

# Disembedded and Free-Floating Bodies Out of Place and Out of Control: Examining the Borderline Existence of Adopted Koreans

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## Introduction

Recently, there has been an upsurge in studies examining previously uncategorizable and unrecognized groups transcending antithetical and binary opposites of white/non-white, male/female, hetero/homo and the like. Words like *borders* and *margins*, and prefixes like bi- (both), inter- (between) and trans- (beyond) frequently turn up in this research trend; these positions challenge essentialist theories and notions of identity based on a social constructivist understanding of it, and take place at the intersection of postcolonial, feminist and queer theory. In dialogue with this new research development, this paper sets out to examine one of these hitherto neglected and under-researched groups, namely the specific ethnic Korean diaspora of 160,000 children who since the end of the Korean War have been adopted from Korea to fifteen different Western countries.

My examination of adopted Koreans starts by providing the history of this extraordinary trade and trafficking in Korean children beyond the mainstream and hegemonic narrative of international adoption as a benevolent and humanitarian child welfare practice. It will be followed by a framing of this absolutely unique, forced child migration in modern history within the context of Western colonialism and Korean nationalism. For many years these two ideologies also spoke for and represented the group, but nowadays adopted Koreans have started speaking out about their own experiences as well as reaching out to each other and organizing themselves. After an introduction to this recent emergence of an adopted Korean voice and movement, this paper analyzes the ethnic subjectivization of adopted Koreans by reading and citing excerpts from a selected number of autobiographical texts, using a combination of Judith Butler's performativity theory and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity as the theoretical background

for the discussion. Finally, the paper argues that the adopted Korean existence is characterized by painful and contradictory subjectivities and identifications, unstable and repeated passings and transgressions, and a never-ending negotiation and navigation between whiteness, Orientalism, immigrantism, Koreanness and Asianness. This makes the Korean adoptee's experience different from that of other Korean and Asian immigrant and minority diasporas and communities, and is neither self-chosen nor a very pleasant place to live—thereby also going against the general celebratory hype of performativity and hybridity in postmodern writing.

### **Chronicling International Adoption from Korea**

International adoption, sometimes also known as intercountry or transnational adoption, is the movement of children from predominantly non-Western countries to adoptive parents in the West. It was initiated on a large scale in connection with the Korean War, even though Western missionaries occasionally had adopted “native children” already at the time of the classical colonial period.<sup>1</sup> The history of international adoption from Korea has passed through various stages, driven by different reasons, and reflects the dramatic turbulences of modern Korean history. It is directly linked to the total destruction of traditional Korean society, to the mass dispersal of people of Korean descent from the Korean peninsula, and above all to the break-up and separation of numerous Korean families that started with the collapse of the Chosôn dynasty in the second half of the nineteenth century, escalated during the colonial era, reached its peak with national division and civil war, and was finally accomplished with post-war migration and modernization.<sup>2</sup>

The practice of international adoption originated as a rescue mission immediately after the war, organized by Western individuals and voluntary agencies to transfer mixed-race children who were fathered by American and other U.N. soldiers, products of the large-scale sexual exploitation and military prostitution of Korean women, to adoptive homes in the United States and Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> In 1954, it gained an official status when Korea's first president, Syngman Rhee (1948–60), initiated a government-sponsored program of international adoption

with the purpose of cleansing the country of mixed children. Two years later, Harry Holt, a wealthy American farmer and a Christian fundamentalist, established the organization bearing his name, which developed into the leading adoption agency, not only in Korea, but in the world. As Holt, in his missionary zeal, believed that he played a part in a divine scheme, international adoption rapidly took on a mass scale, and at the end of the decade adoptions of full-Koreans eclipsed those of mixed children. This first and initial stage of international adoption from Korea was motivated by a mixture of Christian fundamentalist rescue fantasies, a specific American need to legitimize anti-Communist interventions in East Asia by creating family bonds with its populations, a general feeling of bad conscience and guilt among the countries that had participated on the Southern side in the devastating war, and widespread discrimination against mixed-race children within the country itself.

In 1961, independent Korea's modern adoption law was passed, laying the foundation for the most efficient institutional framework of international adoption in the world.<sup>4</sup> Under the military regime of President Park Chung Hee (1961–79), Korea was industrialized with a terrible efficacy, and at a furious and horrifying speed. The tens of thousands of children of young rural migrants-turned-factory-workers, abandoned and relinquished out of urban poverty, now replaced the war orphans. International adoption was integrated into the country's family planning and emigration programs to decrease the numbers in an over-populated country, and utilized as a goodwill strategy to develop political ties and trade relations with important Western allies. Both international and domestic adoption were encouraged to avoid costly institutional care and cope with the rapidly increasing number of unaccompanied children caused by massive internal migration and rapid urbanization. Thus the 1960s ended as the only decade hitherto with more domestic placements processed than international counterparts: 8,247 cases versus 6,166.

