or “Asian Asian.” Owen’s usage of the term “double standard” highlights how cultural authenticity and cultural capital are absent in the lives of adoptees; rather, the lack of cultural knowledge inhibits adoptees’ ability to “be” Korean. In this regard, the legitimacy of adoptees as Korean is questioned.

I find that this tension over legibility as “authentic, true Koreans” exists against adoptees’ impersonation and desire for whiteness. Negotiating what it means to be

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transracially adopted, Korean, and American, I draw from Chen’s examination of double agency. For Chen, double agency “gestures to the multiple allegiances that impersonation makes evident; it exposes the fear of betrayal that is at the heart of charges of imposture to which Asian Americans have been subject.”\textsuperscript{69} In the case of adoptees, their negotiation of double agency remains markedly different in that their multiple allegiances are cross-racial, ethnic and cultural in ways unknown to Asian Americans that reside in normative Asian American families. The unease of adoptees to claim a Korean identity in their writings exhibits the complexity of double agency in their lives.

Adoptees’ double agency becomes palpable in their intimate encounters in Korea. For example, after reunion with her birth family, Crystal Lee Hyun Joo Chappell finds: “Now I have two complete names: one Korean, one English. They encompass my two worlds, two families and two identities that sometimes clash, sometimes combine and sometimes coexist.”\textsuperscript{70} In many ways this multiple naming illustrates how identity is tied to proper names. Without a direct translation between English and Korean names, each represents a different construct – one American child, one Korean child. Yet, what is interesting in the case of Chappell is her deliberate melding of her Korean and English names. This reflects her asserting a particular identity tied to the salience of adoption in her life. Furthermore, underscoring the illusions produced by adoption is Kimberly


\textsuperscript{70} Chappell, “Now I’m Found,” 135.
Kyung Hee Stock’s account of visiting a home for unwed mothers who intended to place their unborn child for adoption.\textsuperscript{71} Stock writes:

I knew I was going to meet these [birth mothers], and I wanted to tell them that, because I was an adoptee, I wanted to assure them they shouldn’t worry about their babies. Life in America would be good for them, and they were going to families that would love and cherish them. Their babies would grow up and understand why they were given up. I was planning to read [a birth mother] the note, but I couldn’t quite double her pain by forcing her to realize that her child, like me, would never speak Korean properly.\textsuperscript{72}

Unlike Chappell’s experience of duality as a moment of double agency between birth family and adoptive family, Stock’s recollection reveals how adoptees may feel like imposters through their inability to communicate outside of rudimentary Korean. Operating within these intimate frontiers in Korea, double agency becomes even more salient. Literally able to “blend in” to the local Korean community, adoptees navigate a space whereby they appear to represent the “Koreanness” associated with cultural authenticity, even as they remain outsiders.

For Korean American adoptees, their experiences are predicated upon their transraciality and adoption status. Unlike other Asian Americans, adoptees lived experiences are profoundly influenced by the primacy placed on adoptee status as this remains a turning point in their lives. Concluding her narrative, Whitney Tae-Jin Ning recognizes that there is “no singular model” of identity.\textsuperscript{73} Thus, inauthenticity does not negate one’s Americanness or Koreanness. Instead, inauthenticity highlights the adoptees


\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 101-102

existence on the borderlands. The transracial composition of the adoptee’s family provides him/her a unique vantage point to experience the normalizing nature of whiteness as well as direct access to a culturally white identity. Adoptees’ remained marked for their transraciality – forever looking like “the person who does not belong” within their monoracial, white families.

At the same time, I recognize that a slippage exists when discussing adoptees’ understanding of both racial and cultural belonging. Adoptees’ feelings of in/authenticity are inextricably intertwined with the affective kinship they initially experience in Korea, yet the unease inhabited by adoptees as they negotiate Korea with a lack of cultural capital possessed by native Koreans. This is also seen in the initial re/birth of the adoptee. Operating as cultural whites with white privilege when located within the adoptive family, adoptees continually negotiate misrecognition concerning the ways in which they self-identify. Consequently, I find that the writings of adult adoptees demonstrate the limits of categorization and the need to break down silos separating concepts of racial and cultural belonging. Transraciality makes this apparent by providing insight into how a dichotomous line of thought hinders the ability for adoptees to assert a positive identity as an adopted Korean American. Reflecting the anxiety produced by a need for binaries, in his poem David Miller writes:

Walking a tightrope
Pulled on both sides
Korea
America
For if I fall either way
I lose a part of me74

The metaphor of the tightrope provides a clear image of how straddling two worlds is untenable because it disallows adoptees to validate the multiplicity of their singular individual experience. In other words, in order to embrace the various intersections they inhabit, adoptees find themselves casting off the need to be an “authentic” subject based on the cultural scripts and norms that historically render them as outliers. Discussing the ways in which concepts of duality confine her identity construction, Kari Ruth writes: “When we talk about cultural identity, we assume there is a split. And we waste our time trying to…[find] balance [or create] space for two cultures or building bridges…Their resolutions lead you to separate, pick and choose or sort and categorize. What I’d really like to do is push puree.”75 By retelling and re-presenting their own experiences in their own words, adult adoptees destabilize understandings of what it means to be Asian/Korean or American.76

*From One Mythic Adoptee to Another*

In my reading of *Seeds from a Silent Tree: An Anthology by Korean Adoptees* (1997) and *Voices From Another Place: A Collection of Works From a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries* (1999), I find that while the notion of the “saved” adoptee appears, each individual writer articulates his/her personal lived experiences. In this respect, I find that the “saved” orphan enters as quickly as it exists in that “saving” appears only in discussions of parental motives to adopt children. This short

75 Ruth, “Kimchee on White Bread,” 80.
dalliance with encounters of loss and ambivalence is not one that speaks to a latent melancholia nor is it indicative of a pathological search for wholeness. Instead, these insights into the tension produced by negotiating one’s transraciality reveals how passing and impersonation remain intertwined in the adoptee’s intersectional experience.

As these writings disrupt the mythical adoptee, adoptees inadvertently contribute to the growth of another discourse concerning questions of return to Korea and the impact of transraciality in their daily lives. For example, in the twenty-first century many adoptees recount instances of awkward questions concerning finding their “real” family and whether they will return to their “motherland.” These questions are predicated upon the assumption that it is natural to search and those individuals who do not embark on such a journey are unnatural and somehow slightly maladjusted, even as adoptees are viewed as angry or bitter if they challenge mainstream adoption discourse.

Conducting a close reading of three narratives from the anthologies, this section explores adoptees’ affective relationships and isolates the individuated strands of their experiences. This new mythic adoptee experience becomes complicated when accounting for the myriad of ways adoptees recount their memories of Korea and encounters with implicit and explicit racism. In doing so, I disentangle the uniqueness of adoption from the commonalities presumed in adoptee experiences and explore the distinct ways adoptees discuss their particular adoption experiences. Thus even as a specific linear narrative of adoption appears to be reified, how adoptees’ negotiate similar issues/encounters is based on their particular positionalities.
While adoption marks the start of the child’s re/birth, adoptees hold on to their pasts and memories. Committed to acknowledging the holistic identities of adoptees, I first want to examine Sherilyn Cockroft’s essay “New Beginnings” from *Seeds from a Silent Tree* (1997). Beginning her narrative with a description of playing in a cornfield with her older brother, Cockroft paints a portrait of a young Korean girlhood in the country. Until age six, she only recalls a life living with her older brother and mother, noting “[her father] lived in another town with another woman.” Yet, it was then her life changed for her parents divorced and her and her brother lived with her father and stepmother. This life was less than idyllic; Cockroft recalls abuse by her stepmother, writing: “She not only verbally abused us, but would withhold food from us as well.”

As the abuse escalated over the course of a year, Cockroft and her brother plotted escape and return to their mother. However, this plan resulted in Cockroft’s separation from her brother during their journey. As a result, Cockroft eventually was placed in a children’s home for girls after being brought to a police station.

The vivid nature of Cockroft’s memories of the orphanage corroborates the social studies given to adoptive parents concerning adoptees’ histories and also provides insights into how children became ready for adoption. She discusses how orphanage personnel asked her questions about her family, how she got lost and for personal information. She writes: “They also asked me my birthdate, but I could not remember the date. But I did remember have a special dinner with my mother for my sixth birthdate. And I remembered that it was a hot, summer day, so the orphanage gave me a summer

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78 Ibid., 12
birthdate.” This memory is similar to what I found in case files when older children entered the orphanage. For example, a social study concerning a child adopted to California reports, “He arrives a sheet of paper [sic] which showed his date of birth, when he was found abandoned. His name was given by our agency.” Discussing another child, a previous social study noted the child’s date of birth was provided amongst the abandon child’s belongings, but her name was provided by the hospital.

While she does not disclose the exact time she spent at the orphanage, based on her recollections, I estimate that Cockroft spent at least two to three years in the institution. Her matter-of-fact writing style disabuses any type of romanticism of orphanage life when she continues to discuss the financial and social realities of orphan status in Korea. She recalls how orphans were stigmatized not only by their hand-me-down clothing, but also for eating brown rice instead of the more expensive white rice at school. Although these instances may appear to be minor, for Cockroft they served as reminders that she was not “one of the little girls in the fancy dresses” who attended her school. Yet, it was this construction of her life that positioned her eager for adoption. Recalling the day she was asked whether or not she wanted to be adopted by an American family, Cockroft notes: “They asked me if I wanted to go to America, and of course, I said ‘yes’.” She saw this as an opportunity to become “one of the little girls in the fancy

79 Ibid., 13
80 See Box 332, "Family and Children Services of Albany Adoption," Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
81 Box 359, Folder 8, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
82 Box 322, Folder 61, Sealed Case Records, International Social Service, American Branch Records, SWHA, University of Minnesota.
83 Ibid., 14
84 Ibid.
dresses.” As part of her adoption preparation, she was sent to a different location, which fed her toast with butter, something she notes “only rich people” consumed and “the home even had flushing toilets.” The material goods represented by adoption and the possibilities of belonging to a family positioned the United States as the land of future prospects and opportunity against Korea and life at the orphanage.

The intensity in which Cockroft recalls her family in Korea as well as her time in the orphanage raises new questions concerning the impact of adoption on older children. How does such a re/birth supplant memories and histories for new realities and truths? Her recollection of life after adoption includes a realization concerning how quickly she lost the Korean language. She also discusses her “desire to ‘fit in’ and be ‘normal’ because she “always felt different and inferior.” Cockroft notes how growing up in the Midwest around individuals with limited contact to other races or cultures caused awkward situations. For example, she writes: “Even going to the mall, people would sometimes stare at me because I looked different…Strangers would talk to me loudly and slowly as if I were deaf and dumb.” However, instead of calling these microaggressions racist, Cockroft defines them as “challenges.” Presenting such incidents as a “challenge,” I read Cockroft as internalizing what happened in order to mask the pain of being marked as “different.” A feeling of inferiority and encountering assumptions concerning her belonging, Cockroft lacks the coping mechanisms to process the impact of transracial and transnational adoption in her life.

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85 Ibid., 15.
86 Ibid., 16.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid., 17.
Yet, what is most striking is how adoptees negotiate and reconcile their rebirths and adoptive family relationships. While Cockroft does not directly engage with how her family shaped her understanding of self, Kari Ruth’s essay “Dear Luuk” in *Seeds from a Silent Tree* (1997) frankly engages the ways in which adoptive parents’ have an impact on the lives of their adopted children.90 Writing to her friend and fellow adoptee who committed suicide, Ruth provides an emotionally raw account of adoption’s multiple effects. Thinking to herself, Ruth notes: “I may never understand why you ended your life, Luuk, but I do understand your need to find peace. Being adopted Korean is far more complex than choosing racial designation.”91 Her statement concerning the complexity of adoption is echoed, when she writes: “The struggles of racial identity cannot be solved at culture camps, outreach events, panel discussions or trips to our birth country. They cannot be described as growing pains nor diagnosed with color-blind love.”92 Speaking to various ways adoptive parents and adult adoptees engage with the adoptee’s birth culture, Ruth highlights the disjunctures experienced between cultural tourism and ethnic commodification and the well meaning intentions behind these acts.

Interrogating the narrative presented by mainstream adoption discourse, Ruth speaks back to the concept of the “saved orphan” and how transracial adoption is a multicultural celebration. Specifically, Ruth writes:

Society has already told you and me that we have become Americans because of someone else’s charity. Now we’re being told that our cultural displacement had a purpose – multiculturalism. By growing up in white families, we can be examples…We can show others that racial harmony is possible. We just can’t

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
show our burdened backs. We allay our parents’ fears by internalizing our own. I
guess someone forget to ask us if we wanted to be America’s diversity mascots.93

By engaging the various modes of acceptance and integration adoptees have in American
society (i.e. charity and multiculturalism), Ruth exposes the ways in which adoptees have
also been taken advantage of as another “Oriental” commodity. In other words, Ruth
underscores the ways in which adoptees have internalized and adopted new mechanisms
to cope within their culturally white worlds. To this end, she notes: “In order to assimilate
into not only a white society, but also our own adoptive families, we learn to see
ourselves as others want to see us.”94 Ruth further writes: “[Adoptive] parents must not
understand that the price they paid for us was insignificant compared to the price we pay
to fit into their world.”95 While the essay by Ruth may seem angry even as she mourns
the loss of her friend Luuk, the piece also exposes how adoptees strive to protect their
families from their loss and encounters with racism. In many respects, Ruth speaks to the
unaccounted for losses adoptees experiences in their re/birth in the United States.

While the two above-mentioned experiences focused on microaggressions and
racism, I now want to turn and examine how adoption may impact adoptees as they
become parents. For instance, many female adoptees discuss how pregnancy raises new
questions concerning their histories prior to adoption and birth families. Speaking to this
issue in Voices from Another Place, Kat Turner writes: “When I was pregnant, I began
for the first time to allow myself to consider my own birth.”96 As a child, Turner recalls

93 Ibid., 144.
94 Ibid., 143.
95 Ibid., 144
96 Kat Turner, "Planted in the West: The Story of an American Girl," in Voices from Another Place: A
Collection of Works from a Generation Born in Korea and Adopted to Other Countries, ed. Susan Soon-
she never asked questions about her adoption or racial difference, even as she encountered racism. For example, Turner writes: “Being referred to as Chinese or Japanese wasn’t meant to be a compliment as kids pulled their eyes back to mimic mine.”

Turner continues to discuss her struggles in adolescence around self-confidence and self-esteem. The impact of her experiences shaped her own shock when:

_I was truly shocked a few years ago when I learned that the adoptive Korean daughter of one of my neighbors was living my déjà vu. However, this wasn’t Iowa in the 1970s, but progressive Minneapolis in the mid 1990s. I couldn’t believe this generation of girls on the edge of a new millennium were not only faced with the same issues and insecurities, but to the same degree I had faced them almost twenty years before._

For Turner, realizing that many of the same issues from her adolescence persist in the newest generation of adoptees is jarring. She assumed that twenty years between her and the subsequent generation would mean increased self-assurance about their racialized appearance. Instead, she discovered how racial difference continued to inflict its negativity in the development of identity for adolescent female adoptees.

