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Backed by papers:

Undoing persons, histories, and return

ABSTRACT

Deportations of long-term U.S. residents to El Salvador and roots trips that Swedish transnational adoptees make to their countries of birth attempt to reconnect individuals to their origins. As they (re)connect, however, such journeys dismantle, reconfiguring the original departure—emigration or adoption—in ways that can destabilize current, future, and past selves and the national and familial belongings in which these selves are embedded. By examining the paths and disjunctures that journeys “back” entail, we consider the significance of “return” for the production of legal knowledge. [*adoption, deportation, law, return, El Salvador, Sweden, United States*]

Maybe the ultimate slippage is that our paper purports to be about adoptees and deportees, but in fact, it is about birth children and citizens by birth. That part I haven't quite figured out. It probably has to do with the fact that we *all* have divided origins, but that without the movement implied in adoption and emigration, the division seems like a certification of the obvious. E.g., “*Of course* I'm listed as Raphael's mother on his birth certificate. I gave birth to him after all.” But that [statement] is a misunderstanding of the relationship between birth and the production of the document that certifies the creation of both Raphael and my relationship to him. Hence the oddity of having to use the birth certificate in order to prove my right to bring him from the U.S. to Canada when I attended the [2002 Law and Society Association] meeting in Vancouver. Fear of baby smuggling. Dread. Proving that one is not this “other” (baby smuggler).

Note from Susan to Barbara, November 10, 2002¹

What does it mean to return to a point from which one originated? In what ways does the very attempt to locate such a point unsettle the implicit assumption that there is an origin “waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against” (Hall 1997:58)? We consider this question by reflecting on the experiences of transnational adoptees who make “roots trips” to their countries of origin to search for memories, records, birth relatives, and cultural origins and on those of deportees who are more or less exiled to countries of birth despite having spent much of their lives elsewhere. These individuals return (or are returned) to sites of prior dislocation because they are presumed to belong there. A return may, therefore, seem to set things right by sorting out people, places, and filiations. By retracing the steps and moments of personal formation, a return seems to promise an encounter

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with an original, less encumbered, more authentic self—or with an alien but nonetheless real self.

Despite the promise held out by return, such retracings are problematic. The possibility of return is predicated on a single origin, an original self, and a transparent account of becoming, when, in fact, relocation may be a moment when one self is officially constituted and another is “cut away” (Yngvesson 2000:173). By revisiting such moments, returns evoke the coexistence of multiple, radically different, but analogous worlds in which selves materialize (Pottage 2001, after Strathern 1988).

“Return” is central to the production of legal knowledge and to linking the “as if” world of law to an allegedly exterior or prior world (the natural? the social? the real?) on which law acts and from which law derives truth (Collier et al. 1995; Riles 2000). Consider, for example, the production of a birth certificate. The birth certificate *returns* to birth, retroactively defining a particular birth as legally cognizable, as an event that produces a particular legal person and establishes legal parentage (and, in many countries, citizenship). The certificate cites the birth—an external event, the truth of which is attested to by witnesses, signatures, and seals—as the basis for its own validity and that of the relationships that it certifies. There is a certain transparency and recursivity in this return—the certificate leads one back to the birth, which, in turn, was the basis for producing the certificate in the first place. In fact, however, locating birth in a “back” that is prior to or outside of law and that, therefore, serves as law’s referent constitutes birth as being of a different order than law. A birth certificate, therefore, cannot lead back to birth but only to birth as a legally cognizable event. In this sense, what appears to be a return is actually self-referential.² Moreover, in dividing the legally cognizable from the allegedly real or natural and then treating these as equivalent, the practice of certifying birth introduces the possibility of alienation. Women who give birth must be positioned “as if” they are mothers for their parentage to be legally certified. If a woman is not positioned as a mother (for instance, if a child is being adopted by another parent), then, in the United States, a new birth certificate listing an adoptive parent as the one who gave birth will be issued. Thus, a birth certificate retroactively instantiates a particular history from among multiple (often incompatible) possibilities, selecting this history as the particular past that produced a seemingly subsequent present. Through such returns, persons are made and unmade.

By analyzing return, we contribute to an emerging project in the anthropology of law, a project that uses analogies between legal and other forms to examine how knowledge itself is produced (Brenneis 1994; Callon et al. 2002; Coutin 2005; Crook 1999; Maurer 2002; Pottage 2001; Riles 2000, 2004, in press; Strathern 1999, 2000; Yngvesson 2002). This project is premised on the notion that law is a form of technocratic knowledge that shares features of other knowl-

edge systems, such as accounting, audit, science, and even ethnography itself. Querying the production of knowledge, therefore, entails a sort of “unwinding,” or “circling back” to practices, relationships, narratives, and artifacts that only in retrospect (retroactively) become “data,” in light of their relevance to an inquiry (or that perhaps never become data) (Riles 2004, 2006; Strathern 1999). By examining the production of legal and other forms of knowledge, we seek to move past earlier debates that saw reality as either socially constructed or discovered. Instead, assuming that reality is both discovered and invented (Mahoney and Yngvesson 1992; Winnicott 1982), we are interested in the ways that return retroactively instantiates (or perhaps fails to instantiate) potential truths.³ This focus on return entails a certain figure-ground reversal that may be pertinent to a variety of ethnographic projects. For instance, Brian Axel (2004) suggests that, instead of conceptualizing diaspora as dispersal from an origin point, one can usefully think of the seeming originary site as a place that comes into being through diaspora. Similarly, we suggest that, rather than viewing adoption and immigration as imitations of “natural” families and nations, a more productive approach is to examine how adoption and immigration anchor (but also potentially unsettle) the “natural child” and the “native citizen.”

In what follows, we explore the (im)possibility of return and return’s capacity for bringing into being potential truths by drawing on research from two separate ethnographic projects. Barbara Yngvesson has done research regarding individuals who were born in such countries as Ethiopia, Chile, and India, were adopted by Swedish families, and returned as adults to spend time in their birth countries or with their birth families. Susan Coutin draws on interviews with individuals who were born in El Salvador, raised in the United States, and then deported to El Salvador after being convicted of crimes.⁴ Racialization is key to both the tenuousness of adoptees’ and deportees’ claims to belong in their adopted countries and to the pressure to return to an origin elsewhere, although race may not mean the same thing in these two situations.⁵ Racialization is both found by adoptees and immigrants at particular moments and also always already there, waiting to be rendered salient (see also Coutin et al. 2002). The two types of return considered here—roots trips and deportations—are neither intrinsically comparable nor intrinsically incomparable. Rather, juxtaposing roots trips and deportations permits particular correspondences to emerge that are both part of these two phenomena and artifacts of our own collaboration. Roots trips and deportations are rendered analogous by the relationships that juxtaposition—and our own return to our research material—brings into being.