From the end of the 1960s, adoptions from Korea started to rise dramatically in response to the decrease in the domestic supply of adoptable white infants, a supply that disappeared almost overnight in the West as a result in part of changing mores and ideals taking place in connection with the Revolution of 1968.<sup>5</sup> International adoption now

came to be imagined as an anti-racist and progressive act in the era of de-colonization and civil rights movements, governed by a left-liberal ideology prescribing multiculturalism, and perceived as a liberating reproductive method by radical feminists and sexual minorities.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the 1970s, international adoption also came to play a part in the propaganda war fought between the two Koreas in that, as I have noted elsewhere (Hübinette 81–85), North Korea accused its southern neighbor of selling Korean children to Westerners. This accusation led to Korea's entire adoption program being classified and transformed into something close to a state secret to avoid further embarrassment to the government. This was the first time international adoption surfaced in political discussion, and during the 1970s the adoption issue engaged both the pro-North and the pro-South factions in Korea, and appeared among Korean diaspora groups in the adopting countries in the West. In 1976, in response to escalating international adoptions and North Korean criticism, a plan for the gradual phasing out of international adoption by 1981 was announced. This would curb the massive outflow of children from Korea to the West, and limit the number of adoption agencies handling Korean children to four, wholly run by Korean nationals instead of Americans and other non-Koreans.

However, four years later a new military strongman, President Chun Doo Hwan (1980–88), came to power and chose to discontinue the policy. Instead, international adoption became directly linked to the expansion of the emigration program and, through the process of deregulation, adoption agencies were allowed to engage in profit-making. They began openly competing with each other to track down unrestricted numbers of “adoptable” children, who in all too many cases were simply lost and run-away children, bought or stolen, abducted or kidnapped, or relinquished after harsh coercion.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, a thriving and profitable adoption industry was created in Korea, resulting in the largest numbers of children ever sent abroad in a decade— a total of 66,511 placements. Adoption out of the country peaked in 1985 with the placement of close to 9,000 children or “goodwill ambassadors,” as the government preferred to designate them. At the end of the 1980s the country had accomplished reasonable economic wealth, and from then on, the children dispatched abroad were increasingly categorized

as illegitimate, born of unwed mothers rather than abandoned and coming from poor backgrounds. The dominance of girls, around 70 percent during the previous decades, was slowly but steadily turned into a preponderance of boys, reflecting changing family values in the Korean society.

In 1988, the Seoul Olympic Games showcased a newly democratized and industrialized Korea to the world. All of a sudden, Western radio and television broadcasters, and newspapers, and magazines started to write about the adoption program and designated Korea as the leading global exporter of children. The unexpected attention was deeply humiliating and painful for the proud host country, and as a result of the negative foreign media coverage, Koreans were finally forced to address the problem seriously. Ever since, the adoption issue has been a recurrent subject in Korean media and popular culture. In 1989, the government decided to make a new deadline after which international adoption was to end—1996. This deadline also failed: the plan was revoked in 1994 in favor of the more distant year of 2015. But in any case, during the tenures of presidents Roh Tae Woo (1988–93) and Kim Young Sam (1993–98) the number of placements gradually decreased as a result of deliberate efforts to phase out international adoption in the long run and replace it with increased government support to family preservation, economic incentives to encourage domestic adoption, and the establishment of a long-term foster home system. The adoption issue was particularly accentuated during Kim Dae Jung's (1998–2003) presidency as international adoption started to increase again in connection with the Asian economic crisis and numerous family break-ups. In 1998, President Kim Dae Jung delivered an official apology to the adopted Koreans for having adopted them away internationally. At the same time, his wife, Lee Hee-ho, designated herself as a supporter and patron of adopted Koreans, and as a result during President Kim's term, the adoption issue was firmly put on the country's political agenda. However, he was not able to stop the practice itself when strong voices again demanded it at the time of the 2002 World Cup, which featured a debate that reprised the 1988 Olympic Games discussion.

