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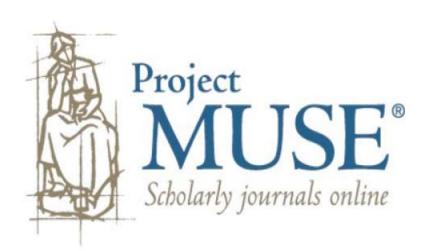
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Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness and Family in South Korea

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Abstract

*Since the late 1990s, adult adopted Koreans have been officially welcomed back to their country of birth as "overseas Koreans," a legal designation instituted by Korea's state-sponsored "globalization" (*segyehwa*) project. Designed to build economic and social networks between Korea and its seven million compatriots abroad, this policy projects an ethnonationalist and deterritorialized vision of Korea that depends upon a conflation of "blood" with "kinship" and "nation." Adoptees present a particularly problematic subset of overseas Koreans: they have biological links to Korea, but their adoptions have complicated the sentimental and symbolic ties of "blood" upon which this familialist and nationalist state policy depend. Because international adoption replaces biological with social parenthood and involves the transfer of citizenship, to incorporate adoptees as "overseas Koreans," the state must honor the authority and role of adoptive parents who raised them, even as they invite adoptees to (re)claim their Koreanness. Government representations optimistically construe adoptees as cultural "ambassadors" and economic "bridges," yet for adoptees themselves—whose lives have been split across two nations, two families and two histories—the cultural capital necessary to realize their transnational potential seems to have already been forfeited. Based on*

fieldwork with an expatriate community of adoptees living and working in Seoul, this article examines how adoptees are specters of both family and foreignness in Korea. I argue that, rather than demonstrating the possibilities of a borderless world, Korean adoptees illuminate how state practices and political economy structure "kinship" and "nation" for transnational subjects caught up in contemporary dialectics of nationalism and globalization [Keywords: Korea, transnational adoption, adoptees, kinship, family, globalization].

Introduction

In the conclusion to her recent monograph on Filipina and Chinese "mail-order brides" and their online suitors, Nicole Constable (2003) draws a comparison between the immigrations of Chinese adoptees and those of Asian brides to ask why "the white middle-class rights to have a 'complete' family," in these two cases, are not treated equally under U.S. immigration policy (211). Constable's work is a significant contribution to a growing literature on transnational families and gendered forms of migration. She importantly notes how "patterns of transnationalism are…influenced by state regulations and policies" (2003:217) against overly-anticipatory theories of globalization and transnationalism that predicted the nation-state's decline in light of border-defying "global flows" (cf. Appadurai 1999). Constable makes the point that, although the parents and the husbands who apply on behalf of their children or spouses for immigration visas share class and citizenship privileges as white, middle-class professionals, it is decidedly more difficult for desiring men to obtain state sanction for their wives than it is for desiring parents—whose children's streamlined entry now includes automatic naturalization. Both kinds of migration share similarities in being highly gendered and shaped by desires and ideologies of normative heterosexual kinship and family relations, yet, as children, adoptees are constructed as innocent and in need of rescue, whereas "mail-order brides" are, as adults, often construed as having dubious, if not cunning, intentions.

I am in agreement with many of Constable's insights, especially her observation that, because children are adopted "blind," without knowledge of biological kin, unlike the foreign spouses, they do not threaten to become an initiating link in a "chain of immigrants" sponsored under the provision of family unification (Constable 2003:213). A piece missing from her comparison, and which is hinted at in this example, however, is what seems to be a neglected aspect in the literature on transnational families in general—namely, closer

analytic attention to how "kinship" itself is configured, reckoned, and constructed in a transnational context. In transnational adoption, children are not only adopted "blind," as Constable says, but are legally designated as "orphans" and thus made "free" for adoption. They are then permitted entry into the U.S. as "immediate relatives" of the adopting parents under the very clause of family unification that correspondence brides might use to sponsor their biological kin. Thus, immigration law for adoptees mirrors adoption law, which also effectively negates the existence of natal parents by creating new birth certificates and instantiating new beginnings (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006). Adoptive parents are thus the only legally recognized genitors of the child. In fact, Korean American adoptees who have been reunited with their birth families as adults have been recently discovering that their rights to sponsor their Korean relatives' entry into the U.S. have already been forfeited.

In this way, legal conventions support normative Euro-American cultural scripts that treat the adopted child as being "as-if" genealogically related to their adoptive parents (Modell 1994). Narratives of domestic adoptees as well as of the first generation of transnational adoptees from Korea suggest how this biogenetic model of relatedness was reproduced in the intimate realm of family (Modell 1994, Kim 2001). Hence, despite the fact that adoptions are achieved through contract rather than "blood," the hegemonic ideal of biological relatedness has long served as the basis for these "made," rather than "natural," ties. Correspondence wives, in contrast, are related to their spouses by a conjugal bond, which is contractual rather than "biological," and not embedded in notions of permanence and the "diffuse, enduring solidarity" associated with "blood" in American kinship ideologies (Schneider 1968).

It thus becomes clear that "kinship," which might serve as the means by which persons are able to "transcend" the bounded nation-state and produce "deterritorialized" nation-states and long-distance nationalisms (Basch et al.1994, Schiller and Fouron 1998), is also regulated, managed and legislated by state power. In this essay, I bring together concerns with transnational social processes and insights from the "new kinship studies" (Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Carsten 2000, 2004), which have extended David Schneider's anti-foundational critique of kinship to consider how "kinship" as a set of discourses, practices and imaginaries, rather than as a reified category, continues to signify powerfully in social life. Because transnational adoption cuts across the boundaries of "blood," "kinship," and "nation," it offers a compelling lens through which to see how familial intimacy and social belonging exist in tension with state power and governmentality.

New Connections and Conjunctures of Transnational Adoption

"Transnational adoption" references the ways in which these adoptions are not simply one-way journeys but unfolding processes that "entail ongoing, criss-crossing flows in multiple directions, in space that is both real and virtual" (Volkman 2005:2).[1] Thus, although children are adopted overwhelmingly from poorer countries to wealthier ones, suggesting a unilinear movement and assimilation process not unlike those associated with earlier theories of migration (see Basch et al. 1994), these adoptions have instigated a range of subsequent mobilities—of information, people, goods and services—to and from the so-called sending and receiving countries that are shaped by (and, in turn, shape) new globalizing trends and transnational processes. One emergent phenomenon that is becoming an increasingly expected part of the process of transnational adoption is the return of adoptees to their "birth country." Korean adoptees are at the forefront of these processes, as they comprise the largest, oldest and most well-organized cohort of transnationally adopted individuals.

In this article I draw upon a larger project that examines transnational adoption from the perspective of adult Korean adoptees. Since 1999 I have been tracking the emergence of a vibrant and active transnational social movement of adult adopted Koreans in a range of sites, from online chat rooms to international conferences. Between 1999 and 2005 I interviewed adult adoptee activists and organizers, attended adoptee association meetings, national and international conferences, and volunteered for three years as a counselor on an annual summer "motherland" tour, hosted by the South Korean government. In Seoul, I conducted research in a more spatially coherent field, composed of expatriate adoptee social networks and adoptee advocacy NGOs, and I interviewed adoption agency social workers, adoptee advocates, adoptee activists, and Korean NGO volunteers. The majority of adoptees who participated in these community-building activities reflected some of the broader demographic patterns of the roughly 100,000 adult-aged adoptees around the world. They were primarily in their early 20s to late 30s and were adopted between the late 1960s and the early 1980s to 15 different countries in North America, Western Europe and Australia. The most active participants were from the U.S. and Scandinavia, the regions where the largest numbers of adoptees have been sent, and in most activities, women tended to outnumber men, by around 2 to 1, which reflects the greater numbers of girls adopted during those decades.[2]

In what follows, I explore the dynamics of "kinship" and "globalization" for expatriate adult adoptees in South Korea (hereafter "Korea"),[3] and situate

their experiences of belonging in the context of South Korea's state-sponsored globalization project (*segyehwa*) and the turn-of-the-millennium expansion of the English language education market in Korea (see Park and Abelmann 2004). Intensified global flows have created the conditions for new transnational connections between adoptees and their "birth country" and have animated diasporic longings that are both increasingly expected and profoundly problematic for transnationally adopted Koreans. Following a brief historical overview of transnational adoption from South Korea and a discussion of the emergence of a transnational adoptee social movement, I show how the hybridity of transnational Korean adoptees, which crisscrosses boundaries of received categories such as culture, nation, race and kinship, renders them as ambivalent figures, being both "family" (*uri minjok*) and "foreigners" (*oegukin*). For the past two decades, adoptees have been represented in the Korean media as pitiable orphans who were abandoned by natal family and nation and as repressed remainders of Korea's third world past (Hübinette 2005). Yet the power geometries (Massey 1993) that directed their migrations westward as non-agentive children now position them as relatively privileged and mobile participants in the global political economy. This class mobility is not what makes their migration experiences unique, but, rather, the fact that they were sent as children to become members of white Western families, thereby complicating the sentimental and symbolic ties of "blood" upon which familialist and nationalist state policy depend.