The impact of her monoracial upbringing drastically impacted her sense of self. In many ways it appears she underwent aesthetic assimilation similar to the female adoptees discussed in the previous section. Turner writes: “Although the reflection in the mirror appears Asian, American is all I have ever known. What is a realistic expectation of balance between biological and adoptive heritage?”

_I read her utilization of the term “American” is linked to the unmarked nature of whiteness. Seeing herself as “American” or implicitly white, Turner reflects the ways in which adoptees as perpetual children or_
perpetual foreigners remain rendered outside the national and family body politic. In other words, the connection between whiteness and Americanness exposes how for Turner being American means shedding her “Asianness.” Nevertheless, even as Turner recounts her struggles, she finds solace in her adoption. Coming to terms with what happened to her, Turner notes: “It is my hope that, like me, others will also know the blessing of a life transplanted from East to West; to be the beginning of a strong, rich heritage for those who come after.”¹⁰⁰ I find this last quote from Turner to embody the contradictions of adoption. Rather than delve deeper into her anxiety concerning whether being ethnically Korean allows her access to an American identity, Turner translates her experiences into one of harmony. Situating adoption as a “blessing,” Turner implicitly renders life in one’s birth country as a burden or, perhaps, even more negatively a possible life of shame. In doing so, she supports narratives of gratefulness in adoption. Yet, she simultaneously alludes to the complications of transraciality and the continual negotiation of identity as she finds peace within her existence as an adoption Korean American.

By recognizing the Korean American adoptee population as varied, and celebrating the different experiences adoptees have as children and adults, I seek to dispel the notion that a singular authentic adoptee experience exists. Instead of considering rearticulation as a process of asserting a common identity, the collective subjectivity that emerges is one that emphasizes individuality and variety. Recognizing the heterogeneity of adoptees’ experiences, adult adoptee autobiographical writings reflect how adoptees

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
challenge the mythical adoptee that was continually spoken for by adoptive parents and professionals in the field of adoption. In the examination of the selected texts, this inquiry exposed how adoptees operate within the confines of the written mediated space, while producing their identities and queering what it means to be an adopted Korean American.

*The Adoptee as Author: Rewriting Adoption History*

Through their rearticulation of their lived experiences, adoptees move past reductive narratives to new territories whereby the adoptee identity is queered and questioned. Through their failure to comply with binary categorization of Korean/Asian or American, adoptees repudiate the suggestion that they are the “overseas Koreans” defined by former President Kim Dae Jung while at the same time challenging their status as the Americans conceived by their parents upon arrival at adoption. Rather, adoptees enter into a dialogue with binary categories that shape mainstream understandings of adoptees. I find this occurs through the act of writing. If we accept the premise that adoptees in general should be “grateful” for their adoption, the inclusion of their moments of alienation from language, culture and family clearly illustrate how instead of “gratefulness,” adoptees are more likely “dumbfounded” within those initial moments of arrival. The concept of gratefulness is further challenged through memories of overt, covert, and internalized racism. The painful recollections of the mirror serving as a reminder of their impersonation and desire to pass as *real* whites instead of the cultural and psychological whiteness they inhabit contradict the concept of adoption as a form of savior.
Yet, this does not mean these adoptees were angry or ungrateful by inserting their voices into mainstream adoption discourse through these two anthologies. I read their varied negotiations of what it means to be an adopted Korean American in the United States and Korea as an expression of the heterogeneity found within a community. While each adoptee may mention a similar encounter, their reaction to how their various lived experiences in childhood and adolescence shape their perspectives of adoption and themselves as adults because evident in their resistance to construct an “authentic” adopted person experience. As dominant discourse’s construction of the mythical adoptee becomes disrupted, I suggest that adult adoptees’ writings denaturalize the imagined adoptee as they provide a new perspective to a childhood and adulthood marked by transraciality.

Producing counterstories, these writings illustrate how adult adoptees move towards a process of self-definition, even as ambivalence in a fixed identity is apparent. The meta-narrative that emerges cannot be read without understanding the individual experiences and encounters that shaped the adoptee’s identity. In their individual and collective states, the anthologies are “narrative acts of insubordination” in their work to shift and even reject the master narrative of the mythical adoptee. Recognizing that while “talking back,” these writings may inadvertently be labeled as acts of “ungratefulness” because of criticism lodged at adoptive parents. Nevertheless, I suggest that the fact that these works are even contested highlights adoptees’ disruption of the master narrative. To this end, I agree with Elaine H. Kim, who notes: “[Adoptees

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101 Nelson, Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair.
102 Ibid., 8.
complicate] the American adoption story of resolution with representations of racialization and othering in the host society that claims to have saved them."  

Talking back is a form of resistance, shifting an understanding of adoptees in the eyes of the public imaginary. Adoptee writings are successful in narrative repair for they provide new perspectives to explore adoptee identities. This becomes evident when examining how adult adoptees author their individual essays. For example, individuals like Susan Soon-Keum Cox, Crystal Lee Hyun Joo Chappell, Mi Oak Song Bruining, YoungHee, Kimberly Kyung Hee Stock, and Whitney Tae-Jin Ning meld their Korean and American names. Within this configuration, these adoptees demonstrate their quest to recognize all facets of their lived experiences that compose who they are today. Such an inclusion requires the reader to recognize that adoptees were not in fact re/born and created as only Western subjects and accounts for how they underwent re/racialization. The legacy of adoption exceeds the white family he/she was raised in; rather, the legacy of adoption cements itself in how adoptees choose to identify in adulthood.

Korean American adoptees’ autobiographical writings illustrate the tensions between “talking back” and the reproduction of macro-narrative tropes. I suggest that transraciality remains particularly helpful to negotiate this paradox. Adoptees’ ability to express their multiple locations is contingent upon vocalizing the ways in which their adoption influenced identity construction. These writings form a collective Korean American adoptee voice. Miri Song notes: “Groups themselves are constantly in the process of negotiating the meanings, images, and cultural practices which are associated

104 Nelson, Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair.
with them. There is certainly no automatic consensus about what it means to be of a particular ethnicity.”105 Within this collective subjectivity, adoptee narratives interject into the master narrative in four distinct ways: 1) highlight how as children they were continually renamed and constructed into exchangeable objects; 2) emphasize the lack of culture keeping and the detriment they suffered as a result; 3) examine the gendered effects produced by transraciality; and 4) challenge understandings of the positive adoption experience and grateful adoptee. In doing so, these adoptees redefine what it means to be an adopted person vis-à-vis the reinsertion of their voices into the dominant adoption narrative. Building upon this investigation of transraciality, the next chapter explores the construction of imagined online communities and the unmediated writings and explorations of identity on the Internet.

105 Song, Choosing Ethnic Identity, 142, emphasis original.
Chapter 5: “Angry” and “Angrier”: Adoptees Speak Back Online

The blogosphere, and the Internet more generally, allows adult adoptees the ability to instantly engage wider debates found in the transracial, international adoption community in comparison to literary texts. By focusing on specific instances of adult adoptee intervention, it is my intention to elucidate how the Internet provides adoptees with opportunities to disrupt the traditional depiction of adoptees as children. Specifically, I interrogate how adult adoptees orient themselves as adults and experts of the “adopted experience.” In doing so, adoptees recuperate their subjectionhood. Simultaneously, adoptees renegotiate what it means to be “angry” or “ungrateful” – the two more popular, albeit negative, characterizations of adoptees who insert themselves in mainstream adoption discourse.

My examination of the ways in which the Internet supports the growth of the adult adoptee counterpublic is aided by my utilization of Cyberstudies scholarship. This chapter suggests that their online exploration of racialized identities provides a unique vantage point to the adult adoptee experience.\(^1\) The work of Nancy Baym, Emily Noelle

\(^{1}\) I would like to thank my Spring 2013 dissertation writing group for its feedback as I drafted this chapter.

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Ignacio and Lisa Nakamura provide a foundation for this exploration of online racialized representation. Their focus on the online deterritorialization and reterritorialization of racialized groups aids my understanding of how adoptees assert a networked collectivized voice and engage in broader conversations concerning the politics of transnational, transracial adoption. My understanding of deterritorialization is also informed by discussions of adoptees as part of the overseas Korean diaspora in that adoptees are spread worldwide in various countries, yet they are also bounded by their commonalities as adopted Korean persons. This chapter’s focus on reterritorialization directly engages with Eleana J. Kim’s exploration of “adopted territories.” By tracing the counterpublic and adoptees’ connectedness via online communication as well as face-to-face encounters at adult adoptee conferences, meetings and gatherings, Kim discusses the ways in such reterritorialization reframes and remaps their lived experiences from the private sphere into, what she defines as, “multiple national and transnational public spheres” – in South Korea, Europe, and the United States, for example. For the purposes of this line of inquiry, I am invested in the ways in which adult adoptees reconstitute

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4 Kim, Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging, 8.

5 Ibid., 15.
themselves online to forge new territories as an amorphous activist community to promote adult adoptees as experts of the adopted experience.

Computer mediated communication impacts individual and community interactions with one another, allowing varying levels of engagement between users’ synchronous and asynchronous communication.⁶ For example, in her research on the Filipino diasporic community, Ignacio writes: “The Internet is a medium in which people can be both intimately involved and anonymous; people in the newsgroup may get to know one another through their posts (and the tone of their posts), yet they may never actually see one another.”⁷ Similarly, Baym notes: “[New media] allows us to communicate personally within what used to be prohibitively large groups. This blurs the boundary between mass and interpersonal communication in ways that disrupt both.”⁸ As digital communication continually responds to new technologies and social networking sites, the ease in which information flows between individuals presents new avenues for deterritorialized communities to become reconstituted in cyberspace. For example, adult adoptees have begun utilizing Facebook as a way to sustain continuous conversation and action. Not only have adult adoptee organizations coalesced on Facebook via the “Groups” and “Pages” features, but adult adoptees worldwide maintain deterritorialized relationships as “friends.” An adoptee may cultivate online relationships with other adoptees based on common Facebook Group membership, but only meet in person at an adoptee gathering or mini-gathering following the establishment of their online

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⁶ Nancy K. Baym examines the ways in which the Internet’s varied features, such as blogs, e-mail, and social networking sites, operate in different temporalities, whereby instant communication may not be as rapid response as one thinks; Baym, Personal Connections in the Digital Age.
⁷ Ignacio, Building Diaspora: Filipino Community Formation on the Internet, xix.
⁸ Baym, Personal Connections in the Digital Age, 4.
friendship. Operating in conjunction with these direct points of contact are Facebook friends sharing news articles and events via their accounts. These passive forms of communication allow adoptees to interact informally and serves as one avenue for the counterpublic to reterritorialize itself online.

Even as dispersed groups are reterritorialized vis-à-vis a rearticulated collective identity, I contend that these online articulations of identity are also fraught with tension, as identity negotiation cannot be viewed as a static act. Such online “speaking” is akin to the heterogeneity found within adoptees’ print writings, whereby multiple voices are found within such a diverse group. Nevertheless, a specific type of networked collectivism arises as adoptees’ find themselves constructed as a monolithic group. Yet, I am mindful of how networked collectivities may encounter fixed identities, whereby their gender or racial identity, for example, is constructed from stereotypes. Ignacio discusses this fixity of identity in regards to the exportation of Western concepts regarding “authentic” cultures as related to multiculturalist discourse. The digital age is the realm in which “national, racial, and ethnic identity is articulated, reified, and re-created.” For adoptees, such networked collectivism remains in dialogue with in real life occurrences, including the dichotomy of adoptees girding mainstream perceptions of adoption (See Chapter Four).

Ibid., 4.
Networked collectivism allows for those located on the borderlands to continually shape and reshape their identities.\textsuperscript{12} The borders produced by location are circumvented with Internet communities in that individuals, previously alone, may enter into kinship with one another to “[create] more community without affecting their off-line lives.”\textsuperscript{13} Examining online enactments and discussions of adoptee identity and adoption vis-à-vis an investigation of adoptees’ networked collective also provides a lens to understand how adoptees negotiate identity daily in ways that the fixity of print media does not allow. The discussion of the three specific instances between 2007 and 2012 will unearth how adoptees continuously negotiate what it means to be an adopted person and how spaces meant to discuss “adoption” may diverge from an individual’s beliefs on the topic.

First, I investigate adult adoptee reaction to the 2007 \emph{The New York Times} Relative Choices blog and the postings of Korean American adult adoptee and former Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute Policy Director, Hollee McGinnis. She also co-founded Also Known As, Inc. – a New York City, an adult Korean adoptee organization. The Relative Choices blog more broadly aimed to facilitate discussion of the complexities of adoption, but was criticized by adoptees and adoptee allies for censoring comments by adult adoptees and for its skewed “Christian American” and Orientalist perspective. Second, I discuss the response by Bae Gang Shik the anonymous author of the Transracial Korean Adoptee Nexus (KAD Nexus) blog to John Seabrook’s May 2010 \emph{New Yorker} article and appearance on National Public Radio concerning Haitian

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\textsuperscript{12} I draw upon Gloria Anzaldúa’s work concerning living on the psychological, spiritual, sexual and physical borders; Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands, La Frontera: The New Mestiza (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).
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\textsuperscript{13} Baym, “The Emergence of On-Line Community,” 37.
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international adoption. Seabrook’s own comments on the blog post brought additional attention to this entry.

Finally, I examine the controversy surrounding a July 2012 Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) broadcast concerning the recent decline of international adoption. Much of the debate stemmed from the lack of adult adoptee voices on the radio segment. Leading the criticism against MPR was adoptee-centric blog “Land of Gazillion Adoptees.” Minneapolis, Minnesota-based adult adoptees and allies globally organized in response to this biased Minnesota Public Radio report.¹⁴ This oversight should not be viewed as minor particularly as Minnesota received the highest numbers of adoptees per capita in the United States. Operating on a transnational scale, the response engaged adoptees residing in Korea as well as across the United States. In response to the outpouring of criticism, Minnesota Public Radio featured two adult adoptee academics within the field of Adoption Studies and an adult adoptee memoirist four days following the original broadcast. This particular incident resonates with me personally as I was in Minneapolis visiting the University of Minnesota’s Social Welfare History archives during the controversy. I saw first hand how quickly the adult adoptee community mobilizes around an issue.

Spurring Debate: Entering Mainstream Adoption Discourse

During the last two decades of the twenty-first century adult adoptees have entered the forefront of adoption discussions on the blogosphere. Since the popularity of

¹⁴ Please note that at the time of this writing, “Land of Gazillion Voices” was in the process of transforming itself into an online subscription-based magazine, Gazillion Voices. The magazine is scheduled to launch in Autumn 2013.
listserves in the 1990s, adult adoptees have continued to form deterritorialized networks across space, place, and time. In addition, these adoptees have also begun blogging to document their experiences with the maintenance of personal and professional blogs to educate mainstream society, including adoptive parents, birth parents and adoption practitioners. For example, adult adoptee activist and memoirist Jane Jeong Trenka maintains what is known as a filter blog, which reflects the way in which the blogger adds his/her personal opinion or analysis to information found in mainstream media.\(^\text{15}\)

Her blog reflects her role as an activist within the larger adoption community based in Korea and her own lived experiences as an adopted person.