Close to 2,500 Korean children are still placed for adoption in eight different Western countries every year, and practically all of them are

mothered by teenage high school pupils or young, middle-class, college students. They give birth at secluded maternity homes and clinics belonging to the agencies that use them to secure a steady supply of infants, healthy or handicapped, for an insatiable adoption market in the West. Infertility is nowadays the prime motive on the demand side; eugenic thinking and the desire to continue to uphold a patriarchal norm system within the country plays an important role on the supply side. Over half a century of international adoption from Korea has produced a population of more than 160,000 overseas adopted Koreans, of whom two thirds have ended up in United States, close to 25,000 in the three main Scandinavian countries, around 10,000 each in France and in the region of Be-Ne-Lux, and the rest spread out in Germany, Switzerland, Italy, England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>8</sup> Korea is the uncontested, number one supplying country in the field of international adoption, and adopted Koreans make up approximately one third of the estimated 500,000 international adoption placements since the 1950s. This group constitutes the absolute or relative majority of all international adoptees in every country affected by Korean adoption, and in many cases also fully dominates the ethnic Korean presence in many countries outside Korea.

### **Western Paternalistic Colonialism and Korean Patriarchal Nationalism**

Together with other critical postcolonial and feminist writers on international adoption, I consider the involuntary displacement of hundreds of thousands of non-Western children on a worldwide scale after formal de-colonization both a clear reflection of a still-existing colonial reality and racial hierarchy, and a grim reminder of the astronomical power imbalance between the West and its former colonies.<sup>9</sup> This is also the approach of Anthony Shiu in his lucid and powerful critique of international adoption. He analyzes the logic, with its flexible accumulation of human commodities, and the ethnic chic of the international adoption market. Janice Raymond links international adoption directly to other global modes of sexual and reproductive exploitation, like the trafficking in women and sexual slavery, the marketing of surrogacy and “intrauterine adoption,” and the trade in

organs and fetal tissues (144–54).

Further, it cannot be a coincidence that of the leading countries supplying children for international adoption to the West, almost all fall under the American sphere of influence and have been exposed to American military intervention, presence, or occupation, even when civil wars, ethnic cleansing of minorities, and corrupt dictatorships must also be considered to explain why these countries—including Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, and Sri Lanka in Asia, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Peru, Honduras, Haiti, Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala in South America, and Ethiopia and South Africa in Africa—became involved with the practice in the first place. The fact that Asia demographically dominates as a supplying continent further underscores the Orientalist imagery at work: in many Western countries, Asian children are perceived as docile and submissive, clever and hardworking, and quiet and kind. The state of international adoption also brutally reflects current geopolitical transformations and conditions, as evidenced by the fact that Iran stopped sending away children for adoption after the Islamic Revolution, that South Africa and Russia and other Eastern European countries started to adopt away children after the fall of apartheid and Communism, and that China and Vietnam started to get involved with international adoption as part of their respective reform politics and opening up to the West.

Having procured at least half a million children for the West during a period of fifty years, as an institution, contemporary international adoption has many parallels to the Atlantic slave trade through which eleven million Africans were shipped to the New World; to indentured labor policies through which twelve million Indians and Chinese were dispatched to serve as coolies in the vast European empires; and to the present day's massive trafficking of women for international marriage and sexual exploitation. There is no study comparing these four forced migrations, conceptualized as a long Western tradition of intercontinentally transporting non-white populations, though one would be highly appreciated. Igor Kopytoff has pointed out the parallels between the commodification of slaves and adoptees in his study of the cultural biography of commodities. A crucial difference between these migrations is of course that the slave trade and indentured labor belong

to historical practice, and trafficking in women is illegal and universally condemned. Only international adoption remains uncontested, made legal through various “international” conventions, which in reality privilege Western concepts of adoption before non-Western ones. International adoption is even on the increase after the end of the Cold War as a result of the globalization of predatory neo-liberal capitalism, recent biopolitical transformations in the international division of labor, the mass popularization of the discourse of multiculturalism, and a rapidly falling middle-class birth rate in the West.<sup>10</sup>

Robert Harms’ detailed treatise on the voyage of the French slave ship, the *Diligent*, in the 1730s helps to substantiate my argument. Numerous striking similarities come to mind when comparing the slave trade and international adoption. Both practices are driven by insatiable consumer demand and cynical profit making, and utilize a highly advanced system of pricing where the young and the healthy are most valued. Both are dependent on the existence of native intermediaries in the form of slave hunters and adoption agencies, as well as on a global transportation system of ship routes and flight logistics. Both the slaves and the adoptees are separated from their parents, siblings, and relatives at an early age; stripped of their original cultures and languages; reborn at harbors and airports; Christianized; re-baptized and given the name of their master, and in the end retain only a racialized, non-white body that has been branded or given a case number. In addition, both practices are legitimized by the same shallow argument that when moved to their new homes, the actual material situation of the slaves and the adoptees are unquestionably greatly bettered. Finally, both groups are brought over only to please and satisfy the needs and desires of their well-to-do buyers and owners.