My previous research with Korean adoptees who return to Korea suggests how attempts to imbue adoptees with folklorized versions of Korean "culture" fail to grasp the other kinds of connections to place, biography and natal family that, in their fragmentation and incompletion, haunt adoptee subjectivities, and often constitute the powerful pull that motivates adoptees' returns (Kim 2005). This contradiction between a generic "culture" and particular historical connections exists in the midst of other tensions in which adoptees become entangled when they return to Korea. Neoliberal values constitute part of the contemporary backdrop to adoptees' resignifications in the Korean national imaginary, in which adoptees are viewed ambivalently as victims of Korean modernity and also, increasingly, as lucky "flexible citizens" (Ong 1999) who symbolize the cosmopolitan strivings of modern Koreans. Here, I show how adoptee social spaces in Seoul provide locations for the production of alternative forms of belonging, in which intimate relations based on mutual care and shared interests are in formation, superseding the more problematic kinship tropes proffered by the state or represented in popular nationalist ideologies.

Hence, belonging in Korea for adoptees increasingly signifies membership in an adoptee subculture such that adoptees who may have returned to Korea with fantasies of national or familial reintegration discover an adoptee expatriate community that supplements or even replaces other, essentialized or biologically-defined forms of relatedness.

Fifty Years of Korean Adoption

Since the end of the Korean War (1950-1953), an estimated 200,000 South Korean children have been adopted to countries in the West, with seventy-five percent of the total adopted to the United States, and the remainder to Western Europe, with a smaller number to Australia. The first adoptions were encouraged by the American and South Korean governments as a solution to what was perceived as a public relations and humanitarian "crisis"—an estimated one thousand "mixed-blood orphans" (*honhyŏl koa*), born to Korean women and fathered by members of the American or United Nations forces. These children were stigmatized as symbols of racial pollution and illegitimacy, and served as visible evidence of the nation's dependency on and subordination to postwar American occupying forces during the height of Cold War tensions with North Korea. Fueled by Christian humanitarianism and pronatalism in the U.S., and postwar social and economic instability in Korea, overseas adoptions continued to increase in volume even after the "crisis" of racially stigmatized orphans had abated by the end of the 1960s. The Korean adoption program quickly transformed into a surrogate welfare system for full-Korean children, suggesting to observers that the "presence of efficient foreign adoption facilities encouraged the abandonment of children" (Weil 1984:282; Chakerian 1968).

Korea's adoption program has demonstrated an exquisite sensitivity to international opinion and geopolitics during the past 50 years. In part because of the discomforting propinquity of money and child welfare that characterizes transnational adoption, accusations of human trafficking easily played into Cold War antagonisms between North and South Korea in the late 1950s. Pyongyang's criticisms reached a peak in the 1970s, and largely in response, South Korea took steps to reduce the numbers of foreign adoptions and to encourage domestic adoption (Sarri et al. 1998). These measures were abandoned, however, in the 1980s when overseas adoption was radically expanded as part of an emigration and civil diplomacy (*min'gan oegyo*) project "to improve relations between South Korea and the receiving countries"

(S.H. Park 1995). This unchecked expansion resulted in negative reviews from South Korea's capitalist friends and neighbors during the media coverage leading up to the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul. Hosting the games was a historic "coming out" for the newly industrialized nation whose "economic miracle" was held up as a model for other developing nations. Yet the Olympics also came to mark another historic moment, drawing attention away from Korea's remarkable developmental achievements to its less praise-worthy practice of "exporting" babies, its "greatest national resource."

Since the late 1990s, as more stories of birth parents surface in the Korean media and from adoptees who are reuniting with their biological families and learning the circumstances of their relinquishments, a picture of how agencies functioned as powerful agents of biopower has emerged, in which hegemonic familist ideologies joined up with Eurocentric and classed notions of the child's "best interests" to encourage adoption as a "quick-fix solution" (Sarri et al. 1998) that de-privileged the preservation of existing familial ties. Despite the orphan label, which is underwritten by legal terminology and was reinforced in cultur-al representations throughout the 1980s, adult adoptees are now discovering that they were primarily victims of poverty, family dissolution, or the stigma of illegitimacy. A grossly under-funded social welfare system, patriarchal family ideologies and misogynistic legal codes in Korea coincided with high demand for adoptable children in the West, especially in the U.S., where the legalization of abortion, the normalization of single motherhood, the empowerment of birth mothers, and the political sensitivity of black-white transracial placements factored into the dramatic expansion of international adoption programs in the 1970s. Today, even as the international community seems to have forgotten about South Korea's former reputation as the "orphan-exporting nation" (*koa such'ul guk*), South Korean journalists, in their regular coverage of returning adoptees and the "adoption issue" (*ibyang munje*), continually refuel the popu-lar imagination with reminders of the nation's inability to live down this shame-ful label and its failure to take care of its own children. Over the past few years, the paradoxes of Korea's modernization have reached an apex, as demograph-ic panic over below-replacement fertility levels and attempts to rectify its pre-cipitously low birthrate (at 1.08 in 2006, among the lowest among developed nations), now coexist awkwardly with the continued practice of overseas adop-tion, which sends 2,000 children to distant countries every year.

More than half of the South Korean children who have been adopted into American and Western European families since 1953 are now adults. The majority was raised in white families and communities that represent a wide

social swath, from working class to upper class, rural to urban environments, Christian to Jewish families. Yet despite these differences in demographics, adoptees have articulated similar experiences of growing up in homogenously white environments and aspiring to "fit in," which usually meant a suppression of their racial difference within the home and among their peers. The lack of exposure to Koreans or other Korean adoptees shifted for many adoptees in the 1990s as global flows of communication, media and travel, permitted them, as adults, to make contact with each other as well as with "Korea," which now bears considerable importance for individual and collective adoptee identity formation. Adoptees' relationship to Korea is also shaped by a growing subculture of adoptee associations, which began forming in the late 1980s in Europe and in the early to mid-1990s in the U.S. Creating communities of affiliation that were based on powerful bonds of emotional sympathy and shared generational consciousness, adoptees shared narratives that revealed how their lives straddled two different eras, one characterized by assimilationist models of immigrant incorporation, and the other by pluralist paradigms. Many found themselves lacking *multicultural* capital in a changed social context in which "race" and "ethnicity" are actively foregrounded aspects of social and political identity, and knowledge of one's "roots" and "heritage" grants social value, political recognition and personhood to immigrants and people of color. In this context, the production of Korean adoptee "kinship" and "culture" becomes necessary and relevant.

Ibyangin, Ibangin/Our Adoptee, Our Alien

The title of this paper is taken from an art exhibition which opened concurrently at two galleries in downtown Seoul in early August 2004. Co-organized and co-curated by adoptee artist and activist Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, "Ibyangin, Ibangin/Our Adoptee, Our Alien," featured the artistic work of 11 female artists who had been adopted as children to Europe and the United States. Playing on the resemblance between the Korean words for "stranger" (*ibangin*) and "adoptee" (*ibyangin*), "Our Adoptee, Our Alien" also ironically appropriates the pattern of ethnonationalist expressions ubiquitously employed by Koreans: our nation (*uri nara*), our race (*uri minjok*), our language (*uri mal*). The show's title is thus suggestive of the ambivalent relationship overseas adoptees (*haeoe ibyangin*) have to the Korean nation and the myth of ethnic homogeneity that characterizes state discourses and other dominant representations (see Grinker 1998).

504

Lemoine and other adult adoptees were among the initial pioneers of what is now a kind of mass pilgrimage of adoptees to their country of birth. Mostly arriving with few, if any, personal contacts and less than rudimentary cultural knowledge or language ability, they faced discrimination or rejection by Koreans who were confounded by the Korean appearance of these co-ethnic foreigners. Defying expected isomorphisms between race, culture, family and nation, adoptees were thereby as much border denizens, "beyond culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1991), in Korea as they had been in their adoptive countries. To address the specific issues that adoptees face in Korea, Lemoine and 11 other adoptees founded Global Overseas Adoptees' Link, or GOA'L, in 1998, which they envisioned as a "home base" for adoptees. GOA'L's mission was to provide a "home away from home," in order to "provide a connection for adoptees who have nothing, no family" in Korea, as co-founder Ami Nafzger told me. After GOA'L's founding in 1998, Nafzger was contacted by over 200 adoptees in the first couple of years, and many of them stayed with her in her tiny, one-room apartment in Seoul. Today, one of GOA'L's most important functions is to provide an instant community for adoptees who arrive in Korea, with weekly weekend get-togethers, monthly meetings, seasonal retreats and holiday parties. Nafzger explained to me after her return to the Twin Cities in 2004, "It's like another family…you don't really have a place in Korea, you don't really have a place here, but you have a place with each other, when you meet each other—your own community, your own unique society."