Our analysis of roots trips and deportations suggests that the key place of returns in instantiating an origin that is cognizable by law (i.e., *de jure*), and the *de facto* impossibility of reaching such a point, creates a powerful pull to go

"back." Because the pull is to a legally cognizable point, returns may be focused on a search for papers (see N. 2). Papers literally enliven and extinguish persons in their search for or abduction from particular realities. In cases of deportation, adoption, or other forms of social dislocation, however, extant documents may be sealed, destroyed, or altered to cancel an extant juridical person or produce a new juridical self. Moreover, the search for documents may be complicated by the possibility that the papers—birth certificates, passports, and court records—that compel movement and authenticate identity will assume multiple and contradictory forms or not even exist. The lack or proliferation of forms produces tensions between papers (which should authenticate a self that preexists its documentation) and the *de facto* experience of a self that exceeds its documentation. Adoption is haunted by the canceled persona (the establishment of "legal abandonment" or "orphan status") that preceded it, and deportation is haunted by the potential that legal "adoption" (i.e., an award of citizenship) might have provided.

Pulls to origins

We use the word *pull* here to signal the complex ways that multiple origins act on adoptees and deportees and to complicate notions of agency where roots trips and deportations are concerned. Adoptees originate through birth and through the adoption that gives them new families, countries, and identities. Deportees are citizens of their countries of birth and members of families and communities—albeit often marginalized ones—in the deporting country. One of these origins is, however, denied full legal recognition.⁶ Adoptees in Sweden may "choose" to go on a roots trip, but they are often propelled toward that "choice" and feel considerable ambivalence about it, as the interviews below reveal. Deportees are forcibly exiled from the United States to El Salvador because of criminal convictions, but the continuation of their juridical personhood in El Salvador and an origin there can pull them "back." This pull toward an origin is realized in the material act of deportation. For both adoptees and deportees, as we argue below, the "back" can be charged with fear and longing, and its materialization in a return can be traumatic. As Elspeth Probyn points out, "Bringing forth beginnings results in loss of bearings" (1996:114).

Returns' potential to produce such loss of bearings is evident in the following stories. We begin with Sara, a woman born in Ethiopia and adopted by Swedish parents in the 1960s. Sara described "a kind of panic attack" on her first trip back to Addis Ababa in 1997, "because I had come here [to Sweden] and then gone back there again, and maybe I wouldn't get home again. I got the feeling, 'Now I am going to die here.'" This adoptee's sense that Ethiopia would reclaim her on her return there, canceling her original adoption and birth as a Swedish person, is evocative of deportee accounts of near-death experiences on their return to

El Salvador, following the actual cancellation of their abilities to live in the United States. Puppet was born in El Salvador but grew up in the United States.⁷ He recounted that shortly after he was deported to El Salvador,

I almost drowned on the beach. I thought it was like the beaches over there [in California], you know? Kind of like calm, and, I don't know, this beach that I went to was sort of like on a little cliff and the currents were really strong and the rip tides were strong and I confided in my abilities to swim, and I went out real far, and I couldn't come back in. So I was drowning for about half an hour. I was like about, a block and a half in the ocean, just floating. And I was like, "Damn! It's my second day here and I'm going to die . . ." I was like, "Damn! I was born here and damn, I just came back to die," you know?

These powerful images of "drowning," "just floating," and death recur in conversations each of us has had with deported and adopted people whose return to a birthplace produced an experience of terror, a sense that returning jeopardized their very being.⁸

The potentially annihilating effects of deportation and roots trips derive, at least in part, from a conventional story line of progress and individual development. This conventional story line is recounted in official acts (such as naturalization ceremonies) and public discourse (e.g., by political leaders and nongovernmental organizations [NGOs]) regarding immigration to the United States and transnational adoption to Sweden. According to these narratives, individuals emigrate or are put up for adoption because they cannot get the right "start" (develop) in their country (or family) of origin. Migrants leave, among other reasons, because they and their families lack opportunity or face persecution in their birth countries; children become adoptable when they are abandoned, orphaned, or formally relinquished by parents who cannot care for them. This lack of fit is "corrected" by placing abandoned children, persecuted citizens, or impoverished workers (and their children) in nations and families in which they can flourish (Coutin et al. 2002). Immigrants (including immigrant children) are supposed to take advantage of opportunity, realize their dreams, and enjoy basic freedoms, and adoptees are supposed to be given the loving care that will permit them to thrive, a concept that is captured by the phrase (widely used in adoption speak) "bringing the adopted baby 'home.'" The unique situation of immigrant children is granted some legal recognition through laws that permit family reunification or that exempt undocumented minors from the bars on reentry that face those who accumulate "illegal time" in the United States.

The notion that the baby (or migrant) is simply coming (home) to where she or he should have been in the first place displaces the original "start" into a kind of no-man's land of false beginnings and, thus, gives migrants and adoptees multiple origins. Immigration or adoption becomes a journey to

where the adoptee or immigrant presumably should have been all along. Legally, this new beginning is (supposedly) rendered unproblematic by the legal insertion of a clean break between adoptees' and émigrés' original and adopted countries or families. In the case of adoption, this clean break is marked by the sealing of birth records, the production of a new birth certificate, and the irrevocable termination of birth-parent rights. In the case of immigration to the United States, successful migration is supposed to culminate in naturalization. During naturalization ceremonies, new citizens renounce prior allegiance to a foreign state—although, in fact, this relinquishing may be partial, and states of origin may continue to make claims on émigrés. This formal renunciation parallels the irrevocable relinquishment on the part of birth parents, except that in the case of immigration, it is the child or immigrant rather than the parent or state that is doing the purported relinquishing. Adoption and immigration, thus, are presumed to produce new persons. Adoptees are typically renamed by their adoptive families, and the motion through which immigrants acquire new citizenship asks that their "prayers for change of name" (a standard phrase meaning their request to naturalize) be granted. Although the narrative of progress is not the only script at work here, it provides the fundamental (legal and cultural) rationale for placing children in adoption overseas and underpins immigration discourse in fundamental ways as well.⁹

Neither immigration nor transnational adoption is, in practice, unproblematic, however, as narratives of new beginnings can only be produced by not narrating parts of the story. New starts, which are supposed to produce happy and whole children, can only be accomplished through the legal "termination" of the person the adoptee was before being adopted. Similarly, setting down roots as an immigrant also entails uprooting, starting over, and substituting one life for another. The repressed story (of the ground in which the prior person or life was situated) continues to exert a pull on the adoptee or émigré. For example, in the following account, Puppet describes his dreamlike connection to El Salvador:

Puppet: [When I was in the United States], I knew that I was from El Salvador, but I didn't feel that I was from there. . . . It was just like a dream to me. It was a place that existed in my mind, that I had faint memories of, and they didn't start asking me where I was from until like, I don't remember, like maybe in the fourth grade, and they made like a little map where everyone in the class was from. And I was from El Salvador. And there were these other kids that were from El Salvador. But they didn't know how to speak English, and they were like, had just got to the United States, and I thought to myself, "I'm not like these kids! How could I be from there? I dress different, I talk different, my friends are different." So I always thought like, "Damn! Am I from there?" But I feel more from L.A., you know?

Susan: And now how do you feel? Do you just say, "I'm from L.A."?

P: I still say that, because I always say, "I'm from L.A., but I was born in El Salvador."