The fate of adopted Koreans, intimately linked to social upheavals and ruptures caused by Japanese colonialism, American imperialism, and the modernization process taking place during authoritarian regimes, must be counted as not only one of the most extreme experiences for Koreans, but also as one of the most forgotten moments of the country’s modern history. I argue that adopted Koreans, together with the so-called comfort women, can well be seen as subalterns in the sense Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern Studies Group use the term: like subalterns, Korean adoptees are silenced as



a result of the cultural and patriarchal feelings of shame and dishonor that surround these two stigmatized groups. Like the Hindu woman practicing *sati*, or widow burning, who Spivak uses as an example in her opposition to the epistemic violence and blatant Eurocentric bias of Deleuze and Foucault, the adopted Koreans simply cannot speak for themselves. They are instead represented as mute physical objects by supplying and receiving governments, as grateful rescue objects by adoption agencies and adoptive parents, and as model diversity posters by adoption researchers. But they are not alone: if anyone must be considered as subalterns within the Korean society, given the fact that both the adopted Koreans and the comfort women at least recently actually have started to come out and raise their voices, it must be the biological parents of the adoptees and particularly their mothers.<sup>11</sup>

The Korean adoption issue is strongly gendered, a reality that parallels the public debate surrounding the comfort women. Both Hyunah Yang and You-Me Park show that instead of addressing the complicity of Korean men who acted as intermediaries and forced, coerced, and tricked women to “enlist”—and the elusive guilt arising from that complicity—the discourse on the comfort women has resulted in the reinforcement of patriarchal nationalism, the women being perceived as having soiled the dignity of the nation. As Chunghee Sarah Soh reminds us when commenting on the comfort women debate, Korean women have indeed repeatedly paid the price to “save the nation” and act as “patriots” with their bodies, since they have often been sent away as tributes or gifts to please dominant powers. Soh sees this as a result of a binary classification between what she calls those women who marry, who were socialized into selfless wives and devoted mothers, and women who “date,” who were recruited and trained to entertain and offer their bodies. With a long history of vassalage under Chinese, Japanese, and American imperialism, and governed by the Confucian concept of serving the dominating power, Korean women have become court ladies to the Mongols, tributary women to the Ming emperors, captives to the Manchu dynasty, comfort women to the Japanese, war brides and military prostitutes to the Americans, and *kisaeng* girls to foreign businessmen and tourists. It is natural to add adopted children to this long Korean tradition of trafficking in human beings as tributary gifts.

Jin-kyung Park points out that the recent uncovering of the comfort women's previously subjugated self-narratives allows us to understand the contradictory complexities of colonial power not only coming from the side of the Japanese, but also from native Koreans in their complicit role as intermediaries in mobilizing and shipping out comfort women. This is analogous to today's role of the Korean government and adoption agencies in tracking down and flying out Korean children for international adoption to Westerners. A parallel to this may be found in the way oral tradition in West Africa remembers slavery and tries to cope with cultural feelings of guilt for having played an intermediary role in the slave trade.<sup>12</sup>

### **Conceptualizing the Adopted Korean Experience**

The first generation of adopted Koreans, adopted primarily to the United States in the early 1950s, started to write their life stories as early as the end of the 1960s; from the early 1990s several of these autobiographical texts were also published in Korean. However, it was not until the middle of the 1990s, with the breakthrough of the internet, that adopted Koreans started to be more visible and make themselves more heard in the public space. Ever since there has been a veritable explosion of cultural and autobiographical works written and produced by adopted Koreans. They range from novels, poems, and art works, to documentaries and films. In these texts, for the first time, adopted Koreans become active agents capable of creating their own social spaces and expressing their own authentic voices, instead of just being the valuable commodities of Korea's adoption program, grateful and privileged children of Western elite families, or idealized and perfectly assimilated adoptees in academic research.