The mid-1990s revolution in home computing and the Internet transformed what was once a dispersed and scattered population into a highly networked and self-consciously global community, of which the adoptee subculture in Seoul comprises one important subset. Among the adoptees I met, most had been living in Korea for 1 to 3 years, but a significant core group had been there for upwards of 5 years. Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, or Cho Mihee, has been a central node in the adoptee network in Seoul, having lived there since 1991 and having helped more than 500 adoptees search for their Korean birth families. Although there are no reliable statistics on adoptee returns, rough estimates put their numbers at around 3,000 to 5,000 per year, with the majority coming for short visits, and an estimated 200 living in Korea for extended periods of one year or longer.[4] With the circulation of narratives and information among adoptees around the world about the possibilities for finding birth family and the feasibility of returns to Korea, it is undeniable that adoptees are returning in larger numbers and staying for longer periods of time. This estimation was verified by Swiss adopted Korean Kim Dae-won

(Jan Wenger), GOA'L's current Secretary General, who keeps an up-to-date list of adoptees in Korea stored in his mobile phone. In the spring of 2004 he had 40 active names in his group list, and by January 2005 there were nearly 100. And at GOA'L's holiday party in December 2005, it was reported that more than 150 adoptees attended (S.J. Kim 2005).

The significance of returning to Korea for some adoptees was made evident to me when I witnessed their sometimes surprisingly impetuous decisions to suspend their university or postgraduate schooling, to quit their jobs or career paths, or to take an extended leave from work in order to experience life in Korea or to initiate a search for their Korean family. What has made these choices imaginable is the existence of a close-knit community of adoptees in Seoul, the ease of finding work, especially for English-speaking adoptees, and legal recognition and resignification of adoptees as valuable members of the (South) Korean diaspora.[5]

From Abandoned Children to Valuable Assets

The South Korean government took proactive measures to resignify adult adoptees by incorporating them into the state-sponsored, Korean-style globalization drive known as *segyehwa*. Adoptees, rather than abandoned children (*pŏryŏjin ai*), became "valuable assets" in the context of the segyehwa project, which opened up new legal provisions for adoptees to travel to Korea and stay for extended periods of time. Announced during the 1994 APEC summit in anticipation of Korea's matriculation into OECD and its achievement of $10,000 per capita income, segyehwa policy proactively appropriated globalization discourse to boost the nation's competitiveness in light of new global economic pressures (see S. S. Kim 2000). As a form of diaspora politics, segyehwa involved a reaching out to the then 5.3 million Korean "co-ethnics" (*tongp'o*),[6] who are constructed as sharing a common substance and conceived of as members of "*hanminjok*," or the [one] Korean people.[7] Coming on the heels of the devastating economic crisis of 1997-98 (IMF crisis), this legislation was broadly considered to be a government attempt to attract foreign investments from affluent Korean Americans. The controversial Overseas Koreans Act (OKA) now grants eligible Koreans a privileged visa designation that allows them to stay in Korea for up to two years and includes rights to work, make financial investments, buy real estate, and to obtain medical insurance and pensions. It replaced the term *kyop'o*, which always connoted a sense of distance in referring to overseas Koreans who had left Korea, with *tongp'o*, which has become the more modern

and politically-correct term to refer to overseas Koreans, as compatriots with the same ethnic origins and blood (*hyŏlt'ong*). The law, as Park and Chang (2005) argue, "utilizes legal categories to define 'Korean identity,' [but] it also entails the construction of a Korean identity based on 'primordial' ethnic ties and the belief in shared blood and heritage (*hyŏlt'ongjuŭi*). Thus, legal national identity is confounded with ethnic identity".[8]

As the law was being deliberated in the National Assembly, GOA'L and other adoptees were active in making sure that adoptees would be included in the new legislation. Their efforts paid off, and they were able to secure recognition as long as they were able to prove Korean birth by obtaining their records from their Korean adoption agencies. In fact, Korean American adoptees were addressed explicitly in an official press release announcing the Overseas Koreans Act, which mentioned the "increasingly important role" adopted Koreans will play in "bridging Korea with the global community." The press release stated, "Such individuals are unique and valuable assets to Korea. While they are Korean in a biological sense, their American culture and lifestyles serve as a precious resource for the international development of Korea." Of course, the subjectivities, motivations, and sentiments of ethnic Koreans around the world often exceed and defy state designs. For adoptees, in particular, who may have little to no knowledge or memory of Korea or of "Korean culture," official inclusion as overseas Koreans has entailed their cultural normalization and incorporation into this globalized vision of the Korean nation through the trope of the "motherland."[9] The "motherland," in the case of adoptees, is a distinctly modern, transnational projection of the nation that naturalizes and sentimentalizes the presumed biological and emotional ties that adopted Koreans must feel for the nation.

Government representatives invariably project maternalistic or paternalistic desires to embrace adoptees as "family," but these expressions are shot through with ambivalence about who adoptees are (Korean/Western, children/adults, tragic/lucky), and if they will be able to forgive and forget enough to accept their role as ambassadors and bridges connecting Korea to the West. An American adoptee who'd been living in Seoul for four years asserted, regarding Koreans' reactions to adoptees in Korea, "They don't know what to *do* with us."

Becoming Family

In August 2004, in the main ballroom of a hotel near downtown Seoul, the South Korean Minister of Health and Welfare, Kim Geun Tae, addressed a

group of 430 Korean-born adoptees with words uncommonly heard coming from a government official. He said, in Korean, "*Saranghamnida*," or, "I love you." The occasion for this unusual melding of bureaucratic formalism with intimate sentiment was the opening ceremony for the 3rd International Gathering of Korean Adoptees, an adoptee-organized conference that has, since its inception in 1999, become the major meeting ground for adult adopted Koreans around the world.[10] The adoptees, ranging in age from their early twenties to late fifties, had converged on Seoul to participate in this four-day event. The rich symbolic potential of this homecoming was mined by organizers, journalists and government officials, including Minister Kim, whose presidential ambitions were as much on display as was his concern for impressing the adoptees in the audience.

Prefacing his declaration of love with expressions of ambivalence and trepidation at the thought of delivering a speech to the adoptees, the Minister stumbled and halted as he spoke these words:

> I was afraid about what kind of reception I would receive. I wanted to say I love you, but I hesitated. I had to consider whether I had a right to say that or not…. I would like to tell you on behalf of the Korean people that we have tried hard to make a respectful country. However, as I stand in front of you I feel uncomfortable. I will tell you with all my courage that I love you all here. I can say to you with confidence that you will have a place in our hearts. I will try my very best to make you proud to be our daughters and sons. I am very proud of you, please remember that.[11]

What is striking about these words, and what has proven to be characteristic of official state messages to adoptees, ever since the tearful personal apology in 1998 made by then president Kim Dae Jung to a group of 29 overseas adoptees, is the juxtaposition of discourses of economic development and globalization with those of kinship and inalienable "roots." President Kim himself asked the adoptees who gathered at the presidential residence to "nurture [their] cultural roots" because "globalization is the trend of the times" (cited in Yngvesson 2002:421-2).[12] Official state narratives reiterate how the tragedy of the Korean War and the ensuing poverty of the post war years led to the heartbreaking, yet necessary, solution of overseas adoption. The plot then predictably shifts from the third world past to the present—underscoring Korea's standing as the 12th largest economy in the world.[13] Presented

as ever aspiring to first-world status, the nation is also striving to be one in which adoptees—who are now adult citizens of advanced Western nations and "daughters and sons" of Western families—can find pride. In this teleological narrative, Korea's achievements as an advanced nation, while not complete, are located fully in the contemporary era of global capitalism. It paints overseas adoption as a practice of the past, necessitated by South Korea's economic and political plights, and conceals the fact that adoptions from Korea not only increased exponentially during the period of the nation's greatest economic strides, but that, even with the decline in adoptions since the 1990s, 2,000 children are sent abroad every year for adoption, ranking Korea fourth in the world in foreign adoptions.[14]

In these representations, the state, having overcome a traumatic developmentalist history and the shackles of authoritarian rule, attempts to enroll adoptees into the logic of filial piety and long-distance nationalism (Anderson 1992) by rhetorically inviting them to participate in the national project of advancing the nation's standing in the world. What this would entail in actuality, however, is invariably left unaddressed. Moreover, for adoptees themselves—whose lives have been split across two nations, two families and two histories—the cultural capital necessary to realize their transnational potential seems to have already been forfeited. Many adoptees have expressed discomfort with these messages of paternalism. A woman in her twenties who was adopted to a working-class family in Canada at the age of five wrote a personal essay following the 2004 Gathering, expressing her disappointment in the event, and her words suggest how "shame" lurks behind the multiple iterations of "pride" in the rhetoric of state officials such as Minister Kim.