Significantly, in this passage, although Puppet distinguishes himself from more recent immigrant children who do not talk right or dress right, he knows that in some sense he is considered to be from El Salvador, if only because he has been placed there on "a little map" in school.

Like Puppet, for whom El Salvador was "like a dream," adoptees may only dimly remember birthplaces (if at all), and they may experience themselves as different from more recent immigrants. For example, Clara, a 19-year-old Swedish woman who was adopted from Chile as an infant, identified herself as "completely Swedish" (*helsvensk*) and commented on how disturbing it was to be mistaken for an immigrant as she grew up. She described her earliest recollection of feeling "not Swedish," when she was in second grade. "Some people came up to me and began speaking Spanish, and at first I couldn't figure out what they were saying. And then I began to realize that they saw me as an immigrant, when in fact I am Swedish." Clara recalled an incident some years previously, in which a man in Stockholm had shot four immigrants, three of whom were Somalis and one a Chilean:

I remember because I was terribly afraid, since it doesn't show on the outside that one is adopted. And I thought, "No, I don't dare go into the city." I remember that I worried about it a lot. It gives one this sense of unease, that others see one as a dark person, those around one, those one knows, but one knows oneself that one is completely Swedish. . . . And you see, sometimes I forget that I am dark-skinned. When one sits with friends and chats. And then when one looks in the mirror: "Aha, just so!"

The forgetting that was required for Clara's experience of being "completely Swedish" was expressed in a different way on a roots trip to Chile that she made with her parents in 1998. There, it was the Swedish that had to be "forgotten," as she implied in an interview a year later: "It felt strange to be there. It felt as though I myself was left in Sweden although my body was in Chile and so one was somewhere in between, *where one didn't know where one was*. It was really strange" (emphasis added). Only after a collective visit by adoptees on the trip with the foster mothers who had cared for them before they left for Sweden as infants, Clara explained, "did I find myself again."

Likewise, Sara describes the pull of the "not Swedish" as she was growing up in Stockholm, although in slightly different terms than Clara: "Before [I returned to Ethiopia], it was as though I was compelled, both for myself and for others, to prove that I was Swedish because I had this 'ethiopianness'

which was such an irritating presence.” This irritating presence made itself felt in many forms: her mother’s tears every time her adoption was mentioned, the curiosity of strangers about where she was from, her own sense of shock when she saw a reflection of an exotic black woman in the mirror (see also Nordin 1996:4–5). Without the “irritating presence” of Ethiopia, or dark skin, this woman and other adoptees would simply be Swedish, an identity that others assume—falsely?—to be unencumbered, exclusive of any other belonging.

These pulls to a “back” experienced by deportees and adoptees are clearly not the same and are configured by differences in the material–structural location of each. Adoptees’ juridical status as Swedish citizens formally secures their belonging in Sweden, allowing them the seeming freedom to search for a canceled Ethiopian or Chilean self. For deportees, by contrast, the pull “back” to their country of birth is essentially a form of exile, given that they cannot legally return to the United States. Noncitizens’ origins can literally pull them back. King, who was a legal permanent resident in the United States but was deported to El Salvador because of criminal convictions, described how his origins set him apart:

[My mother told me,] “Son. Be careful! You’re not like the rest of them. They’ll take you. They won’t take them. They were born here.” And I’m like, “Yeah, Mom!” You know, I like would want to understand her and then I’d just forget about it, you know what I mean? . . . And I got, I went to juvenile hall for like a week, right? She goes, “Look son, you’d better be careful now. That was a close one, you know? They’re going to take you, I’m telling you, man, there’s nothing I’m going to be able to do.” And I was, “Yeah, Mom, I know, but, you know.” Because I had the [legal permanent] residency, I figured, oh shssh, I got it made, you know, a resident.

His repetition of the warning “They’ll take you” depicts deportation as a sort of abduction by an unspecified (alien and unknown) “they.”¹⁰ Deportation interrupts what would presumably otherwise have been migrants’ continued existence—socially, physically, and perhaps even legally—in the United States. The deportation order is the most powerful “back” at work for deportees, who are sent “back” to a place they may not even remember, as though they can simply re-occupy lives that were left behind when they emigrated. The accompanying prohibition on reentry to the United States underscores the enormity of the loss when one is returned permanently to a place that only “existed in my mind,” when one’s dominant experience may be that “I feel more from L.A., you know?”

These differences in the material force of a pull “back” for deportees and adoptees are a function of the different ways that the pull toward nations such as Sweden or the United States is realized in each case. Adoptees’ original fam-

ily belongings are irrevocably canceled, and they are to be naturalized immediately in their new nation.¹¹ In contrast, other immigrants must “prove” themselves and typically require months or years to naturalize. These differences imply the contingency not only of juridical but of “natural” personhood, as well.

This contingency is central to the lived experience of both adoptees and émigrés. The anxiety it generates is underscored in the experience of Katarina. Born in El Salvador and raised in the United States, Katarina lived with the fear that her pending application for legal residency would be denied and that she would be deported. She explained,

Thinking of going back is so terrifying to me, because I don’t know that place. . . . This is where I belong. This is the only place I’ve had to identify with. As long as my family is with me, I have a home, you know? But other than that, it’s like there is nothing. There is nothing here, there is nothing there, it’s a strange situation to be in. . . . You have no identity outside of your house. That’s what it feels like sometimes. You’re just walking around, and you’re just, you’re like invisible to everything else. Everybody else is solid but you’re not.¹²

As Katarina’s narrative of indeterminacy suggests, when neither the United States nor El Salvador is clearly a destination or a “back,” then the self becomes ephemeral. Although the instability of her belonging in both places is clearly different from that of naturalized adoptees—who do not face the risk of deportation—her sense that “there is nothing here, there is nothing there” is reminiscent of the experience of adoptees, who also report feeling that they are “like ghosts” (see “(Im)materializations” below and Clara’s description above of her Chilean body leaving her Swedish self behind). Just as the experience of being adopted can only feel “real” if a “back” prevents it from truly being a beginning, so, too, does immigration require a “back,” that is, the migrant’s country of birth. In that they realize the “back” that is a necessary precondition for adoption and emigration, roots trips and deportations in a sense make the adoptions and emigrations that seemingly preceded them materialize.¹³ It is the conjunction of these two truths—the impossibility yet necessity of originating through birth and through adoption, the incommensurability of, yet lack of alternative to, being “from” two countries (Yngvesson 2002)—that can produce the experience described by Katarina: “Everybody else is solid but you’re not.”

Time travel

Returns are temporally complex. When they “go back,” deportees and adoptees confront truncated histories and selves that might have been. The “same” person may seem to have multiple origins and no termination point. Deportees are not permitted to complete the immigration

process, whereas adoptees can never reach a “back”—which, in fact, is a moving target. In Ethiopia, India, or El Salvador, the “back” becomes Sweden or the United States. Because of the original dislocation and the new lives that followed, in a sense adoptees’ and deportees’ narratives have not yet started. The “back” that they revisit may be a place and time they occupied before they originated either officially or socially. Time becomes a dimension of space as they remember themselves in India or Ethiopia, Sweden or the United States.