As the adult adoptee community witnessed the influx of adult adoptee maintained blogs, it should be no surprise that these sites serve as an extension of adult adoptee print autobiographical writings. These blogs also demonstrate how the Internet is changing the face of dissemination of information between members of the adoption community. The three specific incidents discussed in this chapter garnered intense support and activism from the adult adoptee community. Each event galvanized the community in new and concrete ways, demonstrating the need for increased support of adult adoptees as experts of their own experiences. To understand the organizing capacity of adult adoptees and their commitment for adult adoptee inclusion in conversations concerning adoption, I treat each event as a case study to explore how the Internet is used to forge connections between adult adoptees, their allies, adopted parents and adoption practitioners. Moving chronologically, I will first examine the controversy surrounding *The New York Times*

Relative Choices blog. I then will explore the consequences of only having adopted parents perspectives valued as a form of knowledge. Last, I analyze the significance of adult adoptee mobilization for inclusion in formal conversations of adoption on public radio.

Mainstream Inclusion, Censorship and Questions

In fall 2007, the *New York Times* launched its month long Relative Choices: Adoption and the American Family blog, which featured posts from members of the adoption triad and adoption professionals. Included in the posts were well known voices, including Dr. Jane Aronson, an adoptive mother and founder of Worldwide Orphans Foundation, as well as journalists, such as Jeff Gammage, Gloria Hochman and Tama Janowitz. Both Gammage and Janowitz are adoptive parents. In their narratives these practitioners and parents concentrated on the themes of family legitimacy, transmitting “native” culture, the initial meeting of their child in his/her birth country or their arrival to the United States, and their medical needs. For example, Gammage recalls multiple instances of being asked if his daughters are his “real” children and the “relative who laments that I never had ‘children of my own’.” Even as parents discuss the ways in which their families encounter intrusive questions due to their transracial composition or discuss how they embrace a multicultural outlook, some narratives inadvertently perpetuate dominant perceptions of adoption. For instance, drawing from her medical

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expertise and experiences adopting her son, Dr. Aronson constructs a narrative that feeds into pathologized images of the “horrid conditions” of orphanages worldwide. She writes:

As infants, orphans lie in cribs soiled and vanquished. As toddlers, they stand along railings, rocking side to side, cruising unsteadily along the railings of their large pens in soundless rooms. The smell of unchanged clothes saturated with stool and urine pervade the room; those smells are missing from the hundreds of videos of these scenes that are stacked on my shelves. (I use the videos to help prospective parents evaluate the health and well-being of the children in orphanages). While the conditions and care in some orphanages is clearly better than in others, this is essentially the state of millions of children all over the world living in orphanages.17

I mention this particular assessment by Dr. Aronson not to engage with a direct criticism of her work; rather, I am interested in how this depiction perpetuates notions of “child saving.” While this dissertation is not a study of orphanage conditions in various sending countries and documentaries such as the British Broadcasting Corporation’s The Dying Rooms (1995),18 I want to suggest that such broad generalizations support the dominant narrative of adoption as an act of humanitarianism.

Yet, the series does not obscure adoptee voices, who were also featured as part of the wider blog. These individuals – adults and children – were domestically adopted and transnationally adopted from Korea, the People’s Republic of China, and Vietnam. Their narratives explored the negotiation of their racial, ethnic, and cultural identities, legitimacy as a “real” family within their adoptive families, return to their countries of origin if they were internationally adopted, and the questions they were asked of they did

“search” for their birth parents.\textsuperscript{19} For example, one adoptee recounts how “questions beyond childhood curiosity [for information about her birth parents] and looking anything other than ‘happy’ would get [her] labeled as having psychological problems.”\textsuperscript{20} She further recounts the ways in which such labels label adult adoptees as “maladjusted” if they seek answers to questions or mourn the losses caused by adoption and notes that as a blogger, she too was affected. Even as she discusses the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity of adoptee experiences, she ends her post by noting: “I believe most adoptive parents genuinely love their children.” By also acknowledging that not all adoptive parents negatively characterize adoptees who critique adoption, she allows readers who are adoptive parents create a false dichotomy that, “they’re not the ones she’s criticizing” in the post. Similarly, discussing the internal conflicts about confronting the questions “who am I?” and “where did I come from?,” Korean adoptee Katy Robinson notes: “To broach these topics, it appeared to me, was to point out that I was different from everyone else in my family. I was afraid to seem ungrateful for the amazing new life I had been given, or to hurt my adoptive mother’s feelings by mentioning the mother who gave me birth. It wasn’t as if I was forbidden to talk about my Korean family; it just seemed disloyal.”\textsuperscript{21} Yet, even as Robinson raises these powerful and emotional questions concerning identity as she discusses her decision to return to Korea and reunion with her birth father, her narrative finishes neatly with her

commenting that she now feels whole. In many ways, she presents a circular narrative of a positive search and reunion experience.

The adoptee narratives presented their experiences in a way that was palatable to *Times* readers. In other words, even as their posts challenged mainstream adoption discourse, the conclusion of the posts reframes these critiques under a rubric of gratefulness. These posts distance themselves from controversy and create a false binary of “us versus them,” whereby perceived outliers in the adoption triad (“angry adoptees” and “thoughtless adoptive parents”) are viewed as radical and not truly part of the mainstream. I argue these posts present a “kumbaya” moment for adoption in that any critiques of the system of adoption is overlooked by the “good intentions” of all those involved.

Finally, one birth mother, Lynn Lauber participated in the blog. She focused on the complexities of reunion between first parents and adoptees.²² I find the inclusion of her post to be notable for at the end of her post, Lauber writes:

> Some adoptees need to search for their birth parents, and others don’t, but the secrets and silence that once hung over adoption should be permanently replaced with air and light. Adoption is a triangle, not a tidy circle. There are three distinct parties who are forever linked even if they never see each other.

Complicating the search and recognizing how all experiences vary, Lauber’s post shines light onto the ways in which adoption impacts birth parents. However, Lauber’s narrative presents adoption “neatly” by focusing on her positive reunion with her daughter. As adoptive parents continually negotiate with the “mythic” figure of the unknown birth

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parents, Lauber’s perspective remains respectful of the bonds between adoptive parent and child. In doing so, she does not seek to intervene or disrupt the adoptive parents’ desire for legitimacy as a “real” family, which facilitates the palatability of her experience within mainstream adoption discourse.

Consequently, even as a myriad of voices are included, I cannot ignore the controversy that stemmed from the way in which the *Times* acted as a “gatekeeper” for only specific types of adoptee and adoptive parent experiences to be told via its national platform. Blogger Paula O’Laughlin, who is a Korean American adoptee and adoptive parent of a Korean son, wrote:

> As evidenced by the scores of adoption forums, adoption websites, all of the books, research and literature pertaining to adoption, and in the recent hand-picked comments that were deemed worthy enough to publish in the NYT adoption blog, it is clear that the adoptee's point of view is seen by many as just a mere aside to the discussion about adoption.23

O’Laughlin’s criticism underscores statements discussed in the previous chapter by Bishoff and Rankin (1997) and Trenka, et al. (2006) regarding the need to ensure adult adoptee voices are finally heard as active participants in the adoption triad – adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptees. For example, in the wake of the April 2010 scandal involving an American couple returning their child to Russia, many news outlets featured stories of struggle and joy written by adoptive parents, while ignoring the voices of the adult, transnational adoptee community.24 By censoring adult adoptee critiques of

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As the news became more widespread that *The New York Times* censored adult adoptee comments on blog posts written by adoptive parents, adult adoptee bloggers and their allies on the blogosphere began to document and critique the actions of the newspaper. While censorship may have occurred on post written by non-adoptive parents, what is most troubling is the way in which adoptees dissent was obscured when it challenged the narratives by adoptive parents. For instance, in response to Tama Janowitz’s blog post about her daughter’s adoption from China, adoptee blogger Sarah Kim turned to her own blog to share her comments after *The New York Times* censored her submission.25 In particular, Kim took umbrage with Janowitz’s flippant tone from the following passage:

A girlfriend who is now on the waiting list for a child from Ethiopia says that the talk of her adoption group is a recently published book in which many Midwestern Asian adoptees now entering their 30s and 40s complain bitterly about being treated as if they did not come from a different cultural background. They feel that this treatment was an attempt to blot out their differences, and because of this, they resent their adoptive parents. So in a way it is kind of nice to know as a parent of a child, biological or otherwise — whatever you do is going to be wrong. Like I say to Willow: “Well, you know, if you were still in China you would be working in a factory for 14 hours a day with only limited bathroom breaks!” And she says — as has been said by children since time immemorial — “So what, I don’t care. I would rather do that than be here anyway.”26


26 Kim, S., "To Willow Janowitz: You’re Not Alone…"
As discussed earlier in this study, such language pathologizes the birth culture and places primacy upon the adoptive culture. Regardless of the comment’s intentions, it reproduces the trope of gratefulness onto the child. Responding to this particular paragraph, Sarah Kim writes:

This is the type of emotional blackmail that so many transnational adoptees have to deal with, and it is the source of a lot of pain and guilt. Parents who make this kind of statement do two things: 1) reinforce the “savior” myth by showing how bad & dirty the Third World is and how lucky the adoptee is to not live there and 2) guilt the adoptee into being “grateful” for being adopted.

Another thing that transnational and transracial adoptees often have to deal with is being perpetually characterized and dismissed as petulant adolescents, forever “bitter” and “complaining” as this blogger characterizes a recent anthology by some “Midwestern Asian Adoptees.” Being critical of our experiences as adoptees and also being critical of the systems that make up adoption does not necessarily mean that one hates one’s parents. There is tremendous loss (as well as gain) in any adoption, and acknowledging this loss does not mean that all of these adult adoptees resent their adoptive parents. Many of us wonder about our biological parents—who even though we may not have met them (or may never meet them), are very much real in that they exist, or at one time existed, on this planet.  

Her response focuses on Janowitz’s characterization of adoptees as issuing “bitter complaints” and inserts a trope of “child saving” by invoking the image of the Chinese child laborer. Kim focuses on how Janowitz is misguided in her criticism of adult adoptees and Janowitz’s emphasis on adoptee gratefulness vis-à-vis the implicit focus on American humanitarianism. Constructing the adoptee regardless of age as a petulant child who should feel lucky about his/her adoption, Janowitz exhibits what Lisa Marie Rollins

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27 Ibid.
deems as “m/paternalism” because adoptees are not grateful for not living here versus the mythical “over there.”  

To ensure the censored adoptee voices were heard, Jae Ran Kim reposted adoptees’ comments on her blog, Harlow’s Monkey, which is a resource for adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoption practitioners. Harlow’s Monkey served as a platform for Kim to weave her experiences as an adult adoptee and licensed social worker. She garnered attention for her insightful posts. For example, her posts on adoption and race were cross-posted on Racialicious, “a blog at the intersection of race and pop culture.”

Kim also is an advisor to Adoptees Have Answers, a program funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and co-founder of the Adoption Policy and Reform Collaborative.

By circulating their counterpoints online, adult adoptees proved that their speech could not be censored. In articulating their frustration, adoptees also asserted their agency and adulthood. Yet, these comments were not only be Korean adoptees. Drawing from a personal standpoint similar to Sarah Kim, a Vietnamese adoptee notes:

When I first saw the word “Mongolian,” I thought to myself, “Janowitz can’t seriously be using that word to describe her daughter’s features!” It’s just as demeaning as the word “Oriental.” As I read further, Janowitz managed to be even more extreme with her steamrolling attempt to flatten the differences

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between her and her adopted daughter. It’s one thing to acknowledge universal experiences in parenting, but it’s another to belittle and disqualify her daughter’s birthparents in order to assert maternal supremacy over her child. Janowitz shows recklessness with this attitude.\textsuperscript{31}

Centering on the ways in which Janowitz generalizes persons of Asian descent and employs outdated definitions to describe her daughter, the anonymous commentor highlights the ways in which Janowitz’s rhetoric harkens back to a time of the Asian exclusion era (See Chapter Two). The comment also illuminates the insecurity of adoptive parents concerning their legitimacy as a “real” family (See Chapter Three). Moreover, adoptee academics joined the critique of Janowitz. For example, Shannon Gibney comments:

And of course, I do not mean to suggest that we adult adoptees are alone in this – birth parents are always conspicuously absent from the adoption debate as well. I have grown used to seeing story after story penned by White adoptive parents, expert after expert speaking as a White adoptive parent, editor after editor acting as a white adoptive parent, comment after comment dominated by the White adoptive parent. This is quite disconcerting on many levels, not the least of which is this: To seek the voice of just one part of any community, and to then amplify it to the exclusion of others can cause the worst kind of dissension and ill-feeling, because it creates an uneven power dynamic that can take a generation or many times, more, to undo.

And that brings us full-circle to exactly where we are. A new generation of politicized, adult adoptees are writing our own stories, speaking for ourselves, and stepping outside of the narrow “pro-adoption,” “anti-adoption,” “pro-White people,” “anti-White people,” system of false binaries that has dominated the adoption debate for years. We are writers, researchers, professors, bloggers, scientists, and professors, and we bring a unique perspective to TRA that really has not been heard (loudly at least) until now. And though I can feel the ground moving under us, though I can see the work of Jae Ran Kim, Lisa Marie Rollins, Tobias Hubinette, Bryan Thoa Worra, Ji In, Jane Jeong Trenka, Sandy White Hawk, Sun Yung Shin, Kim Park Nelson, and so many others shifting the terms of engagement – in fact, issuing in a massive paradigm shift – I am still struck, every time, when I come across narratives of the old order, such as the New York Times new “Relative Choices” series.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Kim, J.R., “We Will Not be Silenced.”
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
Gibney’s comments speak directly to how a dichotomy of adoptive parent versus adopted person experiences are constructed whereby personal expertise is valued only if they are the adoptive parent. Touching on the unequal power dynamics in mainstream adoption discourse, Gibney’s words also harken to the asymmetrical nature of adoption (See Introduction and Chapter One).

Even as *The New York Times* suppressed adult adoptee critiques while simultaneously giving credence to adoptive parent voices, I also argue that we cannot dismiss the Relative Choices blog in its entirety. For instance, the excerpts I included at the beginning of this section illustrate the ways in which featured adoptees disrupted mainstream perceptions of adoption, even if their conclusions presented a “resolution” to their narratives. By critiquing the false binary of well-adjusted versus maladjusted and the need for adoptive parents to actively encourage positive identity exploration, these posts may have provided a new perspective to *Times* readers on the perspective of adult adoptees. I selected to examine only McGinnis’ posts because she is known throughout the active adult adoptee community for her work with the adult adoptee organization Also Known As, Inc. and involvement with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. The posts by McGinnis’ provide a new lens to look at what types of narratives are considered “acceptable” to mainstream press.