> The speeches reminded us that we were abandoned, rejected, burdens to our families and country. We were poor lost souls who needed to be rescued. Sadly, for many of us, as grown adults, we are still waiting for this great salvation to come. The belief that adoptees were all adopted into rich Western families to experience prosperity and success is a lie. I think many adoptees bitterly resent this misrepresentation.

These two stereotypes, of the pathetic and pitiable orphan and of the lucky transnational émigré, also formed the background to everyday experiences of adoptees in Korea. Adoptees who traveled to Korea and especially those who relocated to live and work there reported both sorts of receptions in their interactions with native Koreans, although a marked generational distinction

was emerging. Older Koreans might say "*bulssanghae*" or, "poor thing," while a younger generation in their 20s and early 30s may envy adoptees' upward mobility and economic "success" (*sŏnggong*). The expectations and burdens of success are reflected by young Koreans, who themselves feel trapped by the nation's economic instability, limited employment options, and entrenched gender and class stratifications.

Becoming Foreigners

Adoptees I met in Korea expressed a myriad of reasons for returning and came with a range of expectations, yet despite the diversity in their experiences, those who had spent even a short amount of time in Korea often told of the "remarkable feeling of being unremarkable" (Weimer 2006), marveling at their ability to blend into the homogeneous racial landscape of Korea. This novel feeling of blending among co-ethnics was often rapidly accompanied by the unavoidable acknowledgment that gaps in language and culture created moats of miscommunication and incomprehension that rendered them "foreigners" in their birth country. Moreover, any fantasies that these adoptees may have harbored about their ability to be "Korean," or to be fully accepted in their "homeland" were disrupted by their encounters with the dominant ethnic nationalism that equates Koreanness with cultural, linguistic and ethnic homogeneity based in shared blood and the myth of a 5,000 year-old history.[15] Adoptees, like other transnational subjects who return to purported "homelands," confront the impossibility of true repatriation in the form of seamless belonging or full legal incorporation and may discover that their hybridity, which is marked by racial difference in their adoptive countries is, in the context of Korea, inverted, swinging them to the other side of what one adoptee calls the "pendulum," from "Korean," to "Danish" or "American" (cf. Roth 2002 and Tsuda 2003).

First trips back could be complex and potent emotional and psychological experiences, unmooring identity and dislodging narratives of coherent selves. One might say that for some adoptees, travels across geographic space entail journeys back through time, effectuating a temporalization of space, or what Yngvesson and Coutin (2006), in the context of adoptee and deportee returns, call "planar time": "Traveling such a temporal path entails multidirectional movements, not simply from present to past or future, but sometimes from one present to another" (184). Against the impersonal symbolism and generalized state rhetoric of the "motherland," therefore, "Korea" as place and

nation holds specific meaning for adoptees as they locate their particular "origins" and the places of their prior presences, often mediated through the "paper trails" (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006) left by their adoption documentation. Returning adoptees approach their "origins" in a variety of ways—by immersing themselves in Korean "culture" and everyday life or by researching their paper trails and/or searching for Korean family—and they then attempt to assimilate this new information in ways that recall Marilyn Strathern's cogent declaration: "The quest for facts about the way the world works, and in issues of procreation the role accorded to 'blood' and 'actual' facts, is also part of the Euro-American quest for self-hood: self-knowledge is considered foundational to personal identity, and that includes knowledge about both birth and parentage" (1999:68). These experiences can be seen as part of "quests for self-hood," in which adoptee returns may set them on new and previously unanticipated trajectories.

Although some adoptees I knew did not even consider their "returns" to be returns, often because they had left in their infancy and therefore doubted that they had any "real" connections to Korea or anything to "return" to, for other adoptees, especially those who had left as toddlers or young children, frustration at their inability to assimilate into Korean society suggested a deeply-felt desire for acceptance and belonging in their birth country, making them particularly sensitive to everyday encounters with ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Ami Nafzger, who was five years old when she was adopted into a family in Minnesota, upon returning to Korea was told repeatedly that she was a *oeguk saram*, or a foreigner. She told me, "it was drilled into my head so many times that I was a *oeguk saram*. And that was it. And you are —you are a foreigner. And you really come to feel like you are really, really a foreigner there." Yet in the same breath, she stated, "But it's convenient for them when you've got a Korean, for them to say, 'oh, you're really Korean, you're a real Korean because you eat kimchee' —that doesn't make me a real Korean!"

This sense of being a "foreigner" was brought home to Craig, an adoptee in his late twenties, who had left Korea at the age of 8 to be adopted into an upper-middle class family in Wisconsin. Shortly after arriving in Seoul for the second time, he recounted to me how he was sharply reprimanded in Korean by a middle-aged man for speaking in English with his companions on the subway. The man became verbally and physically aggressive when Craig tried to ignore him. As he told me, "I just wanted to be able to tell him, 'I'm sorry, I was adopted, I can't speak Korean.'" Instead of the shame that a Korean American might feel for not living up to the ethnonationalist assumptions in

everyday encounters with Koreans, adoptees expressed a sense of injustice for being blamed for their lack of cultural knowledge. As another adoptee put it to me, "It's not my fault."

Yet the negative reception of adoptees as co-ethnic "foreigners" who demonstrated a curious, or offensive, lack of cultural authenticity began showing signs of transformation, perhaps most notably in the stories of Korean taxi drivers which peppered the everyday talk and narratives of adoptees who I spoke with in Korea. These anecdotes of taxi drivers appraising adoptees offered quick illustrations of how "Koreans" and "Korea" were as ethnocentric as ever, or else of how the nation's globalizing consciousness seemed to be loosening deeply entrenched ethnocentric assumptions. If essentializing stories of taxi drivers can serve as any kind of barometer, it seems that neoliberal economic logics were dislodging culturalist expectations. Longtime adoptee returnees I spoke with found that these former adjudicators of Korean cultural authenticity were now less likely to ask adoptees why they couldn't speak Korean than they were to say, as one adoptee put it, "So, now you know English—you can come here and make lots of money?"

Indeed, for many English-speaking adoptees the radical expansion of the English language education market in late-1990s Korea was a key factor in making their extended stays in Korea possible. Government initiatives to expand English teaching in public schools as well as the expansion of the after-school education industry meant that adoptees were able to commodify their "Westernization" by returning to Korea as English language teachers. Part of the broader "education fever" (*kyoyuk yŏl*) that has characterized South Korean modernity, English language learning gripped the country's middle class with even greater force than before the economic uncertainty descended on the nation during the IMF era (Seth 2002). Education institutes (*hagwŏn*) proliferated post-IMF and were actively recruiting teachers, often without regard to previous experience or qualifications, by offering competitive salary packages, including airfare, accommodations and benefits. These emergent spaces of labor and capital, however, also reflect global hierarchies of nation, race, and gender that stratify migrant workers (H. Park 2001, 2005; Park and Chang 2005) and also adoptees, who are positioned differently relative to their proximity to the American economic and cultural center.

Information about English teaching became widely available on the internet, and Robert Sullivan, an adoptee raised in Nebraska, was able to apply online for work. Robert had been attempting to start a search for his Korean parents, but had been unsuccessful in getting access to information from his

American adoption agency. He decided in 2001 that teaching English in Korea would provide him a chance to conduct his search more effectively. He applied and was offered a job by a *hagwŏn* (after-school academy) which booked his flight to Seoul. The night before his scheduled departure, however, a representative from the *hagwŏn* phoned him from Korea, to inform him that the job offer had been rescinded. Robert had sent a photo of himself to the school so that the escort being dispatched to pick him up at the airport would be able to recognize him. Apologetically, the *hagwŏn* administrator told him that the school had made the hiring decision based on the assumption that he was white, but upon seeing his photograph, could no longer offer him the position.

Ironically for adoptees, they were viewed, on the one hand, as *oeguk saram*, but, on the other hand, their Korean appearance could also serve as a liability on the job market, where whiteness is valued as a sign of (American) cultural authenticity and "nativeness." In another ironic twist, however, and one which might suggest that Korean mothers' preferences have shifted, one *hagwŏn* owner told me that Korean mothers were requesting that he hire *kyop'o* teachers because they felt that Caucasian Americans were too lenient with their children. In this case, he asked me, "Are adoptees *kyop'o* or white?" More than a few adoptees expressed cynicism regarding the ways in which the global economy had structured their ability to return to Korea, forcing them to participate in the reproduction of class status and cultural "Westernization" in Korea. One adoptee I met, for instance, who was looking for work, was adamant about not working at a *hagwŏn*, choosing in the end to take a less well-paying job at a public elementary school.