The sense of having had an alternative destiny (perhaps even death) that was interrupted by adoption is clear in the following comments from Maria and her mother, Gunilla. Describing her first trip back to India when she was 11, Maria, who was adopted by Swedish parents in 1964, recalls her first impressions of that country:

India was strange, it was too much. If you’ve grown up in Sweden, it’s difficult to understand that you can’t have a registration system, at least I thought it was. I didn’t think anyone was lying but didn’t understand that in reality it wasn’t possible. And when you stand there on the streets in Bombay, I mean, you understand in 5 seconds that the strange thing is that they keep track of anyone. . . . When you see the poverty, you see, then it gives you an answer to the question—“why did the mother leave you?” . . . It was a result of that trip that I realized there is just no trace. It was just to accept it, it’s just to accept that fact of your life.

Maria’s mother, Gunilla, who was present during the interview, asked,

Do you remember what you said when you went into the orphanage and saw those statistics on the wall? They have these statistics of how many babies died and were adopted. Almost 60% died. Very few were adopted. Some left for other institutions. You pointed to the [figure on] dead babies and said, “That would be me if you hadn’t come for me, I would be dead, I would be in that column if you hadn’t come.” And then we went to see the orphanage, and then we got back to the car, and you said: “When we come back to Sweden, to Daddy and John [her brother], then I’ll have a big glass of lemonade.” She had to tell herself the world she had in Sweden was still there. Daddy, brother, and water (she wasn’t allowed to have water in India). The one, little, random possible opportunity which came out and made us a family, I mean, you were a thinking person, that was so shaky and scary that you had to grab what was reality at home.

Like Maria, who confronted the randomness of the possibility that made her adopted rather than a statistic in the column of dead babies, Sara describes her first return to Ethiopia in 1997 with ambivalence. Being there “felt strange. . . . It felt—in some ways it was home, because everyone looked like I did, plus they took me for an Ethiopian and

began to speak with me and I didn’t know what they said.” But, she continued, “the culture isn’t exactly the one I would have chosen if I hadn’t been adopted.” Referring to her fear that she would die in Ethiopia and never get back to Sweden, she explained that while she was in Ethiopia she “more or less shut off those feelings, just so I could manage. When I got home again [to Sweden], it all caught up with me and everything seemed unfathomable. ‘Why just me?’ And all the children you see. ‘What would have become of me if I had stayed there? Who was I while I was there?’”

Like Sara and Maria, Salvadoran deportees found that deportation made them conscious of selves they might have been. Legally, deportation returns deportees’ physical bodies to the place of their juridical existence. As their juridical identities (i.e., Salvadoran citizenship) have continued to exist in El Salvador, such a return ought to be unproblematic. But deportees are returned in a documentless state, much like their state prior to being deported. Deportees may have the uncanny sense of being one yet two people (native, yet alien). King explained, “Because my Spanish, I get tongue-tied. . . . I speak like I was a Chicano, and they’ll trip on my words, because they wouldn’t understand it. . . . ‘You’re not from here, are you?’ ‘Yeah, I am. I was born here.’ ‘You sound like, you talk like, you know, you’re from somewhere else, you know?’” These discrepancies are heightened by the discrimination that deportees encounter when they attempt to find jobs, become part of neighborhoods, and walk about freely. Deportees who have tattoos or who have belonged to gangs are particularly stigmatized and may be subjected to police actions.

Deportees’ stint in the United States can give rise to a *de facto* legal self, rendered immaterial through deportation. Puppet described his experience of these transitions:

It wasn’t MY choice to go to the United States. It wasn’t my choice. It was just something that happened. I mean I’m glad for it, because I would’ve probably lived a miserable life here. Or you never know what I would have been. Dead, a revolutionary, politician, or even worse, a lawyer! No, just kidding. You know? It never crossed my mind what I could’ve been if I wouldn’t’ve went to the States.

As was true for adoptees Maria and Sara, deportation can bring the deported person up against the possibilities—including death—that were “left behind” when he or she emigrated. Puppet related that shortly after arriving in El Salvador,

I was just kicking back in a room, laying down on a mattress—that’s all I had when I got there—a big old roach fell on my chest. And it was like, “Damn!” I was already like scared, you know? ‘Cause I don’t know what to expect from this country, you know? So as soon as I felt it, I grabbed it. An immediate reaction. I grabbed

it and I threw it. And you could hear that sucker, that's how big it was. And just slam into the wall, plop, and just crawled away, tk-tk-tk-tk-tk, you know? It was like something out of that movie, "Arachnophobia."

Moreover, the history of human rights violations during the Salvadoran civil war—the moment when many emigrated—does not always give returnees confidence in authorities.

Deportation also produces the uncanny flip side of this experience: encountering the self that was left behind in the United States in the return to El Salvador. Hector, a Salvadoran deportee who came to the United States at age seven and who said that he had few memories of El Salvador, described the impossibility of leaving his old (U.S.) self behind, in spite of his desire to revisit El Salvador. Incarcerated and facing deportation, Hector decided not to fight his immigration case:

My mom didn't have the money for it . . . so I just said, "Well, I've always wanted to know what El Salvador looks like." (Laughs.) You know? I could've fought it in there for a while, but I just still wanted to know where I was from. You know, I wanted to know where exactly in San Salvador I was from.

So I signed it [the deportation order] and got deported. I ended up going to El Salvador this time . . .

I was anxious, I was anxious to smell the air, I was anxious to go see that curve and the railroad tracks and the bridge that I remembered. I wanted to see that scene from the cliff on the back [of] where we lived, that had the view of the mountains. . . . When I got out there . . . I was on the back of this truck going toward this address that I had on this envelope, and I was just enjoying the view, everything green and nice and beautiful. I mean you can't ride a pick-up truck standing up on the back here [in the United States], you know? So I was like standing up and getting all that air. And all of a sudden while I was enjoying the view, I seen this big rock coming out like out of the mountain, and it had some writing on it, and it said "MS-13." It had my gang name on it. And that's when I said, "I can't get away from it . . ."

I wanted to know El Salvador, I didn't want to know about gangs. I knew about gangs already . . . and then it's just right there hitting you, slapping you on the face.

As these powerful images imply, the task faced by the deported (who are not simply on a roots trip but must begin a new life in a "native land" in which they experience themselves as strangers) is daunting. Greg, who was adopted as a child from El Salvador to the United States, who was never naturalized, and who was then deported following a criminal conviction, felt at a complete loss in El Salvador. He said, "It's [deportation is] sort of like if I had took everything from you, threw you on a plane and said, 'Here, you're going to Africa.

And this is where you're living. Now do it. 'You'd say, 'How?' " In El Salvador, Greg allowed his *de facto* (but immaterial) U.S. citizenship to define his identity:

S: You're now a Salvadoran citizen, is that right?