In her first entry, “Who Are You Also Known As,” McGinnis chronicles her migration from Korea at the age of three.33 Remarking that she “seemingly dropped out of the sky on a Boeing 747, walking, talking, and potty trained,” her post echoes the

notions of re/birth as discussed in Chapter Four. Her parents recall that in her first few weeks living in the United States, McGinnis would cry and repeat the phrase, “Jip e ka le,” which means, “I want to go home.” Even at three, McGinnis had memories of her life in Korea and her adoption was a very large adjustment in her life – uprooting her from everything she knew. I emphasize this incident because many non-adoptees ignore the Korean past of adoptees, focusing the start of the adoptee’s life as when they disembark of the plane from Korea. This particular narrative sheds new light to mainstream audiences regarding the previous lives of adoptees prior to their adoption. In many ways, by sharing her lived experience, McGinnis troubles the widely held belief that adoption “rescued” children from a life that she would never want to return.

McGinnis noted the awakening of her adoptee conscious began in her late adolescence, when her Americanness was questioned because of her racially marked body. This led to feelings of being an “imposter” as she was culturally white, similar to other adoptees’ discussion of what I term as in/authenticity. By college, McGinnis highlights how she tried to defy stereotypes of Asians and how she was angry that people assumed she behaved in a certain manner because of salient features – race and gender. As McGinnis worked to reconcile her multiple identities, she eventually embraced her hybrid status and that “the reality was that [she] was both.” In raising the questions she had concerning the intersections of her racial, ethnic and cultural identities, McGinnis foregrounds the way in which an adoptee’s identity is more than their assimilation to the United States vis-à-vis the transculturization process discussed in the previous chapter.

34 Robinson, *A Single Square Picture*…
Rather, McGinnis complicates adoptees’ identity, recognizing the complexity and nuance found within the adopted person’s lived reality.

After sharing her personal adoption history in her first post, McGinnis shifts and weaves her professional opinion into her personal narrative in “South Korea and Its Children.” At age 24, she returned to Korea as a “foreigner again,” alluding to her first entry to the United States at age three. On a subsequent visit four years later as part of a motherland tour, McGinnis visited an orphanage of children awaiting adoption. Reflecting upon the emotions the visit raises for the adoptees, McGinnis remarks “I got out” and notes the questions that were raised for her, including: “Why with all the wealth in Korea were these children here? What were their prospects growing up as orphans? And who were their advocates? Who could speak for their needs and best interests? Who would ensure that they would get to live to their full potentials – and not simply survive?” This visit prompted McGinnis’ interest in the adoption field. The entry ends with McGinnis providing a history of Korean intercountry adoption and explaining the stigmatized position of unwed mothers in modern Korean society. Although she provides her personal adoption story, McGinnis notes:

Personally, I am not for adoption or against it. I can see its value and also its limitation. What I am for are choices. The argument for me is not whether international adoption should be abolished or promoted, but rather how to maximize options for children so that all can reach their full potential.

Emphasizing the need for ethical adoptions to take place, McGinnis also writes:

“Ultimately, the challenge is how to balance the need to respect a child’s right to his or

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her ethnic identity and cultural background against the known detrimental effects caused by early deprivation of a primary caregiver.” Aware of the humanitarian motivations of the early adoption of Korean children, McGinnis provides the reader context for why Korea still participates today and the salient issues she has discovered in whether Korea should end its intercountry adoption program. While her first post challenges constructions of adoptees by addressing issues of re/birth and in/authenticity, her second delves into questions regarding the ethical practice of adoption. Complicating transnational adoption from merely a black and white argument, McGinnis invokes the need for culture keeping, but also asks readers to think of the multiple apparatuses that gird the transnational adoption industrial complex.

In her following entry, “Blood Ties and Acts of Love,” McGinnis returns to discussing her personal experiences as an adoptee. Expecting her first child, she notes that because she and her husband are both Korean American adoptees, they will be unable to pass along their genetic history, instead they will provide access to the culture of adoption and that the ties that bind are not based solely on blood, but on relationships (see Chapter Three). The most revealing sentiment in McGinnis’ post is when she writes:

I am relieved, though, that my child will not have to answer the question ‘Why were you born’ the way I had to answer the question, ‘Why were you adopted?’ I am glad that my child will not be told by well-meaning strangers he or she is ‘lucky’ to have been born. And I certainly won’t tell my child to be grateful because I brought them into the world. And if my child feels any gratitude toward me I hope it is because I earned it (emphasis added).

This section is reveals how adoption permeates an adoptee’s life, making them susceptible to intrusive comments and questions because of the salience of racial difference between parent and child. No longer considered a “private” affair, transracial adoption triggers “public” responses and inquiries. Although some individuals may be well meaning in their comments, McGinnis’ statement illustrates the negative effects such statements have in the lives of adoptees.

Even as we saw comments being censored in 2007, the inclusion of adult adoptee voices as bloggers is notable. To be dismissive of the Times foray into adoption discourse ignores the gains adult adopted persons made through their presence as experts of their lived realities. Overall, I find that McGinnis presents the conflicts of transracial, transnational adoption in a more palatable way to adoptive parents and the wider mainstream community that characterizes adoption as an “act of love” or humanitarianism. McGinnis, while not necessarily “grateful,” presents a critique of international adoption as an institution without being received as “angry” or “bitter.” Rather, her post engages readers with the complexities of adoptees’ transraciality without the same confrontation as the censored comments. In doing so, the dichotomy of adoptee behavior is upheld, whereby the censored commentors are “angry” and McGinnis is seen as “happy” and “well-adjusted.” While the comments to her posts do not laud her as “well-adjusted,” I invoke this dichotomy to illustrate how adoptees are rendered “exceptions” through the inclusion of their narratives within mainstream press over other adoptee narratives. Although she received a handful of critical comments, overall the
commenters lauded McGinnis for sharing her perspective and how her posts reaffirmed their thoughts and feelings.

However, it would be remiss to discount McGinnis as another “happy” adoptee. Her first post demonstrates the complexities of adoption by discussing her re/birth and the ways in which an adoptee consciousness did not emerge until adolescence. I also recognize that McGinnis was limited in what stories to share by *The New York Times* as well as her then affiliation with the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Her work on the report *Beyond Culture Camps: Promoting Healthy Identity Formation in Adoption* for the Adoption Institute demonstrates her commitment to a nuanced understanding of adoptee identity. Nonetheless, for the purposes of understanding the incident of *The New York Times* Relative Choices blog, readers may lack a deeper knowledge of McGinnis. Consequently, she becomes framed as a “grateful” adoptee amidst other criticism of the newspaper’s blog by more “angry” adoptees.

*Babies, Disaster, and Airlifts: Criticizing the Language of International Adoption*

The ramifications of only seeing one perspective on intercountry adoption was evident in the May 10, 2010 issue of the *New Yorker*, where adoptive father and noted columnist John Seabrook penned an article, “The Last Babylift: Adopting a child in Haiti.” In the article, Seabrook discussed his adoption of a Haitian orphan in the wake of the 2008 Haitian earthquake. He also appeared on National Public Radio’s *Fresh Air* program as a follow up to his article and provided his thoughts on intercountry adoption.

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37 Seabrook, “The Last Babylift…”
adoption. His narrative reflects many of the initial sentiments of concern towards the children of Haiti. For example, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell aided the movement of sixty-one orphans to Pittsburgh, PA. One can easily see the comparison between the governor’s coordination of orphan evacuation to the world of Harry Holt in 1953. Following the earthquake, Idaho Baptist missionaries also were caught illegally crossing the Dominican Republic border with children whose parents are alive in their efforts to “save the children.” Discussing the tactics of the missionaries, Jennifer Kwon Dobbs writes: “[Their] tactics of recruiting Haitian children from impoverished families and falsifying the children’s identities as orphans, through irregular or missing paperwork, read like pages out of Korea’s adoption history, which the Korean government has yet to acknowledge, reconcile, or include in history books.”

To understand how his article sparked outrage within the adoptee community, this section will first analyze the use of humanitarian rhetoric in Seabrook’s discussion of adoption as well as his characterization of adult adoptee experiences. For instance, within the second paragraph of his article, describing adoption as aiding “needy children,” Seabrook writes: “[International adoption] combines an evangelical zeal to save the lost, a humanitarian spirit, and the love of a sensible idea: by bringing childless families

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42 Ibid.
together with orphans, international adoption solves two problems with a single stroke.”

Following this examination, I explore the critique found on KAD Nexus’ blog and the subsequent dialogue commentators engaged in with Seabrook.

The focus on humanitarianism as a motive to adopt in the article is no surprise once Seabrook discloses his connection to Holt International. Aware of the history of Holt International’s founder, Harry Holt, Seabrook argues: “Their radical notion—that love could transcend any cultural barrier—was ridiculed within the adoption profession, but it resonated with many Americans.” Yet, even as he attempts to remedy Holt’s initial adoption plans, Seabrook also notes how adoption was part of the nation’s desire “to rescue children from Communism,” while being located “as humanitarian mercy missions.” Seabrook invokes the humanitarian motives commonly deployed to justify international adoption, while aware of the economic marketplace of the transnational adoption industrial complex. This is evident through his utilization of the phrase, “obtaining children.” Such language is amplified when he notes:

We had decided to adopt internationally just as the boom was ending. The gross inequities at the heart of the enterprise had become harder to justify. (The average annual income of the sending nations, if you exclude Korea, is less than four thousand dollars, and the average income in the receiving nations is about thirty thousand.) Critics have argued that the practice denies children the chance to grow up in their own cultures.

I find his particular use of the word “boom” to exacerbate the notion that adoptees are commodities available for purchase. His statement recalls “sending” country critiques of the developed world stealing their resources. Even though Seabrook is seemingly aware of how race and privilege are invoked by adoptive parents who select international

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43 Seabrook, “The Last Babylift…”
adoption, this knowledge appears to have little effect on his decision. Nevertheless, Seabrook also wrestles with a sense of liberal guilt concerning his white privilege and economic power to purchase a child vis-à-vis adoption. Discussing payment rendered for his child, he focuses on how bribes would not be exchanged, even as large monetary transactions were occurring between adoptive parents and agency. In doing so, Seabrook attempts to create a dichotomy of “us vs. them.” He also seeks to disrupt any notions that he “saved” his daughter. Yet, Seabrook seemingly contradicts himself with the following admission: “[B]efore the earthquake, we had never thought of ourselves as Rose’s saviors. We wanted a child, and Rose needed a family: it seemed like a fair trade.”

In his attempt to avoid invoking Christian American rhetoric into a discussion of his adoption motives, Seabrook illustrates the complexities adoptive parents face in the twenty-first century. He is clearly aware of the controversies surrounding transracial adoption based on his personal dilemmas and justifications for why he and his wife adopted from Haiti. Nonetheless, he admits that such concerns are irrelevant, writing: “We thought about the identity issues a black child with white parents might face growing up in the U.S., and decided that, whatever they might be, it was better to grow up in a family than in an orphanage.” He further argues that any possible issues his daughter may have grappling with issues of racial or ethnic identity will be mitigated by the geographic location. Highlighting how his family lives in a predominately non-white community in the New York City region, Seabrook’s parenting style is imbued with a specific notion of culture keeping. As he provides evidence of the neighborhood’s
“diversity” and the “blackness” of her nanny, Seabrook seems to write the lines in order to assuage his own guilt or fears that his daughter will lack positive role models of color.

In many respects, Seabrook’s portrayal of international adoption demonstrates ignorance towards adult adoptees’ critiques of transnational adoption. Nevertheless, he admits knowledge of such materials, while simultaneously characterizing adult adoptee memoirs as “bittersweet” or “just bitter.” He also notes: “Reading some of these unhappy accounts by adopted children was acutely painful.” His utilization of the terms “bitter” and “unhappy” reinforces the false binary of identity categories that I seek to dismantle in conversations concerning adoption. Such rhetoric is dismissive for he then shifts into how “[he] hadn’t dwelled much on the fact that the child [Rose] might have living parents….But [he] was thinking primarily about [his] own interests.” Seabrook further writes: “When Rose grew up, she might have vastly different interests, and perhaps she, too, would come to blame us for adopting her.” By employing the concept of blame in his efforts to understand the value of adult adoptee voices demonstrates his lack of openness to learn from adult adoptees. Even as Seabrook appears to be engaged in the adoption community as a well-versed adoptive parent, by not taking adult adoptees experiences seriously, it becomes clear not all perspectives on adoption are valued as he embarks on the adoption journey with his own family.

Rereading The New Yorker article, I was struck by how one individual’s experience and knowledge on the subject matter of intercountry adoption could be framed as an “expert” opinion within popular culture. This is again evident from the National Public Radio program Fresh Air and its segment “The Joys and Struggles of International
Adoption” with Terry Gross and John Seabrook that his voice is provided credence as an “expert” opinion on the topic at hand.\textsuperscript{44} The main themes within the conversation between Gross and Seabrook focus on: 1) domestic adoption as difficult; 2) international adoption as humanitarian practice; and 3) the impact of adoption on the adoptee. What is most concerning is how Gross positioned Seabrook as an expert of adoption in his role as an adoptive parent. In order to provide a fair and balanced perspective of adoption, NPR should have drawn upon a breadth of Adoption Studies scholars with extensive knowledge regarding domestic and international adoption to provide context to the human interest story of Seabrook. This is not to say that I do not value the voices of public intellectuals; rather, I find that the continued negligence by mainstream forums to place primacy on the expertise of adoptive parents over adult adoptees to be problematic. By overlooking the public intellectuals who are adopted persons continually casts adoptees as petulant children when they do insert their voices into adoption discourse.

Reflecting on why he and his wife selected international and domestic adoption replicates an overall atmosphere concerning intercountry adoption as a method to procure infants. Seabrook noted: “We would have a better chance to get an infant or a toddler through international adoption than through domestic adoption.”\textsuperscript{45} The fact that Seabrook and his wife were considered “older parents” who also had a previous biological child led him to believe that his family would be the less than ideal prospective adoptive family in the domestic adoption marketplace. Ruminating on domestic adoption, Seabrook tells Gross and NPR listeners that in the United States birth mothers decide on adoptive

\textsuperscript{44} Seabrook, “The Joys and Struggles of International Adoption.”
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
families and they usually select younger families to place infants with. Thus, instead of children being marketed to prospective adoptive families as in instances of international adoption, adoptive parents in cases of domestic adoption market themselves to birth mothers.

The racialized nature of adoption also entered the conversation of selecting international over domestic adoption. Even as Seabrook mentions the controversy of the National Black Social Workers in the 1970s (see Introduction), he seeks to reframe adoption in postracial or colorblind terms. This celebration of the nation’s postracial moment speaks to the post-2008 election of President Barack Obama. In reality, this postracial rhetoric fails to capture the continued ways in which race impacts an individual’s lived experience. Yet, for Seabrook, “skin color was a secondary [issue]” in his adoption of Rose, his daughter. Rather, he and his wife selected Haiti because of their personal ties and connections for his wife previously spent time working in Haiti at an orphanage. They continued to maintain relationships with Haitian adults and children, which even culminated in them informally sponsoring education opportunities for their friends. Focusing on the personal ties with Haiti, Seabrook effectively overlooks racial difference. Even as he reflects on transracial adoption criticism, he noted: “I don’t know if there are that many people who are that adamant about it these days.”