As adoptees are increasingly returning to Korea, they confront not only their own pasts but also the political economic circumstances and inequalities that structured their fates as adopted Koreans. Many reflected on their relative privilege, the gains of material comfort, love and family life that adoption afforded them, and some came to realize how large and how harrowing the cracks can be in the social welfare system in Korea, especially for those born into poverty or non-normative family situations. At the same time however, the specific transnationality of adoptees who return to Korea—even those, or especially those, who are reunited with biological family—has forced them to confront the loss of time, memory, everyday belonging, and the accumulation of daily intimacies that make "family" and "culture." Thus, the frustrations at being unable to ever "really" fit in Korea or in the West, and the seemingly insurmountable hurdles of language and difference, contributed to the

deeply felt desire to carve out a space of exclusive belonging, whether at an adoptee conference in a corporate hotel or in the bars of cosmopolitan Seoul. With this in mind, one can see how the economic logic that shapes the state's representation of adoptees as "successful global citizens" fails to grasp their social and cultural marginalization in Korea, where their "losses" of membership in a linguistic and national community have been obscured and resignified by the presumed "gains" of adoption—in a context in which (American) English language ability has become a commodity of significant exchange value and a sign of cosmopolitan privilege.

Kinship and Globalization in an Age of Neoliberalism

Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine's installation piece in the "Ibyangin, Ibangin" exhibition was called "I Wish You a Beautiful Life." Its title was borrowed from a book well-known in Korean American adoption circles called *I Wish For You a Beautiful Life* (Dorow 1999) which features letters written by pregnant Korean women who have planned to relinquish their children for adoption. Lemoine began the project by sending out an email to her contacts and posting it to adoptee listservs. The email announced the "Korean Adoptee Suicide Memorial Project" and asked for basic information about the adoptee, and any message that friends or family of the deceased would want to include in commemoration. She underscored that she was not intending to place blame on adoptive parents, but to "voice [the] memory" of the adoptees who had committed suicide.

The resulting piece was composed of five shiny Mylar squares hanging on the gallery wall, like reflective tombstones, which were printed with the Korean name of the deceased, the years of birth and death, the name of the adoption agency, the adoptive country and the year of adoption. Surrounding these squares were email responses that she received from members of the French Korean adoptee group, Racines Coréennes, after her request was posted to its chat board. Some members were offended by her request, such as one person who wrote, "What kind of idea is this? And why not a memorial for the ethnic Uzbekistanian Koreans living in Morocco? I have absolutely no interest…."; and, "I do not believe that it would please me to know that my name was placed on a memorial because I had committed suicide, particularly if I was adopted." Out of a broad range of opinions, from outrage to curiosity, Lemoine included responses that reflected the shadow of ambivalence that adoption casts. These messages were printed on white fabric and were

hung like pieces of cloth off of a drying line, suggesting the airing of (dirty) laundry. One person wrote, "We do not hide the fact that adoption is associated with experiences that are positive and enriching and, also, unfortunately, with unhappy experiences, which can lead to the worst acts. Let us not be like the ostrich [putting its head in the sand]. Even if the unhappy are a minority (everything is relative), we cannot escape them."

Lemoine in her artist statement, which was printed in the exhibition catalog, wrote,

> This piece is a critique of what Korea has not given its overseas adoptees: a sense of identity. The tragedy of adoptees that have committed suicide has haunted me especially during the first years of my activist involvement in the Korean adoptee community.… I hope that Korea will understand that globalization should not include displacing its orphans in the Western world without their consent, and to consider the human rights of children. Sending children abroad for the benefit of their well-being does not always result in their success as adults. I wish for Korea to not forget those who had less of a chance to survive in their overseas adoption experience (Our Alien, Our Adoptee 2005).

This provocative piece brought a repressed history of adoption to the surface by insisting, against the optimistic vision of the adoptee as a cosmopolitan global citizen, "cultural ambassador," or "diversity mascot," that the unlucky adoptees, those who did not "succeed," be counted and remembered.[16] Adoptee art critic Kim Stoker has written about the "artivism" of adoptee artists like Lemoine whose socially and politically engaged artistic work is also a form of cultural activism. She describes such work as being marked by "public 'roguishness,' meaning that the act of the art itself, its existence and its presentation, mischievously confronts and subverts expectations of the intended audience" (Stoker 2005:230). In the case of "I Wish You a Beautiful Life," Lemoine's action was to publicly "air out" adoptee suicide as a social fact, rather than as a set of private and inexplicable individual tragedies, which touched a sensitive nerve among adoptees[17] (cf. Durkheim 1951 [1897]).

Soon after the art exhibition closed, the topic of adoptee mental health and suicide became unavoidable as news of an adoptee's suicide began circulating among members of the adoptee community in Seoul. While the local authorities sought more information about the case, I received phone calls from directors at various adoptee advocacy NGOs, asking me if I knew the 27

year-old American adoptee who had been found dead outside of his apartment building in Seoul early one morning in late August. I had never met him, and there was only one person in the closely networked group of adoptees in Seoul who recalled having met him when working for a short time at the same English institute. Although foul play had not yet been ruled out, and there was no evidence such as a suicide note, it was generally assumed that his death had been intentional and self-inflicted.

Kim Dae-won, the secretary general of GOA'L, and Reverend Kim Do-hyun, the manager of KoRoot, a guesthouse and resource center for overseas adoptees in Seoul, upon hearing of the adoptee's death, went to visit the city morgue to find out more information. When they arrived, they were dismayed to find that, in place of his name, the tag on the adoptee's casket had been labeled simply with the word "*oegukin*" ("foreigner"). A day later, they organized an informal memorial service for the adoptee at the morgue, which 30 adoptees attended, and a week later, before the body was repatriated to the U.S., a more formal event took place the garden of KoRoot. Despite the fact that he was not directly acquainted with anyone active in the various social networks of adoptees in Seoul, on the Internet, or in other parts of the world, adoptees in Korea honored him as one of their own.

The news of the suicide and the ensuing activities and talk made the outlines of the community and its importance, especially following the Gathering conference, strongly palpable. Many regretfully observed, "he wasn't connected to the community," implying that had he been, the social support he needed might have helped prevent his suicide. The sad news brought home for many the reality that suicide and depression are not uncommon issues for adoptees and raised anxieties for Dae-won about a possible copycat effect. It also provoked reflection on the "community" and its role in providing kinship, social support and informal peer counseling for adoptees who generally lack language skills, family connections or basic cultural knowledge in Korea. The community was acknowledged as being especially vital for those who return to Korea already estranged from their adoptive families or countries, and with fragile hopes of finding a place of authentic belonging. Indeed, the memorial service itself can be interpreted as an attempt at recuperation and repatriation of the adoptee's (absent) body into the adoptee family. The suicide not only brought the hidden histories of the adoptees who, in Lemoine's words "had less of a chance to survive" but also a recognition of the limits of cultural citizenship for adoptees in Korea who, caught between nation-states and cultural locations, can die as "foreigners" in their so-called motherland.

Although some Koreans may believe that adoptees have fared well, having entered into a privileged Western world, with all the opportunities for education and advancement it can afford, this crude calculation often discounts the pain and loss of family, belonging and history that adoptees must often grapple with. For many adoptees, comparing the opportunities they've gained to the things they that they've lost—Korean family, genealogical knowledge, culture, language, and national belonging—only points out their profound incommensurability. As Sebastian, a 33-year-old Belgian adoptee, who had recently moved to Korea in the summer of 2004 said, "I got love, a family, an education, and all those things, but the fact that I'm here says something—there's something missing." Sebastian met Mihee Lemoine, who he affectionately called his "sister," 15 years earlier, in 1987, at a Korean language program run by a Korean immigrant church in Brussels. The 10 adoptees who met there formed a tight-knit group and became founding members of the Korean adoptee organization, KoBel, in 1991, and it was through a Korean church organized summer camp that he had a chance to move to Los Angeles to live with a Korean host family for six months, knowing very little English. Several years later, nearly fluent in English, he told me, "What would I be if I stayed? I wouldn't have the opportunity to travel as I have for ten years…. Would you stay in an orphanage and live like a bum and have no future or choose to be in a family and receive everything I have had?" Sebastian embraced his cosmopolitan privileges and his pride in being Belgian, expressing his frustration with other adoptees who do not "accept where they came from. They're not 100% Belgian and not 100% Korean. I take part of both, and make 100% of myself."