Greg: As far as I know, I'm sure that's what they consider me, but now there is someone which is really ironic—from Ohio who was adopted from Brazil. And INS, they, the judge signed the papers for him to be deported, but Brazil would not accept him. Because they say that his adoption was irrevocable. "You took him from here. He is now a citizen of your country." So in reality, he has no country. So I don't know how different, I don't know how they look at me here. But my friends here consider me from the United States. They consider me a citizen.

S: Your friends here (in El Salvador) consider you a (U.S.) citizen?

G: Is it wrong that I don't explain the situation? That's my question.

Even though legally he remained a Salvadoran citizen and had been a Salvadoran citizen his entire life, Greg felt completely alien in El Salvador. Deportation from the United States reconnected him to a *de facto* legal self that had been rendered immaterial through his adoption to U.S. parents almost two decades previously. Adoption, in turn, created a self and life in the United States that were forbidden to him and that haunted him in El Salvador. The disjuncture between these "immaterial corporalities" (Žižek 1989:18) created first by adoption and then by deportation contributed to Greg's sense of alienage in his native land and his longing for return to the United States, where deportation had configured him legally as an alien.

Greg's experience as adopted and then deported illuminates the dependence of any point of origin or of any journey "back" on the power of law to situate (and resituate) the legal subject—that is, to define (and erase) origins, selves who originate, and the availability of a back. But it also suggests the ways in which desire for a return may confound the definitions of belonging and the accompanying cutoffs authorized by law. As doubly deported, Greg may "in reality have no country"; at the same time, the "back" that he sought and that continued "in reality" to compel him took shape in the "indirect, crosswise, and crablike" movements (Latour 1999:64) through which Greg's past was created. The seeming path that ought to connect these persons and places is unclear, has gaps, and may not really be a path at all. From one point on this path, other points can be seen, but dimly, as when peering through translucent glass. If time were linear, this path would be transparent. When individuals move along this path, however, they move across as well as through time. As a dimension of space, time assumes a planar as well as a linear form.

Traveling such a temporal path entails multidirectional movements, not simply from present to past or future, but sometimes from one present to another. When Greg was sent “back” to El Salvador, for example, he had to become a self (a Salvadoran citizen) that he presumably (but unbeknownst to him) had been all along. Similarly, while Clara was in Chile on a roots trip, her self was also in Sweden. This sense of being a conduit for multiple, coexisting selves gives rise to the feeling, voiced by all of the adoptees interviewed for this study, that going “back” made them feel “strange.”¹⁴

These experiences return us to the paradox that, although adoption erases the “back” and purports to “naturalize” the adoptee-immigrant, adoption requires a “back.” Roots trips and deportations confirm this “back,” revealing its connection to multiple cutoffs, emigrations, and deportations. In this light, going “back” is less a journey with a clear end point (or a clear point of origin) than a network of referents (Latour 1999:310). Just as one seems to reach the “back,” the “false beginning” is “right there hitting you, slapping you in the face.” As Bruno Latour (1999:76) argues, it is only when a network of transformations ceases to refer (when its expansion is interrupted at either end, when the endpoint of a “back” is reached, when a true “self” is found) that it “begins to lie.”

(Im)materializations

Presumably, papers document the paths that adoptees, émigrés, and deportees have journeyed, making it possible for these individuals to retrace their prior movements and encounter earlier selves. Individuals are deported to El Salvador *as if* they belong in El Salvador (i.e., *as if* they are exclusively Salvadoran). Adoptees return to Ethiopia *as if* they are Ethiopian. Because time assumes planar as well as linear forms, however, paths, selves, origins, and destinations are multiple. As a result, paper trails (records of birth, adoption, citizenship, etc.) do not merely document prior moments and movements but also have the potential to redefine persons, compel movement, alter moments, and make ties ambiguous. Instead of only trailing into the past, papers jut out into the future, requiring the selves who are authenticated by these documents to chart new and sometimes unanticipated courses.

Paper trails, which ought to substantiate truth, sometimes plunge their referents into a reality that is incommensurable with their sense of self. In her 1998 memoir, *Ithaka*, Sarah Saffian describes the moment in which she discovered her birth record in the New York Public Library:

I settled in at one of the long, wooden tables with the record for births reported in 1969, which gave a whiff of dust and chocolate when I opened it, as old books do. I looked up my name in the alphabetical listing, and was shocked to find no entry for “Sarah Saffian.” I felt like a ghost sitting there, as if I didn’t really exist, as if I had

never been born. . . . Then I looked up Susan Morgan, and sure enough, the line read: SUSAN MORGAN . . . 02 23 69 . . . I felt cheated, because there was no record of my name in the Birth Record. The only listing was this name that I had never heard until I was nearly twenty-four years old, this strange name identifying someone I barely knew. But that someone was me. [1998:129–131]¹⁵

In contrast to Saffian’s experience of becoming ghost-like on discovering that the record of Susan Morgan’s birth eclipsed her own origin, some deportees find that, in the moment of deportation, they themselves materialize (potentially permanently) as the physical selves that correspond to the legal selves authenticated by their papers. Prior to being defined as deportable, migrant youth may have experienced a lived reality of being “more from L.A.” (or another part of the United States) than from El Salvador. Despite this sense of belonging, when they are deported, these migrants are reconstituted as illegal aliens. King described his experiences:

So we went to an airport right there in Arizona, waited for a plane, got on the plane with the marshals—a government plane—and the marshals shackled us up, our feet, hands. And from there, we took off to Houston, Texas. And landed in Houston, Texas, waited, they took us through a little INS tank thing they have there. And from there they processed us. And they took us to a county jail, in one of the counties in Houston, far. A messed up jail. We were there, and they wouldn’t let us buy nothing at the store or nothing, so we didn’t have no deodorant, no razor, no toothbrush. And they wouldn’t, uh, give us any, because they were treating us like lower, you know what I mean? Like, “you’re getting deported anyways, you don’t need none of that . . .”

They put us in these holding cells, like these dorms, with no air conditioner. No air at all. And it was like hot, moisture. Like everything starts sweating, you know, with the body heat. And the water was no good. There was no drinking water. Only a shower to shower. The toilets were messed up, there was no pressure. All kinds of messed up things.

And we were there like for like, five, four days, and we were all like *hating* it! . . . They weren’t giving us no deodorant, like I said, nothing. No hygiene . . .

So then FINALLY, a sergeant came, and I go, “Look, sergeant, man, what’s going on? We don’t get rec, yard, nothing. You know? You’re treating us like animals, man!”

In this passage, King—who had previously been incarcerated and who was no stranger to prison conditions—comments on the physical deprivation that he suffered as he was deported. This journey was necessary because, as an alien convicted of crimes, King was deportable. His

legal citizenship in El Salvador was the counterpart of his alienage in the United States, and despite being raised in the United States, this “paper self” owned him, compelling him to embody the alien (dehumanized) being who would be deported.