Nevertheless, when Gross pointedly mentions that there are a lot of African American children in U.S. foster care, Seabrook responds, “we weren’t as interested in adopting an older kid.”

Operating simultaneously is his acknowledgement that transracial adoption is “an open

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
secret” because of the interracial composition of the kinship formation. Seabrook noted: “There’s probably going to be a moment, where Rose goes, ‘Hey, wait a minute my parents are white’.”

However, even if Rose does notice the racial difference, Seabrook does not allude to that this transraciality will affect his daughter either positively or negatively. This last comment is representative of his belief that living in a primarily black neighborhood will mitigate any questions concerning the family’s racial demographics.

Colorblind rhetoric is merged with Christian American discourse throughout the interview. At the outset, Gross frames international adoption as both humanitarian and a market of children. Mentioning the *New Yorker* article, Gross noted that Seabrook reevaluated his adoption of Rose as part of a humanitarian mission following the Haitian earthquake. Yet, Seabrook’s reflections on his first encounter with his daughter seem to contradict this claim. Speaking about her malnourishment, Seabrook said: “Her mother couldn’t feed her and one of the reasons her mother relinquished her was her mother couldn’t hear her cries for hunger any more.”

The image of a child saved from poverty is continually evoked. As Seabrook acknowledges the financial disparities between families – birth and adoptive, Gross even comments that his daughter was given up because of her uneducated, unemployed mother lived in poverty with multiple children. Moreover, towards the end of the interview discussing the “airlift” of Holt children from Haiti, Seabrook notes that the birth parents were not told the children were leaving the orphanage because their homes lacked indoor telephones. Juxtaposing the wealth of the

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.

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receiving country, Seabrook invokes a discourse of “saving” implicitly in even mentioning the lack of telephones in birth parents’ homes.

The notion that Haitian children were brought into the developed world and from impoverishment was reiterated as Seabrook presented the history of intercountry adoption to listeners. Discussing the history of international adoption, Seabrook characterizes the initial adoption of Korean children and the work of the Holts as part of wider “babylifts” in the post-Korean War period. Noting that children were languishing in orphanages, Seabrook suggests that children were rescued. This humanitarian rhetoric is continued when he further notes that international adoption is “born of disaster” and “a kind of good thing that comes out of a bad situation.” With little reflection towards the internal and external reproductive coercive forces that requires one set of parents to lose a child, Seabrook positions international adoption as a “wonderful experience.”

The personal interest piece is continually interwoven as Seabrook reflects on his daughter’s adoption and her understanding of the process as a child under the age of two years old. Speaking to whether Rose expressed any distress over the earthquake and subsequent fast-paced adoption, Seabrook noted: “Maybe when she’s able to articulate it, she’ll let us know.” He then quickly mentioned: “She seems really happy…she’s the happiest kid, I think, that I’ve ever met. So, so far so good in terms of the trauma from that.”

A palpable tension exists as he reconciles an adoptee’s young memories with the notion that adoption represents a “clean break.” For instance, he noted that for older children who have memories of their birth country that they “don’t have the language to

\[50\] Ibid.
communicate” to their adoptive parents their experiences as they learn English and shed Creole as their native tongue. Yet, Seabrook does not seem prepared for narratives by adult adoptees who offer different narratives from their parents. Even as he finds that adult adoptee accounts “contrast quite vividly with stories told about their parents,” Seabrook does not ask himself why this may be the case or how aspects of transraciality may be implicated in these divergent recollections of the past.

Seabrook is unable to intellectualize adult adoptee recollections outside of his personal experiences as a father. Adult adoptee narratives instead are viewed as problematic and become pathologized as he discusses their impact on his understandings of adoption. For example, speaking on the case of the Russian adoptee sent back to Russia alone via airplane, Seabrook noted: “A child who spends four, five, six years in an orphanage is going to have some issues.” He attributes the “issues” to anger or developmental issues because they lived in an orphanage or because they left their orphanage and are grieving. This also speaks to his own consumptive practice of adopting Rose in that Seabrook “saved” his daughter from the horrors of institutional care. Yet, I want to return to my focus on how Seabrook discusses the impact of adoption. He labels the first generation of adoptees as “canaries in the coal mine,” stating how society has not seen a whole life lived through an internationally adopted child and calls international adoption an “ongoing social experience.” This assertion overlooks the fact that some of the oldest adoptees are in their mid-fifties with children. To continue discourse that suggests adoptees are perpetual children is troublesome.

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51 Ibid.
In response to the National Public Radio’s Fresh Air program segment, the anonymous blogger Bae Gang Shik of The Transnational Korean Adoptee Nexus critiques Seabrook’s exploration of international adoption in his post, “John Seabrook NPR Segment,” which was published online on May 17, 2010. The overarching critique made by Bae rests in Seabrook’s “white savior” rhetoric and invocation of the “grateful and happy” versus “ungrateful and angry” binary characterization of adoptee experiences.

Yet, his criticism of Seabrook does not end there. Bae writes:

But I think perhaps it’s the most maddening to hear John Seabrook, whose only expertise in adoption is the initial research he has done in thinking about his own life as an adoptive father of a Haitian adoptee, essentialize the entire history of international adoption. He systematically denies the social contexts of these countries at the time their adoption programs began, and from a very America-centric/imperialistic point of view, asserts that corruption occurs ONLY in “poor countries,” since they are more prone to be corrupted by their urge to make money.52

Focusing on Seabrook’s lack of professional adoption expertise underscores how adoptive parents’ experiences become legitimated through print and online sources such as The New Yorker and The New York Times in ways that may not be accessible to adult adoptees who are pathologized in mainstream press. In many ways Bae’s critique is an extension of Rollins’ discussion of m/paternalism in The New York Times Relative Choices blog posts. The rescue motif obscures the wider economic, political and social power imbalances between sending and receiving countries.

While these broader critiques concerning Seabrook’s portrayal of adoption is an irritant for Bae, the larger issue at hand is the misrepresentation of the adult adoptee experience. For instance, Bae notes:

52 Bae, “‘John Seabrook NPR Segment.’"
He leads the listeners to believe that those adult adoptees making their mark either through film, book, etc. portray painful experiences (he omits questions of race) and that an adoptees’ seemingly “primal” pain can be cured by trips to ones birth country. As much as he compares adult adoptee experiences to mere “emotional baggage” he exposes his own hand as an adoptive father with relatively no understanding of race, what it means to parent a child of color, and how his “emotions” potentially drive his own opinions on the historical context of adoption. Seabrook goes on to describe how he hopes his daughter doesn’t grow up feeling angry about her circumstances.\footnote{Ibid.}

Bae highlights how adoptees’ emotions are deemed irrelevant and peripheral within a larger picture that portrays adoption as an act of savior. For adoptive parents like Seabrook, existing adult adoptee recollections are inconsequential to his own daughter’s possible future experiences because he, unlike previous adoptive parents, will “do it right.” In other words, adult adoptees’ parents “got it wrong,” and through the culture keeping practices espoused by twenty-first century adoptive parents. Aware of what it means to confront such negative, pathological portrayals, Bae further notes:

\begin{quote}
Overall, the segment left me feeling as though I was not allowed to socially critique adoption without becoming an “angry adoptee,” and that what I perceive to be my scholarly opinions (based on REAL research), are misleading since they are based on my “feelings.” The piece was totally misrepresentative of the WHOLE adoptee experience and it left me questioning how one with such little knowledge on adoption could be called on for a national radio program to discuss the history and alleged “merits” of international adoption. Would it be so hard to acknowledge that perhaps the best people to call on to discuss international adoption might just be, the one affected the most by it i.e. the adoptee? No. The media seems to prefer to turn to the perspectives of adoptive parents who can tie things off with pretty bows denying that there are huge problems with international adoption, policies, and that for every seemingly “happy ending” there is extreme tragedy when a birth family is broken whether it is through “voluntary” or “involuntary” circumstances.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

Even if Bae’s tone is angry, readers cannot easily dismiss his core argument that adult adoptee voices and critiques of international adoption are valid and equal to rhetoric associated with adoptive parent, pro-adoption discourse. An interrogation of transnational
adoption’s complex power dynamics is necessary in order to capture the nuances found within the adoption triad. Bae points to the need for laypersons such as Seabrook as well as media conglomerates to conduct due diligence by including scholarly opinions that discuss international adoption.

While this immediate critique of Seabrook is noteworthy, what stands out further is the fact that Seabrook himself commented on the blogpost. As the first commentator on May 18, 2010, Seabrook writes:

But aren’t you doing just what you’re saying I’m doing — using my experience of adoption to make a more general point about the rightness (or I guess, in your case, wrongness) of international adoption. You seem to have had an unhappy experience. So far our experience has been happy. I think anyone who reads my piece, or listens to the NPR broadcast, will take away, among other things, that the situation is fraught with peril, often born of heartbreak, and doesn’t always work out for the best. But every study I have seen shows that in most cases international adoption does work out for the best.55

Seabrook continues to comment that studies have shown the benefits of adoption and fostering over institutional orphanage care. He also mentions the negative effects orphanages have on an individual’s intelligence. Yet, Seabrook is self-reflexive when he ends the comment noting: “In an ideal world, everyone would remain in the families they were born into.”56 Nevertheless, neither in his comments, NPR interview, nor New Yorker article, does he interrogate why children are rendered “adoptable” and what institutional factors play a role in the transnational adoption industrial complex.

What also remains interesting when reading the comment by Seabrook is how he easily dismisses the blogger as “unhappy.” In doing so, Seabrook implicitly renders the blogger as “angry” for only someone who is “unhappy” would write a scathing critique of

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55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
Seabrook’s own “happy” experience. By working within this binary framework, it should come as no surprise that multiple adult adoptees, adoptive parents, and allies defended Bae throughout the comment thread. Commentators also discussed the need for recognizing the value in the adult adoptee’s lived experience. Posing questions about whether he would silence his own child’s voice if she spoke out about the injustices of adoption, commentators asked Seabrook to interrogate his own white privilege and how it allows him to easily silence adult adoptees who study adoption, as in the case of the blogger and many commentators. Directly responding to Seabrook, Bae writes:

By calling what I say as “unhappy” makes it seem as though what I say is not valid, and that in order to be “happy” or what I think you mean is “well-adjusted” (a term I also detest) that I MUST view every aspect of adoption as positive….This is not about being happy or unhappy, this [is] about how children of color are raised by Caucasian parents in this country...you fail to address the complexities of parenting a child of color...Adoption does not erase the color line in your family. Nor does it erase the history that your child had in Haiti.57

The above passage captures the interest Bae has in asking Seabrook and other adoptive parents to examine the impact of transraciality on their children’s lives. Reiterating the limitations of black/white understandings of adoptees and the adoption experience, Bae also urges Seabrook to really question whether or not adoption is the only solution to aid children in orphanages. Specifically, Bae also asks Seabrook to examine the ways in which prospective adoptive parents and others can aid national infrastructure and examine the ways in which governments participate in acts of reproductive coercion that makes adoption the more tenable solution.

57 Ibid.
As days passed from when the initial blog was posted, more comments flooded onto the blog, including additional comments from Seabrook. Writing on May 20, 2010, he notes that “discussions about adoption are so useless” because they appear circular with neither side effectively communicating with one another or in this case “angry adoptees” versus an adoptive parent.  

Seabrook maintains a defensive and dismissive tone towards Bae and other commentators, specifically by noting the use of a binary framework as “the tired grad school put down.” In other words, Seabrook characterizes Bae as providing a simplistic critique, which further locates adoptees as children or mere students within adoption conversations. In a subsequent post from May 20, 2010, Seabrook utilizes a sarcastic tone and begins with the following comment: “I feel so proud of the adoptees and allies who so generously took on the education of Mr. Seabrook, who comes off as a supremely entitled and woefully ignorant adoptive parent.” By writing off adult adoptees and their allies as a valuable resource, Seabrook explicitly dismisses adult adoptees as knowledge producers. He remains uninterested in adoptees’ critiques of international adoption as an act of humanitarianism. This is demonstrated in his subsequent comments on May 21, 2010:

Also I have read comments bemoaning the fact that the adoptive parents are the ones who get on Fresh Air, or whatever, and the adoptees never get heard from. Want to know how to get on Fresh Air?. Write a compelling story about your experience that a lot of people want to read. Not an academic account of the Global North blah blah blah. A real and honest account about your experience. It seems to me that adoptees as a whole are far better educated and have much more access to media than adoptive parents, but I don’t see them getting their point across. There’s not a conspiracy here.

Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.  
Ibid.
Shifting the conversation to why his narrative of adoption was featured over others raises questions regarding what type of knowledge mainstream Americans would like to receive from adoptees. Focusing on how adoptees should provide “a real and honest account about [their] experience[s],” Seabrook implicitly reifies notions that adoptees should only write positivist accounts of adoption that is not laced with critique of international adoption and hardships faced as a result of their adoptions. He utilizes liberal rhetoric of individual responsibility and relies on a belief that an “equal playing field” exists for adoptees and adoptive parents when they discuss adoption. This speaks to his constrained ability to intellectualize adoption outside of personal experience.

While this chapter could focus only on the case of John Seabrook and the fallout from his *New Yorker* article, I want to end this section discussing Seabrook’s May 21, 2010 comment concerning issues of diversity. In many ways he reiterates points made both in the article and interview as he writes:

> Oh and one other comment — there is a running assumption in many of these posts that the posters have a better understanding of what Rose’s experience is going to be than I do, because they are people of color who have grown up in white communities. Rose is living in a predominantly African American community in Brooklyn, where three of every four faces she sees on the street are black, her friends are black, her caregiver is black, and she is living within a few miles of the second largest Haitian community in the US, and, I might add, in a country with a black president. Correct me if I am wrong (like, I have to ask), but I am assuming most of the posters here did not grow up in those circumstances. So isn’t it possible that Rose’s experience is going to be vastly different from yours, and your collected wisdom is going to be very out of date or irrelevant when it comes to Rose’s experience?  

Even as Seabrook appears to be interested in culture keeping, the emphasis on the “diversity” of Rose’s community demonstrates how he firmly believes a diverse

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62 Ibid.
environment is the key for Rose’s happiness. Simultaneously, he raises issues of cultural authenticity and implies that those adoptees raised in non-diverse, all-white environments were unfortunate and their parents were not “ready” to parent transracially. Such a dismissive tone challenges the legitimacy of these early transracial families. While being exposed to other Black Americans and people of color is critical for adoptees’ to build a positive ethnic identity, Seabrook fails to understand that adoptees are also impacted by comments and slights experienced within the family and local community. Living in proximity to a community of color is only one step to aid the adoptee’s negotiation of their transnational, transcultural experience.

Relegated to the Sidelines: Why Aren’t Adoptee Adoption Professionals included in Transnational Adoption Conversations?

Even as adoptees found their voices silenced in broader discussions found on *The New York Times* relative choices blog, adult adoptees gained a voice via Bae Gang Shik and his criticism of John Seabrook. As the tensions between the multiple stakeholders within the adoption triad come to the fore, I turn our attention to Minnesota Public Radio’s roundtable discussion on the 1993 Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption. The interest in how MPR overlooked adult adoptee practitioners in the field of adoption to serve as panelists is striking because of the high rates of adoptees who were initially sent to Minnesota upon adoption. Presently, the Twin Cities also boasts an active adoptee scholar and activist community. Consequently, it was shocking to most if not all of the local Korean adoptee community in the area and worldwide that the program lacked the
voices of adult adoptee academics and adoption practitioners. Instead, the program only featured adoptive parents or adoption practitioners.