Simultaneously, adopted Koreans have also started to organize themselves both nationally and globally. The first association for adopted Koreans was formed in Sweden in 1986, and today there are equivalent associations in almost every Western country or region that has a sizeable adopted Korean population, including numerous city-based local networks and circles. These associations function as affinity groups offering peer counseling, mentoring, and self-support; they also organize a wide range of activities, give out journals and

publications, have their own homepages and listservs, and hold conferences and events. In addition, there are several solely internet-based groups, pointing to the fact that the adopted Korean movement can also very much be a virtual community just like those created by so many other marginalized groups who have benefited greatly from the internet. This organized adopted Korean movement, reaching out to an estimated 5 to 20 percent of adoptees from Korea in the various geographical locations, started to interact globally in the 1990s. The most important international networking happened at three subsequent International Gatherings, the first one in Washington D.C. in 1999, the second two years later in Oslo, Norway, and the third in 2004 in Seoul, Korea. The concept of the Gathering has resulted in frequent regional mini-gatherings in the U.S., while in Europe the annual Arierang week in the Netherlands functions as an informal pan-European meeting of Korean adoptees. Finally, a growing number of adopted Koreans who have re-settled in Korea have created their own groups. This *ethnogenesis* of an adopted Korean community, with its extremely heterogeneous, diverse, and completely de-territorialized character, takes place in the interstitial space between the birth country's nationalist vision of a global Korean community where the adoptees are automatically essentialized as Korean brethren and expected to reconnect with the "Motherland," and an arrogant Western culture demanding colonial subordination, complete assimilation, and absolute loyalty.

Considering these developments, it should not come as a surprise that adopted Koreans in recent years have also turned into objects of study in academia. This research trend is symptomatically dominated by adopted Koreans themselves and generally focuses on the question of a specific adopted Korean identity and community.<sup>13</sup> Since the end of the 1990s, other non-adoptee academicians have also increasingly come to write about different aspects of the adopted Korean experience. Eleana Kim has examined the recent efflorescence of adopted Korean auto-ethnographical productions linked to the emerging adopted Korean movement, focusing on its remarkably artistic and creative aspect. Its own writers and poets, painters and artists, filmmakers and photographers, and performers, as well as its anthologies and yearbooks, have been praised by critics; novels

by and about adopted Koreans have become bestsellers and have been translated into Korean; and documentaries have been aired nationwide in countries such as the U.S. and received prestigious prizes. Moreover, as Dani Isaac Meier observes, adopted Koreans are continuously negotiating their multiple racial and ethnic subject positions. Catherine Ceniza Choy and Gregory Paul Choy discuss the racialization of Korean adoptee bodies in their critique of false Western assimilationist policies, Sonjia Hyon writes about the creation of a virtual diasporic community of adopted Koreans in cyberspace, and David Eng conceptualizes the community of adopted Koreans as a queer diaspora in his extraordinary examination of the psychic realm of Korean adopteehood.

### **Reading Adopted Korean Self-Narratives**

#### *The Theory*

Using a combination of Judith Butler's performativity theory and Homi Bhabha's theory of hybridity as the theoretical background, I will now read a selected number of adopted Korean self-narratives and focus on the ethnic subjectivities and identifications expressed in these texts. Ever since the so-called linguistic turn in 1960s-era Western philosophy, grounded in Saussure's language theories and manifested in poststructuralism, the de-centering of the autonomous subject has been one of the main objects of concern for philosophers, together with a fundamental critique of metaphysical thinking and linear temporality, and a questioning of previously naturalized hierarchical structures and binary oppositions. Two milestones in this development draw eclectically and multi-disciplinarily on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Althusserian Marxism, and a Foucauldian understanding of power: queer and feminist theorist Judith Butler's groundbreaking theory of performativity focusing mainly on the categories of gender and sexuality, and postcolonial and poststructuralist theorist Homi Bhabha's seminal theorizations of hybridity and his concept of third space, focusing on the categories of race and ethnicity.

Butler adheres to a radical poststructuralist and social constructivist understanding of language as producing and constituting subjectivity

instead of reflecting and corresponding to an autonomous identity. Subject formation or subjection takes place on the very level of the body, regardless of anatomical features and biological differences. The subject comes into existence by entering the social order, and sustains its subject position or subjectivity through the endless repetition or iterability of what are known as performatives. In other words, the subject originates from an exterior space and not from a psychic interior, which instead becomes an effect of outside acculturation and socialization. We may believe in an innate, coherent, independent and stable identity, but in reality it is imposed on our bodies and incorporated in our minds, governed by cultural traditions and social conventions, and maintained and reproduced by the help of constant reenactment, recitation, and the reiteration of performatives. This performative character of the subject simultaneously constitutes its stability and its vulnerability, as it is always possible to oppose and subvert, and re-signify and transform, this iterability of performatives to create new subject positions.