In some cases, the very legal constructs that pull one “back” may be ephemeral, contributing to the sense that one’s presence is somehow transgressive, in both one’s country of origin and one’s country of residence. For example, migrants who are brought to the United States at a young age may not have birth certificates or passports that “prove” their Salvadoran identity. As a result, when these individuals become deportable, Salvadoran officials must certify that they are Salvadoran and issue provisional passports before individuals can be deported. If they lack travel documents, Salvadoran deportees are issued provisional passports that are taken from them at the airport when they arrive in El Salvador. According to one NGO member in El Salvador, deportees enter El Salvador as “doubly *mojados*,” doubly illegal, because of their lack of documents in both the United States and El Salvador. Their stay in El Salvador, therefore, often begins with frustrating searches for documents—not to uncover the “truth” of their personal histories but, rather, for practical reasons, such as to travel, work, or prove their “identities.”

These examples suggest the potentially powerful role of law and papers in figuring belonging and being. Like Greg, the deportee whose documentless state in his “homeland” meant that “in reality, he has no country,” adoptees who discover papers may find themselves in a country that looks completely different because of that discovery, with a life that has come together in ways that are more divisive than integrating. Papers and the connections they bespeak open up the belonging of adoptees to various reconfigurations, both threatening and desired. Anna, who was adopted by Swedish parents from Ethiopia in 1975, returned to Addis Ababa in 1995 with the Swedish Red Cross, with which she was working at the time. Her mother encouraged her to take the adoption papers containing her original name on the trip. Although by her own account she was reluctant to do so, she quickly discovered that she had living parents and ten siblings in a village outside of Addis Ababa, and a meeting was arranged. In Sweden, she had been given to understand that her adoption was precipitated by the death of her father, but a different story took shape when she spoke with her mother in Ethiopia. As was true for Sara, Anna says that while she was in Ethiopia, she could not allow herself to feel much of anything, “because it was just too much [to be there].” But once she returned to Sweden, “I became really ill. I was physically ill, and I entered the hospital, but I think it was really psychological. It felt wonderful to lie there in the hospital when I came home, in a completely white room, no impressions, nothing and it was completely quiet. Then I could begin to think a little.”

Anna (who now calls herself Chuchu, the name she was given at birth by her Ethiopian parents) has made two additional trips back to Ethiopia, where she has spent time in the village where her mother and several siblings live. She says now that “the actual adoption no longer exists for me. It happened 25 years ago and what is it now? Now it’s a constellation of two mothers [her adoptive father is dead, and her birth father is divorced from her birth mother] and that is what I try to relate to.”¹⁶

The papers (e.g., deportation orders and provisional passports) that legally establish or sever their connections to particular places also redefine (and relocate) the countries where deportees live. One way that this occurs is through reliving memories. Hector, who we quoted above, stated that he wanted to smell the air and see remembered sights. Similarly, in a piece that was aired on the National Public Radio program *This American Life*, a deportee described his experience of eating *pupusas*, a Salvadoran dish, shortly after he was deported: “When I came back here, I remembered a few things. Foods that I hadn’t smelled or tasted like, for years. And I tried it and I go, ‘I know this flavor.’ You know? And then, bam, I remembered this flavor from when I was a kid. I mean, it’s like trying to remember a dream. It’s like fuzzy, you only remember like little pieces” (Richman 1999).

As they relived memories of their prior selves, deportees also sometimes deliberately or defiantly re-created “the United States” around them in El Salvador, thus, refusing to allow their prior lives to be completely extinguished through deportation. Puppet explained in an interview how this was accomplished:

I stayed in the malls here ... because that would like totally remind me of the States. Going from mall to mall. And I still do. And I don’t hang out with nobody like in the street or anything. But all my friends speak English. ... And I speak English at home, and *I haven’t like really like lost what I, you know, learned and what became of me in L.A., you know? I brought L.A. back with me, you know?* [emphasis added]

Adoption, emigration, deportation, and roots trips are not only personal journeys through which individuals “progress” and (like it or not) encounter “truth” but, in addition, these circulations imbue émigrés and adoptees with qualities (such as the ability to bring back L.A.) that can make them valuable, precious, or denigrated.

“Qualified value”

As they are drawn “home” by their prior existences, adoptees and deportees discover that their experiences while away have made them both valuable and threatening, both property-like and priceless.¹⁷ They may become resources for their families and countries of origin, or they may become dreaded objects. Deportations and roots trips, thus,

reconfigure who one is vis-à-vis the people whose claims or rejections materialize in personal encounters.

As King described above, deportees were returned to El Salvador in handcuffs and shackles and were interrogated by Salvadoran police prior to being released. As aliens who had committed crimes in the United States and who were now deemed threats to their country of citizenship, their deportation was perceived as a failed migration.¹⁸ In contrast, adoptees on roots trips (many of which are now organized by adoption agencies with the participation of officials in sending countries) were welcomed by their home countries and sometimes also by their birth families. On a roots trip to Chile in 1998, Swedish adoptees and their families were celebrated in a special ceremony attended by government officials and were told, "This is your country." Foster mothers who had cared for adoptees invited them into their homes, hospital and orphanage staff gave them tours, and adoptees spoke of the confusion, joy, and ambivalence that accompanied these experiences. In 1998, President Kim Dae Jung welcomed an invited group of transnational adoptees to their birth country of Korea and offered them a formal apology in a special ceremony at the Blue House. He spoke of their adoptive countries as their "homes," but referred to Korea as their "homeland" and urged them to "nurture your cultural roots and try to harmonize that with your national identities" (Kim 1999:16).

Such welcomes are described by adoptees as simultaneously confirming and disturbing. Thus, Sara commented on her ambivalence about being welcomed "back" on her various returns to Ethiopia,

They are nationalistic in a way, so that they take one in. If one has some aspect that is Ethiopian then you *are* Ethiopian. "We need you. You should be here. This is your country. You should live here and learn the language." It makes it easier to feel at home. While here [in Sweden] one can be questioned even though one has lived here one's whole life. "How Swedish are you? Blackhead!" [*Svartskalle*]. There is also racism there, but another type of racism. Especially all that business of taking you in even though you don't know the language, don't know the culture. One can feel like an alien, even though they don't regard you that way. . . . They can get upset if you don't want to live there.

Sara and her friend Amanda described related concerns that took shape in the context of implicit or explicit expectations of economic assistance from (officially nonexistent) Ethiopian kin. Some adoptees, Sara related, simply rejected such claims out of hand: "What?! I don't get it. Why should one help them?" But, she explained, "I feel this way—why not? They are terribly poor." Amanda described her (Ethiopian) father's tentative approach to requesting help:

He didn't ask. He has never asked himself, but through the interpreter. He hasn't asked me. And first I thought:

"Jaha, why doesn't he ask me? Doesn't he want to?" Perhaps it isn't so easy to ask your child for money. And I think he didn't want to appear to be begging. So I just indicated through the interpreter that it was ok.¹⁹

Unlike these adoptees, whose birth relatives request or expect financial assistance, deportees are often in need of aid from their relatives in the United States. In El Salvador, emigration is often motivated by the need to provide financial assistance to relatives. Families sell belongings to raise the \$5,000 to \$6,000 that, in 2004, was needed to hire a coyote (alien smuggler). Migrants enter the U.S. labor market, in which employers in the agricultural and service sectors are eager to take advantage of this cheap source of labor. From their scant earnings, migrants then send money to family members. Deportees, in contrast, can become the ones who make claims on their "more fortunate" relatives in the United States. Such financial need can be seen as adding to the sense that deportees are "failed" immigrants, given that El Salvador has come to rely on the remittances that migrants send to relatives in their countries of birth (García 1994; Montes 1990; Orellana Merlos 1994; Pederson 2002).