The content of the segment focused on pro-adoption rhetoric. The host, Tom Weber, emphasized how children were the victims of the decline of transnational adoption because it meant languishing in orphanages. Posing the question, “what does the future hold for international adoption,” the segment focused on the “precipitous decline” of adoption as a result of the United States ratifying the Hague treaty in 2008 and countries such as Guatemala and Vietnam closing their adoption programs in 2009 out of concern about corruption. As noted in the Introduction, the Hague convention mandates only accredited adoption agencies may facilitate adoptions, transparency throughout the adoption process within both the “sending” and “receiving” countries, and adoption certificates attesting to the child’s eligibility for adoption. The MPR segment’s guest included: Dr. Dana Johnson, co-founder of the International Adoption Clinic at the University of Minnesota; Maureen Warren, President of Children’s Home Society; and Jodi Harpstead, chief executive officer of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. Both agencies featured on the panel facilitated many of the intercountry adoptions from Korea that resulted in Minnesota earning the nickname of the “land of gazillion adoptees,” which complements the state’s nickname of “land of 10,000 lakes.” The panelists noted that while the movement of international adoption is declining, the number of children available for adoption worldwide is actually growing. Yet, Warren noted the need for caution as agencies “realign or reset” their international adoption programs. Rather than


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focusing on the “volume of placement,” Warren finds that agencies and practitioners must be focused on ensuring children’s safety.

Joining the panelists at the end of the segment was Dr. David McKoskey, an adoptive father and adjunct professor of computer science at St. Catherine University. Dr. McKoskey focused on the increase in waiting times for adoptive parents. He echoed themes mentioned by Warren regarding how legislative changes resulted in a more unpredictable process where waits for children are extended and agencies are seeing more older children (over the age of two years old), children with medical conditions and sibling groups as available for transnational adoption. Dr. McKoskey was included to discuss his personal experiences as an adoptive father with waiting times. A week previously, on July 2, 2012, he participated in a Minnesota Public Radio feature entitled “Tighter regulations prompt drop in international adoptions.” What is curious about Dr. McKoskey’s inclusion at the end of the July 9, 2012 broadcast was his lack of formal expertise on international adoption. On a superficial level it appeared as if his status as an adoptive father trumped any knowledge of an expert studying adoption in academia.

Furthermore, even as Warren discussed “how much [agencies] are learning from adult adoptees,” it was notable that only adoptive parents and practitioners were featured on the broadcast. Adoption blogger and activist, Kevin Vollmers phoned into the show and asked Minnesota Public radio directly about why they did not invite local adoptees to participate and offer their perspectives on adoption given the high numbers of adoptee

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65 Johnson et al., "Daily Circuit: International Adoption."
researchers and activists in the local area. Vollmers also inquired about the post-adoption services provided by agencies as many of the transracial placements enter predominately white communities. Weber noted that because the show focused on the legislative changes, MPR wanted to speak with the local agencies and the question and answer period with phone-in participants was meant for other voices to be included. Addressing the second question, Warren discussed how agencies are preparing parents to discuss and recognize racism and how their children will have a different experience than the adoptive parents.

In response to Vollmers’ question, as well as criticism from adoptees and their allies, Minnesota Public Radio utilized a Korean adoptee assistant producer, Meggan Ellingboe to post a short piece entitled “What are your experiences as an adoptee?” on July 10, 2012. Relying on first person anecdotes, Ellingboe, provides sample questions and answers she and her family encounter due to their family’s transracial composition. Her post received over fifty comments, many of which were from adult adoptees critiquing the negligence of MPR for their exclusion from the conversation concerning the “precipitous decline” of international adoption. Many of the comments echoed the themes mentioned by Jane Jeong Trenka, who asked: “If adoption is really all about the best interests of the child (the adoptee, even if that child has grown into an adult adoptee), then why completely sideline the population that is at the heart of the practice you want

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to report on?"67 Throughout the comment section, adoptees from across the United States voiced their critiques of the July 9, 2012 segment and encouraged Ellingboe and Minnesota Public Radio to host a follow-up segment that included the expertise of adult adoptees. These critiques resulted in a July 13, 2012 adult adoptee roundtable discussion featuring: Jae Ran Kim; Dr. Kim Park Nelson, Minnesota State–Moorhead, and Kelly Fern, adult adoptee memoirist of *Songs of My Families* (2011).68

Instead of continuing the conversation from the earlier panel concerning the decline of international adoption, the follow up roundtable focused on how adoptive parents and adoptees negotiate racial and cultural issues. Both Kim Park Nelson and Jae Ran Kim provided their professional expertise and discussed the need for adoptive parents’ cultural competency and ability to understand how racism will affect their children differently than their personal experiences because the majority of adoptive parents are white in these transracial or transnational placements. Park Nelson noted that because the United States remains highly segregated, many adoptees are raised in predominately white communities and their ability to develop language and skills for coping with racism do not come until much later in life. Kim echoes this point, commenting that adoptive parents lack the tools to help their child negotiate building a strong racial/ethnic identity. She also finds that the Hague only mandates adoptive parents receive ten hours of pre-adoption training, including training on racial/cultural difference and the state of Minnesota only mandates adoptive parents of foster care

67 Ellingboe, "What Are Your Experiences as an Adoptee?"
complete at least sixteen hours of the same training. The little preparation given to prospective adoptive parents is immediately felt by adoptees as children. For example, in comparison to white parents, Kim stated that parents of color prep their children for incidents of bias and racism. Fern also recalled that as a child she avoided discussing issues of racism with her parents because of their lack of response and inability to relate to such incidents.

Moreover, panelists discussed the importance of socializing the child into communities of color and the adoptee community. Responding to a white adoptive mother of an African American daughter’s comment that the black community is not accepting of her family, Kim noted that parents must make an active effort to make inroads into the community because in adulthood the child will be a member of the community. Similarly, Park Nelson found that while the cultural aspects of culture camp may be superficial, the camps provide adoptees an opportunity to meet other adoptees and aid the formation of a network. At the same time, Kim warned that while it is important to allow adoptees to explore their birth culture, adoptive parents should be wary of cultural tourism (i.e. language lessons, consumption of Chinese food, trips to China) because such activities do not teach the child how to be Chinese American or Asian American. Overall, while both Kim and Park Nelson steered the conversation back to issues of policy, Weber and the callers were more interested in sharing issues associated with identity negotiation and community acceptance.

Having followed the week-long saga in Minneapolis while visiting the University of Minnesota Social Welfare History Archives, I also tuned in for the broadcast.
Communicating with other adoptees and allies via Facebook during the segment, I called into the show, hoping my question would be selected. After being placed on hold, I was asked by a MPR employee to state my name, location and question. Interested in having Park Nelson and Kim speak to their adoption studies expertise, my question asked for their views on the decline of international adoption and the international adoption marketplace. The question stemmed from my desire to hear an academic perspective on the “precipitous decline” of transnational adoption. However, this question was not selected. In retrospect I joked on Facebook to other adoptees that I should have done a bait-and-switch and mentioned something about my own personal adoption story to secure air time as the questions selected for public listeners focused solely on their personal narratives and struggles with racial and cultural identity negotiation. This personal incident again raises the issue of which voices and narratives are preferred for a national audience discussing mainstream understandings of adoption.

Others were also unsatisfied by the segments focus on issues of race and culture. This frustration stems from the fact that the majority of the time when adoptees are included on adoption panels they are only asked to speak to their experiences negotiating identity and not asked to speak as experts. As Vollmers notes it was “the most satisfying unsatisfying show.” Utilizing his position as the founder of Land of Gazillion Adoptees, Vollmers held a follow-up conversation with Park Nelson and Kim and featured the podcast on the blog. Framing the conversation as a “special edition” of the blog, he

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asked both scholars to “talk with me about…everything.” Dividing the interview in five parts, Park Nelson and Kim were asked to discuss the following topics: the decline of adoption and the conflation of the Hague; the financial underbelly of adoption; adoption based trauma, relevant issues for adoptees, and the adoptee community; and accountability legislation and representation of adoptees in literature, popular culture, and film.

The overall conversation between Park Nelson and Kim centered on questions submitted to Land of Gazillion Adoptees. The initial question asked to the panelists was one I submitted: “I want to hear their perspectives on the decline of international adoption and its conflation with the Hague convention. How does this all relate to the larger conversation of the market forces of international adoption?” Kim responded first, discussing how the nation’s ratification of the Hague treaty is not the only reason for the marked decline in adoption because the United States continues to conduct transnational adoptions with non-Hague signatories, including Korea. She attributes the decline to the implementation of domestic adoption programs in sending countries for they recognize international adoption cannot be a stopgap for lack of social welfare development. Moreover, Kim noted that intercountry adoption continues to be expensive against a time of economic downturn. Park Nelson also finds that since the enactment of the Hague Treaty, sending countries’ attitudes towards transnational adoption have changed, whereby the practice is no longer seen as a catchall social welfare policy.

Shifting from why the rates of international adoption are declining, the second question focused on the financial aspects of adoption and whether adoption agencies are working to eliminate the need for the practice in sending countries. Acknowledging the difficulty to trace the multimillion-dollar industry’s money trail, Park Nelson noted that many of the agencies are nonprofits and as a service provider, the fees are legitimate to cover adoption-related expenses, even if they are high. Kim also mentioned how some of the fees aid the development of partnerships with organizations, including orphanages, in sending countries. In response to the second part of the question, Kim believes that agencies are not necessarily conducting family preservation services in sending countries. Rather, the funds are contributing to the building of facilities for children.

The next set of questions focused on the adoptee community, specifically commonalities and differences amongst adult adoptees. Discussing adoption-based trauma, Kim noted that she cannot definitively say whether all adoptees feel trauma; rather each individual adoptee manifests understandings of the disruption of adoption differently. Similarly, Park Nelson commented that there always will be adoptees with varied experiences, cautioning against categorizing adoptees. While Park Nelson’s response may seem to not clearly engage the question posed concerning adoption based trauma, she clearly articulates the complexities of labeling an adoptee’s actions or personality traits as resulting from a specific adoption-related trauma.

Related to the categorization of adoptees, the following question asked Park Nelson and Kim to discuss the community-at-large. For example, adoptees discuss anecdotally the similarities of adoptees, including high divorce rates, poor teeth, and high
suicide/self-harm rates, yet have there been studies conducted that quantifies the statistics? In addition, the panelists were also asked what are current issues facing adoptees and where do they think the community is going. In response the question on data collection, Park Nelson noted that some issues are extremely difficult to quantify in the United States and that it is difficult to find a representative sample of adoptees. Kim echoed this sentiment, noting that one needs to consider who is participating in outcome studies. She also notes that online, adoptees are already discussing these issues and how they affect the community via social networks, such as Facebook. Moreover, Park Nelson wonders whether the momentum experienced in the adoptee community will continue as the peak of adoption was in the 1980s, so these individuals are currently engaged in the community. Nevertheless, Park Nelson believes the next step will be having the Korean adoptee community come together with the broader transnational adoptee community. Likewise, Kim noted she continues to find similarities between same race and transracial domestic adoptees and believes that much will be gained from working across different adoptee groups in the future.

Returning to the politics of adoption, the next question asked for Park Nelson and Kim’s thoughts on adoptive parent accountability in cases of relinquishment and adoption dissolution. Kim noted that in such cases, it is critical to examine the adoption contract between prospective adoption parent and agency regarding a contract penalty as well as whether the child is legally a United States citizen due to the Child Citizenship Act of 2000. Similarly, Park Nelson discussed the importance of determining the child’s guardian. While this podcast with Park Nelson and Kim occurred in July, six months
prior to Russia’s suspension of adoptions to the United States, both discussed the civil court case concerning child support payments for Artyom Savelyev.

The session with Park Nelson and Kim ended with a question concerning representations of adoptees in popular culture. Rooted in a cultural studies background, Park Nelson discussed her concern of utilizing a binary of “good” versus “bad” because the definition of “good adoptee” is muddied. For instance, is a good adoptee someone who embraces his/her birth culture or is completely assimilated? Park Nelson also mentioned the dichotomy of adoptee as villain or hero. More specifically, Kim was interested in how adoption is portrayed as rescue. Utilizing the film *The Blind Side* as an example, Kim found Michael Oher was not provided agency and is interested in how his autobiography speaks back to the film depiction of him. Kim also noted that her least favorite representations of adoption occur in television because of their sensationalist portrayals of members of the adoption triad.

By facilitating questions to Park Nelson and Kim, Vollmers achieved something unaccomplished by others, including Weber. Namely, Vollmers reframed conversations of transnational adoption by positioning adoptees as experts and recognizing that adult adoptees are involved in a professional capacity in the field of adoption studies. He reaffirmed that adoptees mature and enter adulthood. While recognizing that all stakeholders involved in adoption are rooted in various perspectives, it is my hope that after exploring the content of the three broadcasts/podcasts that it becomes evident that adoptees are knowledge producers. Furthermore, this last example also demonstrates how
the deterritorialized adoptee community mobilizes and responds at a faster rate with greater results from 2007 to present.

*Embracing the “Anger”: Adoptees Assert Their Adulthood*

The three case studies of adult adoptees’ interventions into mainstream adoption discourse demonstrate how their location as experts of their own experiences is fraught with tension. For those adoptees that speak out and challenge the ways in which adoptee voices are traditionally included in mainstream conversations, such as the work of McGinnis, they are seen as defective or unhappy about their adoption experience. Positioned as angry, these adoptees sit in direct opposition to individuals such as McGinnis or other adoptees whose voices are considered “acceptable” or “happy.” While these more positive voices may challenge international adoption as problematic tend to result in the bittersweet ending mentioned by Seabrook. Alternatively, adoptees are not even viewed as experts, resulting in their knowledge being de-legitimized in spaces such as Minnesota Public Radio.

Through intervening and speaking back to dominant portrayals of adoption in mainstream media, adult adoptees demonstrate that they are no longer the children depicted in popular culture. By expressing their displeasure, adoptees understand that they run the risk of being labeled as “angry.” Yet, this does not deter their advocacy and activism. Instead, it raises new questions concerning the binaries utilized to divide the adult adoptee community. What does it meant to be “angry”? Based on the three case studies, it appears the label “angry” is applied to adoptees who critique the
pathologization of the adoptee experience that renders adult adopted persons as illegitimate knowledge producers regarding transnational, transracial adoption. If “anger” is linked to reclaiming their subjectivity, many adoptees are re-embracing the term. Challenging normative binary categories that frame the depiction of the adult adopted person, adoptees also demonstrate the limitation of labels and need for a more expansive and nuanced understanding of the term “adoptee.” Labeling themselves as “angry,” adoptees assert that this frustration is rooted in how their experiences are misrepresented and dismissed. By being positioned as “angry,” adult adopted persons find themselves finally being heard in ways previously unknown to them. Even as memoirs and anthologies proliferated, adoptees found their narratives being analyzed around issues of identity negotiation and not necessarily based on their critiques of the practice of international adoption.