However, it is important to remember that performativity theory is not about advocating a strategy of individualistic or, even worse, neo-liberal identity politics in the form of free role-playing and strange theatrical gestures. Instead, Butler reminds us that subject formation is heavily constrained by a ritualized iterability of cultural rites and social norms policing and regulating the subject under the threat of marginalization or even death. This constraint takes place through the use of prohibition or taboo that not only chooses what is socially acceptable but also creates a foreclosed desire for what is not acceptable, which in turn results in an unresolved grief or melancholia in the subject for being forbidden to perform this desire. The constrained aspect of subject formation of course becomes extremely productive for Butler in her understanding of the upholding of gender difference and the heterosexual matrix. Lastly, Butler also admits that sometimes bodies do matter, as the surface of some bodies often are inscribed with meanings, and that these inscriptions always have a history—making such bodies particularly vulnerable to deeply ingrained and historicized discourses, imaginaries, and interpellations.

Hybridity, a key term in postcolonial studies, stands for the transcultural crossroads and spaces generated by the colonial encounter,

and is usually associated with colonial subjects and postcolonial migrants. Homi Bhabha, the leading postcolonial theorist, has developed the most influential and at the same time most controversial theory of hybridity with his concept of third space. For Bhabha, inspired by the writings of Frantz Fanon, the relationship between the colonialist Self and the colonized Other is always marked by ambivalence, and the boundary between them is never totally divided, separated or closed. Instead, while the former is never fully accepting of the colonizer's image of him or her as the Other, the latter is never fully able to reproduce its authority and uphold its Self completely, so both colonized and colonizer, having "contaminated" each other, end up with split and incomplete identities. It is exactly in the interstice between the colonizer and the colonized that hybridity enters and is to be located, in the form of the third space. The third space is an in-between and neither-nor space characterized by constant signification, translation, and negotiation where there is neither a beginning nor an end, nor any unity nor purity, where time meets space, and where primordial notions of culture and nation have been replaced by a floating and multiple, indistinguishable and indeterminate existence. Finally, it is important to note that the hybridized is rendered different from both the colonizer and the colonized and becomes an Other between, beside, and beyond both cultures and worlds, and both the majority society and the minority community.

### *The Texts*

Both my Danish and my American family are white, all my friends here in Denmark are white . . . my husband is white . . . and my two sons are often mistaken for being white. So whether I like it or not—and I actually don't—I've developed a white identity. When I look in the mirror I'm actually surprised to see an Asian woman and I honestly don't know how to feel about the woman I see. I actually expect to see a white woman with rosy skin, blond hair and blue eyes. (Danish Asian)

Growing up in a large Swedish community in the Midwest introduced me to the first criteria of what was considered the

norm. Fair skin and blond hair were the standards I measured myself against. Honestly, I had no idea I didn't fit that description unless I saw my reflection in the mirror. I thought of myself as a Caucasian. What a shock to find out that I wasn't. (Smith 106)

I used to believe I was white. At least I was completely emotionally invested in this belief. Theoretically I was white, my family is white, the community I grew up in was white, and I could not point out Korea on a map, nor did I care about such place. The only thing I heard about Korea was that they ate dogs. . . . However, my image staring back at me in the mirror betrayed such a belief . . . I hated myself, this betrayal, being given such a look without any knowledge of where it came from. (Young Hee 86)

The first point of departure when examining how adopted Koreans are subjectified must be the fact that they have usually been subjected to self-identification as white after having grown up with a white family and living in wholly white surroundings. This seemingly gives strong empirical support for Butler's performativity theory, which says that subject formation is not necessarily tied to material bodily facts, and for Bhabha's hybridity theory, which argues that the colonizer and the colonized are forever implicated with and contaminate each other. So in line with this, one could say that adopted Koreans uphold this white subjectivity by constantly copying, imitating and mimicking whiteness on an everyday level, meaning that they are usually able to pass as native Westerners in spite of having a physically Korean appearance. In this regard, adopted Koreans can be likened to ethnic drags and cross-dressers, transvestites or even transsexuals or the transgendered who are troubling, mocking and parodying supposedly fixed racial, ethnic, and national identities and belongings. This subversive and liberating interpretation of the white subjectivization of adopted Korean is indeed compelling and also appealing as it actually means that there is no real, authentic, or original way of being white. Rather, as adopted Koreans have acquired a white self-identification and are able to perform whiteness more or less to perfection, they must also be considered as whites. To put it simply: adopted Koreans think of

themselves as being white Westerners, in spite of having a Korean origin and a Korean appearance. Given that different forms of colonialism and integrationist policies allowed and allow differential access for non-whites to some kind of white Western nationalist belonging, have adopted Koreans managed to break the walls of whiteness, which in the old colonial days seemed so impregnable even for mixed-race people who could barely pass as whites? Unfortunately, I do not think so, even if I still firmly adhere to a social constructivist and performative understanding of identities.