When I saw Sebastian again in January 2005, he was busy working on a major project called the Adoptee Awareness Wall, which would be composed of a series of posters featuring 3,000 photographs of adoptees who'd been sent overseas. The plan was to line the walls of subway stations in Korea's major cities with posters stretching to 500 feet, to present a stunning visual representation of the vast extent of Korean adoption over the past fifty years. Intended to bring visibility to adoptees in Korea and to raise awareness among Koreans about adoption-related issues, the project carried large ambitions and reflected a growing consciousness among many adoptees about the troubling aspects of the ongoing practice of overseas adoption. While working on this project and encountering difficulties with fundraising and sponsorship, Sebastian had settled into life in Seoul, and, I was surprised to hear, was in the process of surrendering his Belgian citizenship and EU membership to reclaim his Korean citizenship. I asked why he didn't simply take on his Korean name as a symbolic

act of claiming identity, as many other adoptees I know have done, since giving up his European citizenship would surely limit his future abilities to work and travel. "Can't you just change your name?" I asked, partly in jest.

He replied, "I'm not going to change my name or get rid of my Belgian identity. That's who I am. I am Sebastian Hootele." What was meaningful for him was to be fully present in Korea, where he was born, where he can now, by his own choice, stay and live. He was not going to renounce his adoptive family or his identity and history as a person raised in Belgium, but, having traveled extensively and lived in Europe and the U.S., he told me that he was certain that he didn't want to go back to Belgium, and that he wanted to be a Korean in Korea. He tried to clarify it further for me, "Koreans look at me, and they don't understand that I'm Belgian. Now I can say that I'm Korean." The Adoptee Awareness Wall was also part of this desire to be a part of Korea, to work as a legal Korean citizen toward progressive social change and greater cultural citizenship and visibility for adoptees in Korea. I interpret Sebastian's decision as shaped by his own belief in the power of the state and the performative efficacy of law to instantiate identity and to legitimate his national belonging. His "discrepant cosmopolitanism" (Clifford 1994) had led him from Korea to Belgium and back to Korea again, but now, legitimizing his presence in Korea rather than being opposed to or distinct from cultural citizenship, was intimately entwined with his aspiration to belong, as a "Korean," who was adopted and raised in Belgium, to the nation. He was choosing to dwell, to be fixed in a world in which flexibility, movement and deterritorialization are the rules governing the global economy. Against a neoliberal logic that trades "kinship" for "globalization," in which the cultural losses of adoption and abandonment are easily resignified as individual economic gains, Sebastian was trading in his cosmopolitan citizenship for a sense of locality and kinship, to restore national belonging in the face of his own foreignness.

Congealing Kinship and Concealing Power

As I hope to have shown, adoptees' disrupted and remade kinship narratives complicate conventional constructions of "Korea" as a place of origins, "roots," and ethnic attachment. This is not to say that adoptees did not often imbue "Korea" with a host of existential longings, myths of authenticity and yearnings for wholeness and plenitude, as might other diasporic or exiled persons. What I foreground here is how notions of kinship, belonging and relatedness were negotiated by adult adoptees in Korea, against competing discourses of popu-

lar and official nationalisms. Thus, although transnational and transracial adoptions denaturalize the purported basis of kinship in biological procreation, the state's primordialist rhetoric often seeks to re-naturalize adoptees as Koreans, based on metaphors of biologically-based kinship. Moreover, in everyday experiences with native Koreans, adoptees came up against other kinds of "blood"-based paradigms which attempted to include adoptees as Koreans based on consanguinity with the nation. For adoptees, however, whose backgrounds are very often unknown, a different valence of "blood" (*p'itjul*) and "lineage" (*hyŏlt'ong*) can serve as the basis for discriminatory or exclusionary practices that malign their presumed "polluted" or "bad" bloodlines. A thirty-year-old Danish adoptee, for instance, found that being welcomed as a "Korean" was heartwarming, but he also recognized that his adoptee-status imposed certain limits to kinship: "Koreans say, 'We can see that you're Korean, you have Korean blood, you should marry a Korean woman,' but I know they're just saying that—they don't want their daughters to marry me."

Recent work on Chinese transnational imaginaries and nationalisms provide a useful point of comparison for my analysis of returning adoptees and state and popular nationalisms. Vanessa Fong suggests how "filial nationalism" among Chinese youth stands as an extension of filial loyalty to family, allowing well-educated and globally-minded urban teenagers to at once disparage China's subordinate ranking in the global political economy, but also to express a deeply felt devotion to the nation that is as unconditional as their love for their parents (Fong 2004). In contemporary Korean diaspora politics a similar type of filial nationalism is frequently invoked in state discourses addressed to ethnic compatriots, but adoptees often short circuit this discourse because their "kinship" ties to natal family and nation have been legally severed by their adoptions, through the state's own design and as a consequence of its "shameful" failures to "take care of its own." The state could symbolically conjure adoptees' "roots" in Korea but, given the problematic nature of their kinship histories, it is unable to draw upon family genealogies to nurture personal ties to "Korea" as an ancestral place (cf. Louie 2000, 2004). Rather, hollowed out ritual tropes are mobilized in official narratives which effectively erase adoptees' individual pasts under the production of the "homogeneous, empty time of the nation" (Anderson 1991, Benjamin 1968), obscuring the more problematic and complex kinship histories of individual adoptees (see also E. Kim 2005).

It is, in fact, precisely the intervention of the state through the biopolitical management of populations and the legal constructions of adoptees as par-

ticular kinds of state subjects and migrants that help to clarify the specific hurdles to their reincorporation. Adoption policies based on the autonomous and self-contained Western nuclear family continue to reproduce logics of exclusivity and permanence in child placement, constructing children as rightfully belonging to only one set of parents (Yngvesson 2004). Through the legal fiction of the "orphan," they disembed children from prior contexts and produce narrative discontinuities that can present challenges to adoptees' attempts to create coherent identities out of any remaining fragments. Barbara Yngvesson (2002) reveals, for instance, how the "clean break" effectuated by adoption law, which severs biological ties and replaces them with adoptive ones, leaves behind an excess of relationships that "enchain" the child's givers and recipients and "haunt" adoptee subjectivities (see also Dorow 2006). More recent frameworks in international adoption policy have turned an eye toward "origins," constructing the transnationally adopted child as being "rooted" in the "birth country," and international covenants such as the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993) now recognize a child's rights to "cultural heritage" and to identifying information about her background. These frameworks, however, resist more capacious perspectives on "family" that would deny the logic of exclusivity and permanence reproduced in dominant norms of the nuclear family in favor an acknowledgment of the multiple ways in which the child is embedded in cultural worlds and social relations, with values and meanings attaching to her as she passes through different national and familial locations. The "clean-break" of adoption law enables the marginalization of prior histories and relationships, which may be erased or devalued in the radical transformation of the child from needy third world orphan to privileged first world citizen.

Indeed, as discussed in the introduction, orphan status is a prerequisite for adoption in American immigration law, which means that the child has been deemed to be adoptable by either the death or the departure of both parents, or through legal relinquishment by at least one parent. The child is thereby an exceptional migrant who is "reunited" with "immediate family" in the U.S., and has no other legally extant kinship connections that might render her the first link in a "chain of migration." The production of the legal orphan in Korean adoption practice also entails the production of the child as an exceptional kind of state subject in the context of Korean law and hegemonic cultural scripts. The family registry (*hojuk*) has served as the normative mode of documentation and identification in Korea, in which a patriarchal system of succes-

sive male family heads of household organized Korean citizens as members of patrilineal genealogies. For adoptees, an "orphan *hojuk*," or orphan registry, served to render the child as a legible, free-standing subject of the state in preparation for adoption and erasure as a Korean citizen. The child was thus registered as a family head of its own, single-person household and solitary lineage. This disembedding of the child from a normative kinship structure and its legal reinscription as a peculiar and exceptional state subject singularize the child as an orphan, without any extant kinship ties. In the context of Korean law, she becomes a person with the barest of social identities, and in the context of Korean cultural norms, she lacks the basic requirements of social personhood—namely, family lineage and genealogical history.

Because these Korean children were sent overseas as "orphans," the severing of their natal connections also entailed the forfeiture of Korean citizenship, and to reincorporate adoptees as "Koreans," the state must at once honor the authority and role of (Western) adoptive parents, even as they invite adoptees to (re)claim their essential Koreanness. These broken family ties also disrupt the expected isomorphisms of blood, family, nation, and place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) in dominant constructions of Korean national and diasporic identities and thereby expose the contingencies of those naturalized connections. Indeed, the inextricability of cultural citizenship from legal citizenship is made ironically visible when some adoptees find out in the process of applying for the overseas Koreans visa that they had never been removed from their natal family registry, and in order to qualify for the visa, they must complete their own erasure from the registry and cancel their Korean citizenship.