The voices of “angry” adoptees are quickly finding themselves included in traditionally mainstream spaces. For example, on January 14, 2013 Minnesota Public Radio’s website featured an editorial by Jane Jeong Trenka, a leading critic of Korea’s adoption participation and the nation’s limited support for unwed mothers.71 Entitled “How to stop languishing and get yourself adopted,” Trenka’s commentary offered a critique of the adoption community’s concern over Russia closing its doors in 2014 to international adoption. Utilizing sarcasm, Trenka lists “tips” for American children eligible for adoption to make themselves “as precious and loveable as one of those Russian orphans”: 1) be young; 2) be white; 3) be alone; and 4) be an orphan.

Specifically, Trenka notes how international adoption from Russia allowed adoptive parents to find children unattached to siblings who have no contact with their birth families, which may be less common in cases of domestic adoption. Trenka’s inclusion is a marked departure from MPR’s earlier stance in summer 2012 regarding who is considered an “expert” in the field of adoption. In addition, organizations such as the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN) is making a conscious effort to reach out to adoptee-centric blog Land of Gazillion Adoptees and its founder, Kevin Vollmers. In their July 2013 annual conference, Vollmers along with other transracial, transnational adoptees will facilitate workshops for adoptive parents, adult adoptees, and spouses. Even though KAAN was founded by an adoptive parent, in recent years the organization has made strides to engage the adult adoptee community. This is seen in their Advisory Council which includes multiple adult adoptees, including myself, as well as adoptive parents. By reframing adoption as one that is holistic and accounts for the multiple perspectives involved in the adoption journey, KAAN seeks to facilitate a dialogue between all members of the adoption community. Lastly, the Adoption Policy Reform Collaborative resulted from the advocacy work adult transracial, domestic and international adoptees conducted with Ambassador Susan Jacobs, Special Advisor to the Secretary for Children’s Issues, from the U.S. Department of State. The Collaborative is composed of adult adoptee scholars and activists working towards a nuanced discussion of adoption and accountability.

The impact of social networks and social media in aiding the activism and organizing of adult adoptees was seen in the three above-mentioned cases. More recently,
the fast moving nature of the community is seen in the ways in which information regarding the alleged “North Korean orphans” and their critiques of prospective adoptive parents’ attitudes towards the Russian adoption ban disseminated throughout 2012 and 2013. Adoptive parents and practitioners can no longer overlook the expertise adult adoptees have as scholars and as laypersons on issues of transnational, transracial adoption. If the experiences of adoptive parents are validated, their counterparts in the adoption triad must also be viewed as legitimate. In other words, the adoptive community can no longer be viewed as a static concept that situates adoptive parents against birth parents or adult adoptees and divides adoptees into two groups of “grateful and happy” and “ungrateful and angry.” Community should be neither separatist nor divisive. Thus as adoptees reclaim the term angry, I encourage a redefinition of how the “adoptive community” is defined.

With concerns over gratefulness and anger shaping how we view members within the adoption triad, it becomes clear how this rhetoric is limiting. Instead of facilitating conversation, news stories, blog posts, articles, and books that rely on such stereotypical language and generalizations create rifts and divisions – widening the tides between us. In order to build bridges and connections, adoption triad members must be open to dialogue and must remember that regardless if one agrees or disagrees on an issue, everyone has been touched by adoption. Rather than labeling adoptees as “angry,” I urge a closer reading of why this “anger” is occurring and what triggered an adoptee response. Recognizing that each member of the adoption triad is capable of learning from another triad member, I find that from the frustrations expressed by adoptees in the three case
studies that a more open dialogue is needed that recognizes and values all expertise of adoption triad members equally.
Conclusion: I’m Korean American, But…

This dissertation has traced the contentious nature of the politics of Korean adoption through its examination of the transnational adoption industrial complex and the adult adoptee counterpublic’s critiques of the practice. The multi-faceted nature of adoption not only affects institutions and governments, but also families and individuals. I am interested in locating how adoptees reconcile the displacement caused by international adoption. This is not to say displacement is directly linked to feelings of melancholy or loss; rather, such displacement reflects the involuntary nature of adoption and selection of adoptive family. By accounting for the displacement adoptees experience, this final chapter reconciles the ways in which the micro- and macro-levels of the transnational adoption industrial complex remain intertwined. In particular, I investigate how the transnational adoption industrial complex has lasting implications in the lives of adoptees.

First, I explore the ways in which adoptees characterize the adult adoptee community. In doing so, I analyze how my interviewees discuss the ways in which their varied lived experiences with adoption impact on how connections are forged amongst adopted persons. Second, I examine how adoptees bridge the disjunctions between the
adoption industry and the adult adoptee community. Specifically, I consider the effect of memes on challenging mainstream adoption discourse. Finally, I interrogate the broader implications of the transnational adoption industrial complex.

The Complexity of the Adoptee Community

“It’s funny because one thing we have in common is that we are adult adoptees. But you can meet adult adoptees and go like, ‘Wow. We’re really totally different people.’ And that’s great too. And that’s part of the strength….But what is interesting is what people want out of their association with other adoptees is also very different. Some do want to socialize and that’s great. Some want to develop deep friendships. Some want to advocate on particular causes. So I think people come into the community with very different expectations.”

- Robert, December 6, 2012

The insertion of multiple adult adoptee voices drawn from print writings, the blogosphere, and collection of oral histories throughout this study reflects my desire to highlight the heterogeneity found within the adult adoptee community. While commonalities exist due to their transraciality, adoptees’ intersectional identities and individual encounters with the world demonstrate the multiple ways in which these individuals negotiate what it means to be an adopted person. Such diversity also speaks to how adult adoptees may or may not intervene in mainstream adoption discourse. By engaging adult adoptees at the micro-level via the collection of their oral histories, their strands of the adoptee experience are reincorporated into mainstream adoption conversations. The interventions of these voices alongside accounts in print and online writings collectively disrupt the limited binary framework interrogated within Part Two of this project. At the same time, questions concerning the ways in which adoption
impacted the daily realities of adoptees linger as the majority of diverse adoption experiences go untold, unwritten and remain hidden in the depths of adoptees’ memories.

This section foregrounds my collection of oral histories and adult adoptees’ perspectives on the counterpublic, including where they locate themselves within it. These perceptions range from their superficial understanding of community bound by similar racial/ethnic features and a cultural white identity to a more critical viewpoint that sheds lights into the community’s internal dynamics. For instance, Amy noted:

Coming into later adulthood, [it has been] nice finding other Koreans or any other Asians who have been adopted who have a similar experience because there is a part, physically, visually and who I am is still Korean, despite how I may act, or how my family may have raised me.

Her comment reflects the immediacy and familiarity other adoptees discuss concerning their initial encounters with the adoptee community. As a newcomer to the adult adoptee community, Amy emphasizes how easily intimate bonds can be forged with other adoptees. In other words, by focusing on commonalities, no explanations about their families or feelings concerning identity are needed. Her experience addresses Eleana J. Kim’s assertion: “The adoptee counterpublic is organized around a discursive process of identity construction in which adoptees endeavor to define themselves as a group that is distinct from others that might share demographic or biological similarities.” In an effort to construct themselves as a distinct group, Kim describes adoptees’ deployment of “contingent essentialism,” whereby “adoptee identity is at once essentialized as

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1 Interview with author on June 23, 2012.
2 Kim, Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging, 86.
something natural and also construed as something cultural or socially constructed. It thus takes on biological associations despite the nonbiogenetic basis of adoption.”

For adoptees with more established ties to the community, a more complex picture of the community emerged. The contingent essentialism becomes disrupted as adoptees’ recognize how adoptees’ entrance into and maintenance of ties to the community ebbs and flows over time. Describing the adoptee community, Lydia said: “Like a dysfunctional family. We can’t help but be tied one another because being a Korean adoptee is beautiful. We can’t change this fact about ourselves. We can’t reverse it. It’s sort of like being born into a particular family. People can’t help it. So we are a family. We can never escape this identity. This family is dysfunctional.” While the label of “family” speaks to the contingent essentialism discussed by Eleana J. Kim, the dysfunctionality underscores how various members come to and remain affiliated with the community for multiple reasons.

Yet, while Robert’s quote in the epigraph highlights the positive outcomes of community difference, other adoptees discussed this heterogeneity in a variety of different ways. For instance, Rebecca deconstructed the community into age groups, noting that older adoptees, who may be legacies of the Korean War, “seem very reluctant to criticize” adoption, while adoptees who arrived from the late 1980s or later are “still

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3 Ibid., 86, 97.
4 These connections include individual friendships, participation in local adult adoptee organizations, utilization of Facebook or listserves, and/or attending International Korean Adoptee Association gatherings/mini-gatherings. However, it is important to note that connections with the adult adoptee community varied for each interviewee. For instance, Amy and Kevin had limited contact with other adult adoptees.
5 Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
very much in the stage where they want to just explore Korean identity.” At the same time, Kevin distinguished activist and non-activist adoptees from one another, when he said: “It seems like the people who are most ferocious about the adoption community or about adoptees seem to be the ones with the most pain in their lives…but I don’t think that, you know, there are divides in the adoptee community whether they think adoption is good or bad, some people can be ambivalent.”

While these adoptees presented varying views of the adoptee community, what stood out were conversations with two individuals focused on portraying adoptees in a positive light. This is not to say that no other respondents were careful about what they said when asked to characterize the community. Rather, these adoptees honestly noted the anxiety of discussing the adoptee community in research. For instance, aware of how adoptees are routinely pathologized, Liz noted:

> There is a lot of contention within the community, a lot of drama. That’s part of a lot of small minority communities. The reason why I hesitate [to discuss this further] is because you’re an adoptee, I’m an adoptee and I feel bad for throwing Korean adoptees under the bus. Like, I feel like as an adoptee, I felt like I had to perform Korean Americanness and portray adoptees in positive images because we’re already battling against other negative images.

Her statement highlights how adoptees may consciously perform a specific type of outward identity to non-adoptees or researchers in order to ensure an affirmative analysis of adult adoptees. Instead of situating Liz as an adoptee “throwing Korean adoptees under the bus,” I find that her honest discussion of the community reflects how a palpable fear exists concerning whether or not the adopted community’s “dirty laundry” is exposed.

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6 Interview with author on July 12, 2012.
7 Interview with author on July 16, 2012.
8 Interview with author on July 23, 2012.
Similarly, Claudia said: “I’m very invested in having a positive portrayal of the Korean adoption community. I think it’s fine if we all talk about how fucked up it is amongst ourselves, but…when I’m talking in public I never say anything in bad about anybody—in terms about the community in general, etc.”\textsuperscript{10} This apprehension to discuss the community reflects how while adoptees recognize the complexity of the community’s dynamics there is a distinct investment to ensure only one type of image is put forth to mainstream society. This emphasis on a singular, positive experience directly engages the binary framework concerning happiness and gratefulness versus anger and ungratefulness.

Yet, their collective common experiences remain useful when thinking about the wider implications of adoption in future generations of adult adoptees. When multiple voices speak of crises occurring within identity negotiation or of the fraught nature of reconciling multiple “families,” it becomes clear that it is no longer useful to dismiss certain voices because what they say is hard to hear. Instead, these similar experiences shed light onto the complex lived realities adoptees face from childhood to adulthood. I want to return to a quote from Kat Turner in Chapter Four, for she discussed her shocking realization that an adopted Korean girl in the mid 1990s experienced the same “issues and insecurities” as she did in the 1970s as she writes:

I was truly shocked a few years ago when I learned that the adopted Korean daughter of one of my neighbors was living my déjà vu. However, this wasn’t Iowa in the 1970s, but progressive Minneapolis in the mid 1990s. I couldn’t believe this generation of girls on the edge of a new millennium were not only faced with the same issues and insecurities, but to the same degree I had faced them almost twenty years before.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Interview with author on July 25, 2012.
\textsuperscript{11} Turner, “Planted in the West: The Story of an American Girl,” 137.
It is not surprising that adult adoptees like Turner are troubled to see the same struggles and lack of confidence in younger versions of themselves. The concern expressed by Turner is also evident in the discussion of adult adoptee activism throughout this dissertation. This is problematic for adoptive parents and society-at-large that celebrate the twenty-first century as a time of multiculturalism and perhaps even a post-racial existence. The contradictions of this rhetoric were exemplified in the documentary *Somewhere Between* (2012), which followed four Chinese adoptees and their reflections on adoption.\(^{12}\) Adopted in the 1990s, these young women’s recollections of yearning for more information concerning their birth families and encounters with microaggressions remain starkly similar to those of adult Korean adoptees. This generation of adoptees raised in post-racial America demonstrate the limits of multiculturalism and underscore the direct impact transraciality has in shaping their negotiations with wider society.

*Reconciling the Macro- and Micro-Levels of the Adoption Industrial Complex*

The connections between the micro-level of international adoption to the macro-level politics of the transnational adoption industrial complex (TAIC) cannot be overlooked. In their engagement with concepts such as family, nation, citizenship and community, adult adoptees also connect with how mechanisms of the TAIC influence and shape their identities and negotiation with the wider adoption community. To this end, looking towards the future of how adoptees and their allies critique the transnational

adoption industrial complex, I believe that we will see greater critique through the utilization of digital media and in artistic productions.

As Facebook becomes a ubiquitous way for adoptees to reterritorialize themselves and communicate, the use of images shared between social networks is a new avenue for adoptees and allies to interact with one another. Specifically, the rise in popularity of internet memes is seeing increased crossover within the adoptee community. While memes gained popularity for their inane depictions of cats (i.e. lolcats) and use of the 1987 Rick Astley song “Never Gonna Give You Up” for the means of “rickrolling,” I find memes have also become a tool for activism within the adult adoptee community. In many ways, memes reflect the twenty-first century political cartoon. While they may be considered a lowbrow form of culture, memes are expressive and are not merely for comic effect. Rather, memes may also be a form of intellectual, cultural critique. For instance, adoptees utilize memes to engage mainstream understandings of adoption and sharing them online via social networking sites such as Facebook. In this way, adoptees are able to summarize and capture information in smaller snapshots than blogs and even tweets via Twitter. Even as these memes may have a low rate of circulation vis-à-vis the number of Facebook “friends” linked to the disseminator, memes demonstrate the new possibilities for adult adoptees to engage the wider adoption community.