To overcome the premature celebration of postcoloniality, I argue that this use of hybridity theories must suggest that to have a white self-identification as a non-white person coming from a non-Western country must be seen as problematic when colonialism is taken into account. The acquiring of a white subject position is also made mandatory in adoption research, and a white self-identification is even praised by an adoption ideology, falsely representing international adoption as a physical bond between cultures and a symbol for racial harmony, and valorizing adoptees as living diversity posters. It has also led proponents for international adoption to argue that a white subject position is exactly what diasporic non-whites need to be able to survive in a world of white supremacy and white privileges, and made them conceptualize transracial and international adoptive families as examples of post-identitarian, post-nationalist, post-ethnic, post-racial or even non-racial kinship. This tendency is present in several recent works by Western adoption researchers inspired by postmodern theory of whom most are adoptive parents themselves, including Howell, Lal, and Yngvesson. Rather, for me, to have a white subjecthood makes adopted Koreans (together with other international and transracial adoptees) absolutely unique in the history of colonialism: never before has any non-white group ever been subjectivized as white, with the exception perhaps of a few individuals among slaves and coolies who were also completely severed from their biological parents and cultural backgrounds. This bizarre phenomenon of having a completely distorted physical self-image, which logically leads to self-hate, self-alienation, and self-destructiveness and makes adopted Koreans strangers to their own bodies, can only be likened to the grim experiment taking place in the story of the emperor's new clothes, or to how new-born ducks can



be seduced into believing that human beings are their parents.

Colonial subjects have of course historically always desired whiteness and wanted to have white bodies, and this desiring of whiteness particularly concerns the descendants of slaves, coolies, and postcolonial migrants living in Western countries. However, even if those groups can be said to be fully Westernized on a cultural level, they are still racially subjectivized as non-whites. Accordingly, though they desire whiteness, they have not truly acquired a white subject position. In this paradigm, international adoption can truly be seen as the final triumph of the colonial project: international adoptees are the most whitened and Westernized, and the most “integrated” and “assimilated” colonial subalterns ever in the history of colonialism. Adopted Koreans are, in other words, in no way a danger to the upholding of cultural homogeneity and social harmony in Western countries, and in this way they also become the most perfect immigrants.

So the subject formation of adopted Koreans cannot be reduced to something as simple and unproblematic as the acquiring and performing of whiteness. This might have been the case in an ideal world, but having a body marked and inscribed with a long history of Otherness, alterity, and out-of-placeness in a Western culture and society totally imbued with colonialism and racism actually does matter. In spite of being given a Western name and growing up in a white family, and in spite of only speaking a Western language and behaving like a Westerner, having a non-white body does create limitations to the adoptee’s ability to sustain a white subjectivity. The frequent, painful, and humiliating moments when adopted Koreans are revealed and exposed as pastiches and copycats are good examples of what Butler calls a misfire: a performative that fails to reproduce its intended effect and instead ends infelicitously. So when are adopted Koreans failing to maintain a white subjecthood, when are they misfiring and performing infelicitously? What is exactly interrupting and fragmenting, destroying and crushing their white self-identification? In the autobiographical works of adopted Koreans, I have identified three principal and often sequential interventions when others do not acknowledge, accept and take them as white Westerners. These moments occur when the imaginary of Orientalism, the discourse of immigrantism and the interpellation of Koreanness intervene and the adoptees are imagined

as ethnic stereotypes, addressed as non-Western immigrants, or as Asian tourists or as businessmen on visits, and this information means the adoptees are interpellated as overseas Koreans.

Growing up, I was the perfect abducted daughter. Good, smart, considerate. I had a close relationship with my abductive parents, and I felt like I really loved them. So hearing them make comments like, “Our daughter is so obedient, it must be in her genes!” and listening to my abductive family use words like “Oriental,” “Chinaman,” and “China doll” to describe me and other Asians seriously sucked. (Kim, So Yung 3)

Sometimes my adoptive mother will see an Asian woman on tv and declare, “Oh she looks just like you!” Or when we eat in a Chinese restaurant the first thing they will comment on will be the “ching chong Chinese music.” (Seoul One)