Transnational adoptions not only open up a gap between "substance" and "code for conduct" (Schneider 1968), decoupling "blood" from its "natural" expression in love and intimacy, but, by extension, "kinship" is also disjointed from its purportedly natural connection to the "nation." This defamiliarization effect is notable in instances where adoptees' interest in returning to Korea as their "homeland" alienates them from their adoptive families, rather than becoming the grounds for greater inter-generational solidarity, as might be expected among second-generation children of immigrant parents (Maira 2002, Louie 2004). Therefore, the equation of family with nation that provides the basis for intimacy and loyalty for Chinese and Chinese American youth, in the case of Korean adult adoptees, comes up against a fundamental paradox—that "family" and nation" have been decoupled and disconnected and re-suturing them requires a recognition of adoptees as being split across families, nations and potential loyalties. This paradox is often resolved through

the rhetoric of "diplomacy" or "ambassadorship," inviting adoptees to take advantage of their (presumed) dual identifications to act as "bridges" linking Korea to the West. Yet this retroactive and optimistic rendering of adoptee histories as productive of harmonious international economic and political relations is not always appreciated, and is sometime resented by adoptees whose biographies of displacement are fundamentally marked by a lack of agency and who may, if given a choice, not choose to voluntarily enroll as future "ambassadors." Indeed, what is concealed in these renderings of kinship and nation is precisely the power of the state to determine who counts as kin, and who counts as being in and of the nation (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995).

Given the ways in which adoptees depart from conventional understandings of kinship and transmigrants, one could argue that the "transnational" is simply an inapt way of conceptualizing their social practices and subjectivities. Until the recent turn to "roots" and the multiculturalist dispensation in adoption policy and practice, it was assumed that adoptees would simply assimilate into family, community, and nation. Yet their contemporary mobilities across national boundaries are decidedly transnational—for the returnees who live there for an extended period of time, as well as for the "roots" searchers who visit for shorter stays, but who often make multiple return trips. In the absence of "authentic" kinship based in genealogy and easily mapped onto nationalist paradigms, adoptees have produced their own spaces of alternative kinship. Adoptees may travel to Korea with the hope of locating natal family or information about their "biological" kin, but many find, instead, another set of more profound kin relations, which are based on common histories of displacements, alienations, and complex negotiations of "foreignness" and "family" in Korea. "Adoptee kinship" is consequently produced through practices of place-making in Seoul and other parts of the world, and has proven to be a powerful form of relatedness that is based on radical contingency, shared generational consciousness and elective affinities that articulate adoptees' "unnatural histories" (Rapp and Ginsburg 2001) and struggles for cultural citizenship in the West and in South Korea. It emerges out of common experiences of alienation and disidentification with hegemonic racial and familial ideologies, and it is (re)produced through collective social practices that legitimate adoptees' "inauthentic" origins, which are, importantly, based on contingency and ambiguity rather than on "blood" or genealogical certitudes. Like the "families we choose" of gay kinship (Weston 1991), adoptees are engaging in forms of "diffuse, enduring solidarity" commonly associated with biogenetic kinship (Schneider 1968), based less on pro-

creation than on choice and an ethics of care (Borneman 1992). Between "family" and "foreignness," adoptees are forging kinship in community, rather than out of consanguinity.

Time-space compression associated with "globalization" (Harvey 1990) has made it possible for adoptees to connect with Korea, but in ways that are both similar to and distinct from other so-called diasporic populations. With the rise of global English, adoptees and other English-speaking expatriates have found an economic niche that enables them to travel to Korea and stay for extended periods of time. Hence, rather than freely-chosen "family," adoptee kinship is also structured by the nation-state and the global political economy—specifically, South Korea's own proactive globalization project which recognizes overseas coethnics as part of the deterritorialized nation, and the lucrative market in global English. In this process, new stratifications that reflect the broader global hierarchy of nation-states are reproduced among adoptees whose value is differentially determined in terms of economic and social capital. For instance, non-English speaking European adoptees have much more restricted employment options in Korea, and thus they present a more economically stratified group, with the most privileged engaging in small-scale entrepreneurial ventures, and the least privileged scraping by on income earned from occasional private language tutoring. In addition, adoptees' desires for citizenship and state recognition exist within the context of the heightened commodification of kinship among affluent South Koreans who view adoptees enviously as they themselves engage in strategic forms of "familial governmentality" (Ong 1999) to evade state control in the neoliberal pursuit of upward mobility and cosmopolitanism.[18] The emergence of an active, if fluid, community of adopted Koreans in Seoul demonstrates how new kinds of relatedness are being formed in the midst of other, increasingly transnationalized, kinship practices and nationalist claims.

Conclusion

Transnational Korean adoption, as a form of transracial adoption, defamiliarizes normative models of biologically related monoracial families even as it reproduces the Euro-American middle-class nuclear family ideal.[19] As a type of transnational adoption, Korean adoption reveals "kinship" to be profoundly structured by global political economic inequalities and legal conventions, and makes visible the constructed nature of "kinship" in discussions of transnationalism and families—whether kin relations are strategically or

pragmatically deployed by "flexible citizens" in forms of "familial governmentality" (Ong 1999) or whether they become the object of much emotional labor, to sustain affective bonds despite the distances imposed by stratifications in the global division of labor (Parreñas 2001). Because biogenetic ties are legally and practically severed in the making of adoptive family ties to be "as-if" biological (Modell 1994), "kinship" and its relationship to dominant nationalisms and transnationalisms are rendered problematic for transnationally adopted individuals. As Kath Weston suggests, "viewed through the lens of political economy, kinship appears not as a coherent ideology or core concept but rather as something congealed." And as kinship congeals, she writes, it "leaves unnamed and unrecognized those shifting affiliations that refuse the claims to ideological stability" (2001:168).

I argue that a de-naturalized view of "kinship" might help us to identify what it accomplishes, that is, what it helps to *congeal* and also what it *conceals* with respect to national and transnational processes. Namely, hegemonic cultural scripts congeal kinship ideologies out of naturalized categories of "family," "nation," and "diaspora" and in so doing conceal forms of governmentality and state power that underwrite and legislate certain relationships as "kin" while disallowing others, left "unnamed and unrecognized." As feminist legal scholar Drucilla Cornell writes, "the imagined heterosexual adopting family is privileged as the one deserving of protection of the state, even against the child who is a member of it" (1999:220). As I have hope to have shown, in the absence of extant kinship networks, the equation of self, family, and nation that fuels a diasporic politics based upon genealogical continuity ("roots" and "blood" rhetorics), fails to add up, in part because the state was a primary actor in severing those very ties of family and nation that adoptees are often seeking to locate and/or reconstitute. Korean adoptees highlight the extent to which "kinship," in the context of contemporary global transformations, is made and practiced across national boundaries by state entities, social movements and individual actors, but they also reveal how kinship is reckoned within the constraints of state power, family legislation and dominant ideologies of national belonging.

AKNOWLEDGMENTS

ENDNOTES

[1]Until the recent spate of anthropological and sociological interest, scholarship on transnational adoption had been overwhelmingly dominated by quantitative social work and psychological "outcome" and "adjustment" studies organized around analyses that sought to measure the well-being, self-esteem and psychological health of Korean children and adolescents adopted into white homes. Studies of transnational adoptions, however, as Shiao et al. (2004) note, are notable for their scarcity, especially given the large number of transracial international placements following the notorious condemnation of black-white domestic adoptions by the National Association of Black Social Workers in 1972. With the conspicuous expansion of Chinese adoptions to the U.S. and Europe beginning in the 1990s, however, a growing number of sociologists, anthropologists and humanistic scholars have been applying qualitative analysis to the phenomenon of transnational adoption. In Korea, "international adoptions" (*kugoe ibyang*) are also referred to as "overseas adoptions" (*haeoe ibyang*).

[2]Gender ratios for Korean children differ markedly from Chinese adoptions, in which almost all the children are girls. In Korea, as single motherhood replaced poverty as the main cause for child relinquishments, gender ratios leveled off. In addition, Western adopters have conventionally preferred to adopt girls, a preference that is now mirrored by Korean adopters as well. This development has meant that, with priority given to domestic Korean adopters, more Korean boys than girls have been placed overseas since the mid-1990s.

[3]I refer to South Korea as "Korea" in this article for reasons of style over politics. In doing so, I acknowledge that the use of "Korea" to denote South Korea implicitly obscures the existence of North Korea and its competing claims to legitimate sovereignty over the Korean nation. My use of "Korea" (without quotes) thus designates an idealized concept of South Korea as a geographically coherent territory and national political unity. I also use "Korea" in quotes to indicate a reified notion that conflates nation, place, culture and identity. Wherever possible, I employ South Korea (without quotes) to refer to the "state" and its effects, as performed and represented by the Republic of Korea. I follow the McCune-Reischauer system for the romanization of Korean words excepting place names and alternative romanizations for the names of public figures, and I follow the Korean convention of family name first.