Provocative in tone, memes challenge widely held beliefs or raise sensitive subjects concerning adoption. Meme creators incorporate their knowledge of the transnational adoption industrial complex for satire. Through politicized language associated with the meme, these individuals aim at the heart of discourse that centers
adoption as an act of humanitarianism and child rescue. The memes dispel any fantasy of the adult adoptee as completely supportive of the practice of adoption. In doing so, the creators also reclaim the label “angry” through their criticism. For example, on January 14, 2013, Jane Jeong Trenka shared the following meme (Figure 5) that she developed with Kevin Vollmers, founder of Land of Gazillion Adoptees.¹³

![Meme](image.png)

Figure 4: “Y U No Tell Me Black Kids are Cheaper than Asian Babies?!“ Meme

The choice of utilizing the “Y U No Guy” meme speaks to Trenka’s deliberate use of sarcasm speaks directly to the financial realities of adoption as discussed in Chapter One.¹⁴ Yet, Trenka requires that viewers reflect on their own prejudices and the legacies of American racism that permeates adoption practices and policies. The meme capitalizes

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¹³ Permission obtained by creator, Jane Jeong Trenka.
¹⁴ The origins of the meme trace to the use of “SMS shorthands and carefree grammar as a way to bring someone’s attention on a particular subject or issue; [http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/y-u-no-guy](http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/y-u-no-guy)
on the racial hierarchies found in both domestic and international adoption and the
discomfort that results when such monetary values are placed on children’s bodies. By
recognizing the financial realities and implicit racism that influences adoption practices,
Trenka’s critique speaks to her legacy of adult adoptee activism in Korea.

Acknowledging the help she received from Vollmers, Trenka’s use of the meme
to convey critique also speaks directly to how Land of Gazillion adoptees targets specific
groups through meme on their Facebook page. For example, following remarks by Tom
DiFilipo of the Joint Council of Adoption in regard to the impact of the Russian adoption
ban, Land of Gazillion Adoptees unveiled the following meme (Figure 6) on January 14,
2013.15

![Figure 5: Tom DiFilipo/Tom Cruise Meme](image)

15 Permission obtained by creator, Kevin Vollmers.
Utilizing DiFilipo’s own language regarding the “cataclysmic implosion” of adoption, Vollmers challenges the notion that the decline of international adoption is an issue for concern. Vollmers questions DiFilipo’s motives concerning adoption and whether the “best interests of the child” are in mind when we’re speaking about the economic realities and supply/demand nature of adoption.

Within this particular meme, Vollmers also capitalizes on implicit knowledge of Tom Cruise as an adoptive parent of two transracially adopted children (Connor and Isobella) with his former wife Nicole Kidman after the couple married in 1990. As an individual who within the past ten years has fallen from his status as a Hollywood legend due to his various media mishaps, Cruise also raises questions concerning parental fitness. In other words, his on air television attacks against Brooke Shields on Access Hollywood and The Today Show in May 2005 and his emphatic declaration of love to then girlfriend Katie Homes raised questions concerning his stability.16 Yet, there was little questioning within the media over his ability to “parent” and set a good example for his children. The utilization of Tom Cruise as the meme background calls all adoptive parents into question with the subtext that financial success does not translate directly into good parenting skills.

The integration of memes into the communication between adoptees, adoption practitioners, adoptive parents, birth parents, and others on social networking sites

illustrates how the social media continually accommodates new types of interventions concerning the limits of the transnational adoption industrial complex. Utilizing sarcasm and humor, adult adoptees are asserting agency and lending their humor for immediate consumption. In many ways, adoptee memes are a twenty-first century iteration of the political cartoon in that both lambast individuals, organizations, and governments, while also providing social commentary. Bridging their personal experiences with their politicized understandings of adoption, Trenka and Vollmers demonstrate the intersecting nature of the micro- and macro-levels of the transnational adoption industrial complex.

The personal becomes political when adoptees are rendered as voiceless, perpetual children. Even as their individual experiences are heard whether through print or online writings, interviews, research studies, or artistic productions, adoptees voices, as seen in Chapter Five, are continuously mediated via the lasting impact of the transnational adoption industrial complex.

The Legacies of the Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex and Adult Adoptee Counterpublic

From the adoption of Korean children in the post-Korean War period to Operation Babylift to the rescue of Haitian orphans in 2010, it becomes obvious that international adoption has become a solidified worldwide practice. Yet, this childbearing practice is not only tied to times of political, economic and social distress. As we have seen in the case of Korea, adoption is also utilized as a way to inhibit the growth of a strong social welfare state. We have also entered a period where it is clear that adoptees’ voices are no longer silenced and included in mainstream adoption discourse. No longer minors
involved in an involuntary migratory process, adult adoptees are engaged in campaigns to ensure all adoptees gain access to American citizenship. In doing so, these adoptees raise new questions concerning citizenship as a sense of national belonging. Through complicating adoptees’ citizenship, the adoptive family is queered and challenged to become a broader concept in order to account for its location as both a white and Asian American unit.

This project underscores how transnational, transracial adoption is changing the American landscape. My work directly speaks to scholarship that traces the breadth of American imperialism abroad. In addition, my interest in how American Cold War rhetoric influenced Americans earliest participation in transnational adoption provides new insights into how everyday Americans engaged in the promotion of democratic values. I also challenge the portrayal of international adoption as solely an act of humanitarianism and child rescue by interrogating how concepts of family and national belonging are negotiated within the adoptive family and by adult adoptees. By recognizing Korean adoptees within the broader overseas Korean diaspora found within the Asian American population, I contribute to expanding understandings of what it means to be Asian and American in the United States.

Broadening how everyday Americans conceive adoption, adult adoptee voices are complemented by renewed focus on the corruption and nefarious practices of the adoption market. At the start of this study, I noted how the American media has become aware of abuses to Russian children. This unease was fueled following accounts of a 17-year-old adoptee that returned to Russia to live with his grandmother following a failed
adoption. Russian news agencies report that the child was forced to steal to survive on the streets of Philadelphia due to maltreatment by his adoptive parents. Concerned by the recent spate of news concerning the welfare of Russian children in the United States, Yuriy Pavlenko, Children’s Ombudsman under the President of Ukraine, visited Ukrainian adoptees and their families on a four day trip across the U.S. in the beginning of April 2013. However, this is not to say that only sending countries are concerned with the adoption market. Denmark halted international adoptions from Ethiopia in March 2013 due to concerns over the ethical practices of orphanage workers and orphanage conditions.

As the twenty-first century progresses, it becomes evident that the “best interests of the child” can no longer be solely linked to having the child enter a home with “good” parents. This project has highlighted the ways in which even the best intentions cannot account for unseen abuses and legal oversights. Instead, I contend that in order to ensure the safety for adoptees – minors and adults – their voices must be validated and recognized as truths and given equal weight in mainstream adoption discourse. Failure to do so would demonstrate that adoption practitioners, researchers and parents have not learned from whom John Seabrook calls the “canaries in the coal mine.”

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20 Seabrook, “The Joys and Struggles of International Adoption.”
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter and Consent Form

Recruitment Email Announcement

[Date]

To Whom it May Concern:

Hello. My name is Kimberly McKee. I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at The Ohio State University. As an adoptee from Korea as well as a scholar of Korean adoption, I am interested in contributing to the research within Korean Adoption Studies through my dissertation research project. Entitled “The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex: An Analysis of Nation, Citizenship, and the Korean Diaspora,” this study tries to understand the growth of a multi-million dollar international adoption industry and how adult adoptees understand their sense of identity, family and national belonging.

I am particularly interested in capturing the perspectives of adult Korean American adoptees, particularly those who consider themselves activists within the adoptee community. If you are between the ages of 18 and 65, a Korean adoptee who was adopted to the United States and are interested in participating in the research study, please contact:

Kimberly McKee
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies
The Ohio State University
286 University Hall
230 North Oval Mall
Columbus, OH 43210
Email: mckee.517@osu.edu

Interview questions are designed to capture adoptees’ understandings of activism, national belonging, citizenship, family and the adult adoptee community. Interviewees
will also be asked to fill out a pre-interview questionnaire to capture demographic information, reflections on childhood and adulthood, as well as information concerning their involvement with the adult adoptee community. I will conduct two interviews with each interviewee at least four weeks apart to allow respondents to reflect on their responses and to account for any changes in their activism and involvement in adult adoptee related issues.

For questions about your rights as someone taking part in this study, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-614-688-4792 or 1-800-678-6251. You may call this number to discuss concerns or complaints about the study with someone who is not part of the research team.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Kimberly McKee
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies
The Ohio State University

Consent Form (Skype Interviews)

The Ohio State University Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex: An Analysis of Nation, Citizenship, and the Korean Diaspora
Researcher: Primary Investigator: Dr. Judy Wu, Associate Professor, Departments of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies and History
Co-Investigator: Kimberly McKee, Doctoral Candidate, Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate.

Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose: Transnational adoption has become a worldwide institution due to the adoption of over 200,000 Korean children from the Republic of Korea (South Korea or ROK) following the Korean War (1950-53) to the West. Two-thirds of these children entered the United States. Entitled “The Transnational Adoption Industrial Complex: An
Analysis of Nation, Citizenship, and the Korean Diaspora,” this study tries to understand the growth of a multi-million dollar international adoption industry and how adult adoptees understand their sense of identity, family and national belonging. Interested in capturing the various perspectives found in the adoption industry, this scholarship seeks to include perspectives of adult Korean American adoptees. Specifically, the study is interested in capturing the voices of adult adoptees who consider themselves activists within the adoptee community.

Interview questions are designed to capture adoptees’ understandings of activism, national belonging, citizenship, family and the adult adoptee community. Interviewees will also be asked to fill out a pre-interview questionnaire to capture demographic information concerning racial/ethnic identity, adoption history, social networking with the adult adoptee community, and understandings of citizenship.

**Procedures/Tasks:** Participants will be asked to complete a pre-interview survey, which should take an estimated 30 minutes to complete.

Interviews are a two-part process. Each interview will last an estimated 60-90 minutes. Following the second interview, if the participant requests, or if the co-investigator later realizes that she needs additional information, the co-investigator will schedule a follow-up third interview to make clarifications. However, her intention is to conduct only two interviews with each subject. Participants will be asked a series of set questions approved by The Ohio State University’s Institutional Review Board. Questions are designed to elicit information concerning how the respondent defines activism and family. The respondent will also be asked questions concerning citizenship and the adult Korean adoptee community. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the co-investigator, Kimberly McKee.

**Duration:** Interviewees will be asked to take part in a two-interview process. These interviews will be at least four weeks a part to allow for respondents to reflect on their responses and to account for any changes in their activism and involvement in adult adoptee related issues.

You may leave the interview at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the interview, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University or the Korean Adoption Studies community.

**Risks and Benefits:** Participants in the interview process will contribute to the ever-expanding knowledge based concerning adult Korean American adoptees. Participants will be asked to reflect on their childhood and adulthood experiences, which may bring to light underlying feelings associated with their adoption. These emotions occur when discussing information concerning one’s adoption and will add value to Korean Adoption
Studies scholarship as an increased presence of adult adoptee knowledge is captured and documented.

Confidentiality: Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives: Compensation will not be given to interview participants. However, the researcher will pay for parking costs and potential food/beverage costs associated with the interview. Participating in this research will also allow adult adoptees the chance to help shape the direction of Korean Adoption Studies as the researcher is committed to including a range of adoptee experiences that do not necessarily adhere to the trope of the “saved” adoptee.

Participant Rights: You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions: For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Kimberly McKee, Doctoral Candidate, at mckee.517@osu.edu or 585-507-5399 or Dr. Judy Wu, Associate Professor, at wu.287@osu.edu or 614-292-9331.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you
may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Dr. Judy Wu, Associate Professor, at wu.287@osu.edu or 614-292-9331.

**Signing the consent form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by consenting to be interviewed via Skype. To demonstrate affirmative consent, I emailed the co-investigator the following phrase: “I consent to be interviewed via Skype for the study on adult Korean adoptees and Korean adoption.”

I have been provided a copy of this form prior to consenting to the interview. I will be given a copy of this form.

**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Printed name of person obtaining consent</th>
<th>Signature of person obtaining consent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AM/PM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Part 1 Questions
1. Why did you participate in this study?

Questions on Family
2. What is your definition of “family”?
   a. Who do you consider part of your particular family? Has this evolved?
   b. What factors shape this understanding of the term?
3. If you have traveled to Korea, please describe your initial experiences in Korea as well as what motivated your travel.
4. If you have searched for your biological family, what motivated you to do so?

Questions on Community
5. Please describe your involvement with the adult adoptee community.
6. Has your engagement with the adult adoptee community evolved over time?
7. How would you characterize the adult adoptee community?

Questions on Activism and Citizenship
8. Are you active in adoption related issues? Please describe your activism.
   a. What has prompted this activism?
   b. How do you define the term “activism”?
9. Do you believe dual citizenship is important for adoptees?
10. What are your perspectives on the citizenship campaigns in the United States calling for retroactive citizenship to adult adoptees whose parents/guardians failed to properly naturalize them as children?

Concluding Questions
11. Please elaborate on anything else that you would like to share that was not covered within this interview.

Interview Part 2 Questions
1. Since the initial interview, how has your engagement with the adult adoptee community changed?
2. Since the initial interview, have you become less or more active in advocacy issues/work concerning the adoptee community?
3. Since the initial interview, has your understanding of family changed?
4. Since the initial interview, has your relationship with either your adoptive or birth families changed?
5. Since the initial interview, have you sought to obtain either dual citizenship or a F-4 visa?
6. Please elaborate on anything else that you would like to share that was not covered within this interview.
Appendix C: Coded Interviewee Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Basic Information</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part One</td>
<td>Part Two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>6/23/12</td>
<td>8/17/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>7/16/12</td>
<td>8/17/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>7/14/12</td>
<td>3/3/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>6/28/12</td>
<td>8/30/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>7/12/12</td>
<td>8/28/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>7/25/12</td>
<td>8/29/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>7/25/12</td>
<td>8/30/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>7/23/12</td>
<td>9/12/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>8/26/12</td>
<td>10/28/12</td>
</tr>
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<td>Susan</td>
<td>8/14/12</td>
<td>1/26/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>9/6/12</td>
<td>11/7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>12/6/12</td>
<td>1/22/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>9/9/12</td>
<td>3/3/13</td>
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</table>

Table 4: Interview Participant Data - Snapshot
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Arrival Year</th>
<th>Age at Arrival</th>
<th>Adoptive mother's race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Adoptive father's race/ethnicity</th>
<th>Biological family search conducted</th>
<th>Biological family reunion</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>White/Jewish</td>
<td>White/Italian American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2 years, 8 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>1976</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Less than 1 years old</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>1961</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>White</td>
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</table>

Table 5: Interview Participants Adoption Related Information

299
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Current self-identification</th>
<th>Childhood self-identification</th>
<th>As an adult, have you visited Korea?</th>
<th>As an adult, have you lived in Korea?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Adopted Korean and Jewish/Italian</td>
<td>Jewish/Italian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>Korean, American</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Once</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Identification varies based on which language she speaks and whether she is with her Korean family. For example, she identifies as gyopo (South Korea) when with her family, ibyangin (South Korea) without her family, dongpo (North Korea), Korean adoptee (U.S. and transnationally in English)</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Nine times</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Korean American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>American, Asian American</td>
<td>American</td>
<td>Three times</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Adopted Korean American</td>
<td>American/Adopted</td>
<td>Four times</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 6: Interview Participants Racial/Ethnicity Identity and Experiences in Korea
References

Primary Sources


Appendix I: Refugee Relief Bill of 1953 As Passed by Congress and Sent to the President, Box 14, Folder 8, Refugee Relief Act 1945-1958, International Social Service, American Branch Records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.


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