At the same time, some argue that deportees return to El Salvador with "value added." Angel, a member of a Salvadoran NGO that assists deportees, pointed out that although they are stigmatized by Salvadoran society at large, many deportees have skills—a high-school education, computer knowledge, and English-language fluency—that could be put to good use in El Salvador. A deportee who directed an NGO that worked with deported gang members stressed that members of his organization had been trained in such skills as composting. "What is missing," he commented, "is the opportunity to put this training to use." Veronica, another NGO member, also stressed that deportees had abilities from which El Salvador could benefit: "They're [El Salvador is] missing out on a great opportunity, for example, in the airline business. They're [deportees are] fluent in English. And tourism—there are just so many things that they can [do.]"

In part, drawing attention to the skills and knowledge that deportees acquired while away is an effort to counter their vilification as dangerous criminals. Hector encountered such stigmatization when he was deported to El Salvador:

There had been this article written in this magazine called *La Gente*. . . . [Authorities] said that they were going to be deporting 600 people a month. And, you know, that most of them were from prison. So, this magazine had said that "the 600 are coming. *Allí vienen los seis cientos*. The worst of the worst. Assassins, murderers, rapists, thieves, gang members."

In contrast to such vilifying imagery, some Salvadoran youth admired deportees for their experiences in the United States. Puppet related:

There's a lot of people that like kind of look up to us, or me, you know, because I have this knowledge of another country that they've never been to, and that they only see on TV, MTV, you know, for example. And I've LIVED it, you know? . . . And I'm kind of like looked upon as, you know, I wouldn't say a celebrity, but you know, you have like a little status of a, a cool guy, you could say.

The value of an "export" such as migrants or children takes material form as payment for services to orphanage or agency, as payment for smuggling to a coyote, as marketable skills, or as remittances by immigrants, adoptive parents, or adoptees to the families or orphanages in their country of birth. Value is not always visible: It is "partly visible, partly invisible" (Hochschild 2000:134). Value may only be made visible in a return of some sort, which, in turn, establishes the meaning of the original product. As Michael Callon and colleagues note, qualities that are attributed to a circulating good are both intrinsic and extrinsic. They are thought to reside in the good in question; but the qualities are also generated in qualification trials and are formulated through "evaluations and judgements which vary from one agent to the next" (Callon et al. 2002:199).

The value that adoptees and migrants acquire as circulating "goods" is contingent, paradoxically, on the very characteristics that marginalize them in their adoptive nations. For adoptees, their pricelessness (Zelizer 1985) as resources for completing Swedish families (and their entrée to Sweden's middle class) is related to the same "irritating" racial "presence" that sets them apart in Sweden (Wallenstein 2000; Yngvesson 2002; Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000). Migrants' exploitability as low-priced labor gives them (and their children) access to symbolic and material resources, such that even when they are deported as "dangerous criminals" they may "have the status of a cool guy" because they are "from L.A."

The place of returns in this process of evaluation and qualification is complex, disturbing any sense that value consists only in origins or roots that pull adoptees or other migrants "back" to a ground of belonging that is intrinsically theirs, or that naturally grounds those who have not emigrated. Adoption law both erases a back and requires it, provoking returns in "both directions" for adoptees (Samarco 2002:5). The situation of the deported also creates complex relationships to "roots" and constitutes multiple countries as a "back." Together, adoption, deportation, and associated returns reveal the import of having or lacking particular kinds of papers, the power of legal constructs to "own" persons, and the differential mobilities of bodies in transnational circuits of exchange.

Juxtaposing roots trips and deportations reveals the "as-if-ness" of national memberships and of birth families not only in these particular cases but also more generally. For, legal, natural, and national selves, along with the kin relations

within which they are embedded, are always already both cut off and inalienable in that they define necessary preconditions of personhood and constitute people as property of a state. Thus, roots trips and deportations not only affirm the borders of identity and nationality but also unsettle the postulates, the crucial "as ifs," that keep these borders and the racialized or nationalized belongings they secure in place.

On the third day of the American Anthropological Association meeting in New Orleans, we took a walk down to the river. Our conversation turned to a talk given by Marilyn Strathern [2006] at UC Irvine. She argued that among the Murik people of highlands New Guinea, images can be said to "own" the children whose ties to particular groups are made visible through the ornaments inscribed on their bodies. In this sense, people "belong to" the ornaments rather than ornaments belonging to the people who "have" them. Intrigued by the implications this might have for adoptees and deportees in search of papers that authorize their belonging, we couldn't quite see a way of working this reversal of conventional ideas into our analysis. We felt that if we could just figure out this one last piece, the paper we were writing would fall into place. We then realized that this might be the same issue the deportees and adoptees we were writing about were struggling with. Like them, we're in the middle, too, and the form (the image of "the paper" that will make everything fall into place) is calling to us. It's the form of the paper (the ethnographic product) that calls us into being as ethnographers, just as the documents that certify belonging in a particular nation or family authorize adoptees and deportees. [Barbara Yngvesson and Susan Coutin, November 22, 2002]

Notes

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1. We use vignettes to suggest possible analogies between the forms that move us as academics and the forms that move adoptees and deportees. At the same time, we in no way wish to equate our experiences with theirs.

2. A vivid example of this was provided by the adoptive mother of a daughter born in India, who returned to Delhi with her 12-year-old daughter to search for "papers" that would provide details about the daughter's origins. On being directed to the town hall where records were kept, the mother and daughter were presented with a file that

contained, in the mother's words, "copies of *my letters* before and after the adoption, *but no papers*." She added, "That was so terrible. . . . It was painful. It was terribly painful" (emphasis added). In this example, the letters provided by the adoptive parents "backed up" the acknowledgment of the orphanage baby (Renu) who became their daughter as the legally cognizable Swedish child (Maria). The disposable child, Renu, was made "worthy of life" (i.e., made into *homo sacer*; Agamben 1998:81–85) in the moment in 1964 that her adoptive mother claimed her as "my child" (Gunilla Andersson, interview, August 21, 1999). Giorgio Agamben describes *homo sacer* as

the originary figure of life taken into the sovereign ban and preserv[ing] the memory of the originary exclusion through which the political dimension was first constituted. . . . *The sovereign sphere is the sphere in which it is permitted to kill without committing homicide and without celebrating a sacrifice, and sacred life—that is, life that may be killed but not sacrificed—is the life that has been captured in this sphere.* [1998:83]

See also Jean-Luc Nancy's discussion of "Abandoned Being" as "turned over to the absolute of the law" (1993:44).