[4]It is impossible to determine how many adoptees return to Korea every year, or how many are living there on a long-term basis, as Korean immigration records track entry by nationality, and do not treat adoptees as a separate category. In 2001, the Ministry of Health and Welfare reported nearly 3,000 adoptees visiting their adoption agencies (which would also include younger adoptees traveling with their parents), and these numbers are undoubtedly growing.

[5]In addition to the emergence of a transnational adoptee social imaginary, the late-1990s discovery of returning adoptees by Korean journalists has developed into what can rightly be called a veritable genre of adoptee and adoption-related stories, examples of which have proliferated across the South Korean mediascape. Print, internet and television news focus

on adoptee birth family search and/or reunion stories, with journalists often becoming active participants in the process, and coverage of roots tours predominate during the summer months. Personal profiles of adoptees living and working in Korea have appeared in magazines and newspapers, as well as stories that feature "celebrity" adoptees, such as Toby Dawson, who recently won a bronze medal for the U.S. ski team in the Torino Winter Olympics. Adoptee narratives are ripe for melodramatic renderings, and their representations are invariably constructed to maximize emotional effect. Other Korean transnationals have also been celebrated in the media, most recently Hines Ward, an American professional football player of African American and Korean parentage. Indeed, television in Korea is a major search and reunion technology, which, ever since the mass-mediated reunions of the separated families of the Korean War (*isan kajok*) in 1983 (see C.S. Kim 1988), has churned out reunion programming that runs the gamut from long-lost relatives to old friends, lovers, and beloved teachers. In 2004, I was astounded at the number of real-life adoptee stories and also fictionalized ones that were appearing with greater frequency, especially in melodramatic telenovellas (*dŭrama*), a key staple of the Korean national and transnational mediascape (see Hübinette 2005).

[6]There are an estimated 6.7 million ethnic Koreans residing outside of Korea. The greatest numbers are in China (2.4 million), the U.S. (2 million), Japan (900,000), the former Soviet republics (532,000), and Central and South America (107,000) (MOFAT 2005). Approximately half of the 107,000 estimated overseas Koreans living in Europe are adoptees.

[7]This state project has come up against a problematic set of legal and political contests over the precise definition of membership in this new deterritorialized vision of the nation and has entailed a complex negotiation of geopolitical relations, historical narratives and entrenched assumptions regarding "kinship," "race" and "culture" in contemporary reckonings of citizenship (See H. Park 2005 and Park and Chang 2005). The OKA's criterion for determining eligibility for overseas Koreans status initially excluded those Koreans who had left Korea before the national division and the establishment of the ROK in 1948 by requiring proof of former south Korean citizenship. Effectively excluding Korean Chinese and Korean Russians, the law was deemed illegal for violating the equality principle in the national constitution in 2001. For a discussion of the controversy over the constitutionality of the OKA, see Park and Chang (2005). Park and Chang include the results of a survey which asked Koreans their opinions of whether or not various categories of overseas Koreans were "Korean," to which close to 75 percent responded that adoptees are "Korean."

[8]In addition to facilitating the financial investments of Korean Americans, the law was also related to the influx of ethnic Koreans from China who filled in labor shortages in the so-called 3-D job sector (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) (see also H. Park 2005).

[9]Korea is also referred to as the "motherland" (*moguk*) in contemporary usage for 1.5 and 2nd generation Koreans, and perhaps most commonly when referring to Korean as one's mother tongue (*mogukŏ*), but *choguk* (often translated as fatherland, and literally meaning ancestral land) is also found in media reports which refer to adoptees or other overseas Koreans' relationships to Korea. It is most often associated with patriotic discourse, such as *choguk t'ongil*, or, national reunification. *Koguk*, literally the "native country," carries a sentimental valence that is sometimes employed to describe the nostalgic return of elderly Koreans to their natal land.

[10]The first Gathering conference took place in 1999 in Washington, D.C., and the second in Oslo, Norway in 2001. A fourth Gathering is being planned to take place in Seoul in August 2007.

[11]The quotes from the minister's speech are taken from the English version that was read by the official interpreter of the Gathering to the adoptee audience.

[12]President Kim included adoptees in his inaugural address as one of the 25 points that his administration would address. The apology and recognition of adoptees should also be contextualized within other repressed counternarratives to the nation that emerged following

Korea's transition to a democratic government. Comfort women, labor movement organizers, North Korean sympathizers, student radicals, divided families, and other groups have had their histories legitimized and aired publicly since the early 1990s.

[13]Korea's economic ranking, based on gross domestic product, has fluctuated over the past several years between 10th and 12th largest in the world. In 2005 it was ranked number eleven.

[14]There are no international bodies that track the global transfer of children through adoption, but demographer Peter Selman's estimates show that the numbers of children have nearly doubled from a mean annual rate of approximately 16,000 children in the 1980s to nearly 32,000 in 1998 (Selman 2002), and these numbers have no doubt increased in the past several years. The United States has been the primary "receiving" country for children throughout the history of international adoption, and, according to statistics kept by the U.S. State Department on children entering the U.S. on "orphan visas," or more recently, as beneficiaries of the Child Citizenship Act, adoptions from foreign countries have exceeded 20,000 per year since 2001. South Korea was the main "sending" country throughout the 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s, accounting for approximately half of all international adoptions during those decades. For an overview of international adoption history and policy, see Altstein and Simon (2000) and Lovelock (2000). Since the 1990s, Russian and Chinese adoptions have increased dramatically, with upwards of 5,000 adoptions from those countries by Americans in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Korean adoptions, have, since the early 1990s, become tightly regulated, capping at around 2,000 children per year. Since 2002, Korea's ranking has fallen to 4th in the world in adoptions to the U.S., with the majority of children now arriving from China, Russia, and Guatemala.

[15]Scholars of Korean nationalism (Em 1999; Grinker 1998; Jager 2003; Robinson 1988; Shin et al. 1999) have discussed the powerful ideology of ethnic homogeneity that has its roots in the Japanese colonial era, during which anti-imperialist nationalist movements drew strength from a belief in the distinctiveness of Korean personhood, race and nation, despite the lack of territorial sovereignty. The notion of *minjok* thus encompasses conceptions of both nation and race, and is grounded in history (the origin myth of T'angun), language, and culture that are unique to the Korean people. Following the national division, Korean cultural nationalism became a key part of the ideological struggle between North and South Korea, both states drawing upon the notion of unitary nation (*tanil minjok)* and shared blood (*hyŏlt'ong*) to argue for the legitimacy of either the ROK or the DPRK as the sovereign representative for the Korean people (Shin et al. 1999). Moon (1998) provides a necessary feminist intervention into dominant constructions of the nation, in which the purported homogeneity of the people obscures the marginalization of women to the private realm of the family, subordinate to family patriarchs. Under constant attack by feminists since its legislation in 1960, the patriarchal Family Law, which in 2004 was finally deemed unconstitutional, has legitimated male dominance through the family head system (*hojujedo*), underwriting a nationalist vision of the nation as a community of men.

[16]As the responses to Lemoine's email query revealed, the subject of suicide and depression in the adoptee community is highly controversial and touches upon a more divisive debate among adoptees about the politics and moral value of international adoption.

[17]The most comprehensive epidemiological study of suicide among international adoptees in Sweden was published in 2002 by a group of Swedish researchers who found that international adoptees were three to four times more likely to have serious mental health issues, including suicide and suicide attempts, than native-born Swedes. A subsequent study examined suicide among domestic Swedish adoptees, non-adopted native-born Swedes, and internationally adopted Swedes for the entire cohort born between 1963 and 1973 and living in Sweden since 1987. This study has been the grounds for rethinking adoption policy in Sweden, and also has served to fuel adoptee critiques of transnational adoption. See Hjern et al. (2002) and von Borczyskowski et al. (2006).

[18]Like the "parachute kids" and "astronaut wives" of the Chinese diaspora, Korean transnational families are also finding ways to flexibly insert their children into the global economy, and in the process, stretching dominant definitions of the nuclear family, Korean kinship and "Confucian" values (see Ong 1999:128). Thus, even as the Korean state is extending the bounds of the nation across transnational space, based on blood and inalienable kinship ties to the ethnic nation, Korean families are seeking to evade state regulation and the obligations entailed with citizenship.

[19]The Korean adoption program has, since the 1970s, restricted overseas adoptions to heterosexual couples who have been married for at least 3 years.

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