3. Here we point to the continuities between the deployment of the concept of "return" in the production of ethnographic and other forms of knowledge, on the one hand, and its relevance, on the other hand, to an understanding of desire and the motivation to return, which are necessarily located both inside and outside the meaning-making subject. Our understanding of desire draws on the work of Jessica Benjamin (1988, 1998), Judith Butler (1997), and Slavoj Žižek (1989). For all of these theorists, slightly differing understandings of "recurrence," "return," and the retroactivity of meaning are important. For all, the concept of an "excluded Other" and its (intrapyschic) return is the central problem for a self that (in Benjamin's terms), "is constantly, dynamically engaged in acts of incorporation and projection in which parts of self and other are split off" (1998:88). Unlike Butler (1997:132–150) and Žižek (1989:100–105), however, for whom "return" is only understood intrapsychically, as a melancholic condition in which the subject repeatedly returns (in fantasy) to the repudiated, longed for, foreclosed object, for Benjamin, "return" involves the "reappearance" of threatening (potentially annihilating) experiences (experiences, that is, in which annihilation may or may not have occurred) and the capacity of the subject for survival. Survival is understood as the "incremental transposition of the experience of abandonment and retaliation (often felt as literal repetition, for long stretches, by both participants) into metaphor. This metaphorical capacity allows us to hold onto the reality of thoughts and feelings [of annihilation] . . . without insisting that they be the whole story" (Benjamin 1998:107).

4. Barbara Yngvesson carried out fieldwork on transnational adoption in Sweden, India, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Chile between 1995 and 2002. Her research focused on the practices surrounding child adoption involving the Stockholm-based agency Adoption Centre, and orphanages, child-welfare organizations, and government officials in countries in Asia and Latin America from which children adopted to Sweden are obtained. She interviewed Adoption Centre staff, staff of children's homes, and government officials in Sweden and in sending countries, accompanied representatives of Adoption Centre on visits to the orphanages from which they obtained children, and was a participant-observer on a roots trip to Chile in 1998 involving Swedish adoptive parents and their children (Yngvesson 2003). She has also interviewed adoptive parents and adult adoptees about the experiences of transracial adoptees who are raised in Sweden.

Susan Coutin did research between 2000 and 2002 in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and San Salvador regarding the formu-

lation, contestation, and impact of U.S. and Salvadoran policies regarding Salvadorans who immigrated to the United States. As part of this project, she interviewed members of Homies Unidos, a transnational gang violence prevention project with offices in Los Angeles and San Salvador. Some Homies Unidos members in El Salvador have been deported from the United States because of criminal convictions, and deportation is an ever-present threat for Los Angeles-based Homies members who are not U.S. citizens. Coutin also interviewed U.S. and Salvadoran officials and members of U.S. and Salvadoran migrants'-rights groups regarding deportation and deportees. This 2000–02 research built on prior fieldwork among community groups that assisted Central Americans in their efforts to avoid deportation (see Coutin 2000).

5. Regarding ways that race is implicit within citizenship and immigration categories, see Calavita 2000, Collier et al. 1995, Coutin 2003b, Goldberg 1997, Haney-López 1996, Pred 2000, and Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000.

6. Although adoption may appear to be about kinship and immigration to be about citizenship, in fact, family relations are key to—and disrupted by—both of these processes. Deportation disrupts family relations as much as cultural, social, and economic ones, and many deportees described relationships with spouses, partners, or children that were seemingly cut off by their deportation. Similarly, roots trips problematize or reconfigure a variety of relationships, as we demonstrate in our subsequent discussion of Anna, who found herself with a "constellation" of mothers.

7. Some deported gang members use nicknames. "Puppet" is a pseudonym for the nickname used by this interviewee. We use pseudonyms for all deportees and migrants quoted in this article. Adoptees preferred to use their real names.

8. Accounts of the likelihood of dying on return are, not coincidentally, the bases of pending asylum applications through which many Salvadorans have been able to secure at least temporary status in the United States.

9. The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993), the key legal document regulating transnational adoption, provides an example of the developmental narrative in its opening words: "Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding. . . ."

Similarly, during a naturalization ceremony held at the Los Angeles Convention Center on May 31, 1996, the presiding judge stated, "What we came here, I believe, all of us, for, is for freedom to do what we can and want to for ourselves and our families to make a better life" (Coutin 2003a).

10. Some transnational adoptees report having nightmares of being pulled back to their birth country by an abusive parent, in accounts that evoke King's sense of deportation as abduction.

11. In Sweden, naturalization became concurrent with the issuance of an adoption decree as of July 1, 1992. In the United States, the Child Citizenship Act, a similar law, was passed in 2000 as a result of occasional, widely publicized, deportations of adopted adults whose parents failed to naturalize them. Such occasional "failures" to naturalize adoptees in the United States are illuminating because of the public outcry deportations produce in such cases, in contrast to the relative absence of protest when other immigrants are deported.

12. Katarina's fear of returning to El Salvador is not surprising, given that her family emigrated because of political violence.

13. Žižek describes the "basic paradox" of time:

The subject is confronted with a scene from the past that he wants to change, to meddle with, to intervene in; he takes a journey into the past, intervenes in the scene, and

it is not that he “cannot change anything”—quite the contrary, only through his intervention does the scene from the past *become what it always was*: his intervention was from the beginning comprised, included. [1989:57–58]

14. This word seems like an understatement, but its very inadequacy suggests the difficulty of capturing the experience of going “back.” It recalls Julia Kristeva’s discussion of Freud’s “unheimlich,” in which “the familiar and intimate are reversed into their opposites, brought together with the contrary meaning of ‘uncanny strangeness’ harbored in *unheimlich*” (1991:182).

15. See also Betty Jean Lifton’s (1994) discussion of adoptees inhabiting a “ghost kingdom.”

16. For a discussion of split subjectivity and its relation to narratives of adoption, see Yngvesson and Mahoney 2000. For a more general discussion of splitting as a condition of subjectivity, see Benjamin 1998 and Mahoney and Yngvesson 1992.

17. Our section title follows Marilyn Strathern’s 1992 piece, “Qualified Value.”

Adoptees and deportees are property-like in that adoptees may be “marketed” through adoption websites and they are exchanged for “fees,” but they are “priceless” in that they are culturally imagined as “beyond price” (Kopytoff 1986; Zelizer 1985) and because international conventions prohibit the commodification of children. Similarly, when they migrate clandestinely, emigrants are both potential workers who are being “exported” as cheap labor and unauthorized beings who travel in miserable conditions and who could be buried in unmarked graves.

18. To counter the negative implications of deportation and to aid deportees in becoming reinserted in Salvadoran society, a program called “Bienvenidos a Casa” (Welcome Home) has been instituted by the Salvadoran and U.S. governments. The program is administered by Catholic Relief Services, an NGO.

19. Similar issues are raised in the film *Daughter from Danang* (Dolgin and Franco 2002) in which a woman adopted as a child from Vietnam by a family in Texas returns as an adult to visit her birth mother and siblings. The film depicts in stark terms the different social worlds of the adoptee and her birth family and the painfully different expectations as to what her role in their lives should be.

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