An Asian body signifies Orientalism, and the sudden and powerful intervention of the Orientalist imaginary turns up at the most unexpected occasions, even within the adoptive family. Apparently, having an adopted child from Korea does not stop one from being racist. The Asian body always threatens to fetishize adopted Koreans into ethnic stereotypes. It is important to note that in practice for adopted Koreans, the Orientalist imaginary is almost the only disposable, visible, mirror image of their bodies at hand, besides the white bodies surrounding them. This situation has similarities of course to those of other ethnic Koreans in Western countries, like those living in interracial relationships, or well-assimilated second generation Koreans or those of mixed-race origin, since these groups usually are also alienated from both their homeland and the mainstream Korean diaspora community. However, what makes the state of Korean adopteehood so unique is the complete severance of biological ties, cultural routes, and social connections to all kinds of Koreanness whatsoever. This is also the reason behind their ambivalent response to Orientalist imaginary as it at least offers an image of their bodies, while other diasporic Koreans do not recognize themselves, distance themselves, and take Orientalist discourse claiming that Asian men are

either evil villains or ugly nerds, and that Asian women are subservient, docile, hypersexual and hyperfeminine, as misrepresentation and as distorted fiction. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that many adopted Koreans also uncritically perform Orientalism, almost fully embodying the Orientalist phantasmagoria in its most gendered and heterosexual forms. Men often take on a nerdish lifestyle, while women instead exoticize themselves: "I remember feeling pulled between being white and being Asian when I watched 'Miss Saigon' the first time. . . . I didn't feel Asian, but as white as the friends who sat next to me. And yet the stirrings of identity were beginning, because I was emotionally drawn to the Asian American actors. . . . Watching the play was exhilarating. . . . It was like falling in love. I was giddy with the American dream it presented, tearful over the hardships of war, and became infatuated with the relationship between Kim and Chris, the lovers the story focused on. It was love, and I fell hard for 'Miss Saigon.' . . . I let myself be wooed by decent music, dramatic and lavish sets, and the story of a prostitute who was sold for a night of sex with an American Marine, fell in love, bore their child, and ended up killing herself in a star-spangled flame of sacrifice" (Coughlin).

For others, the ever-present popular cultural manifestations of Orientalism in Western culture completely destroyed their self-esteem and self-respect, resulting in self-loathing and self-contempt: "I didn't want to be like the Asian geeks I saw in movies . . . I'd watch with my lighter-complexioned friends and laugh along with them. Laughing, I thought, would distance me from the popular, Asian-looking icons of American humor. I did not want to be another typical Asian overachiever, both praised as a model minority that other people of color should follow and denigrated as an emasculated sex-starved wallflower. I tried to stay away from other Asian guys at school" (Kearly 64). Kristin Penaskovic writes: "I am Korean but, God, do I wish I was white!" To me, whiteness was the embodiment of everything good, everything pure. Who was always the good guy in the cartoons I watched after school? Why, the man in the white cowboy hat, of course . . . Thus, my idealization of the color white stemmed from my early experiences, and I ultimately succeeded in internalizing the dominant culture's standards and imprisoning myself in a cell of self-hatred" (35).

Not only do adoptees endure (and perform) Orientalism, they always risk the threat of being taken for a non-Western immigrant of Asian origin by a discourse of immigrantism dividing native whites from immigrant non-whites. In response they usually perform whiteness even more intensely and often in combination with an over-exaggerated middle-classness and infantilism, in the hopes of being taken for an adoptive child of a white elite family, and not as a working-class adult Asian immigrant: “In my daily plan of achieving perfection, I made sure I was never associated with any of the other Korean adoptees at school. This worked out great because they were also hiding out in their other identities. What I hadn’t anticipated was the first Hmong family that came to my school. I felt their stares in the hallway. They were immediately drawn to that thing I hated most about myself then—my Asian features. I avoided them like the plague. I figured they might blow my cover and actually call to attention to the fact that I looked like them” (Kase 22). And Jamie Kemp reports that “During this period, there was no way I would be caught dead in a group of other Asian people. My perception of Asians at the time was negative because of what many of my peers said about Asian people who they assumed were immigrants—‘Oh look they are fresh off the boat.’ Meaning, I’d probably look like someone who only spoke a foreign group of syllables and consonants that came out the same, ‘Me how ping pong’ (44). In extreme examples of this over-performed whiteness, some Korean adoptees acquired racist views and even hung around with right-wing extremists and Nazis. The other choice is to identify with Asian immigrants, but this is not an easy option, as adopted Koreans often end up as outsiders in both the white world and among immigrant communities: “My Asian friends tell me that other Korean adoptees are too white, like bananas. They tell me it is good that I am learning about what it is to be Asian-American. What it is to be a person of color. And how white people think of me. I have white parents . . . Twinkie, banana, sell-out. I’ve heard them all before, and hate them just the same. . . . I can see the racism from all my white friends, from my grandparents, and cousins. . . . They say that my racism is internalized and that I have been tricked into believing the great white lie. Maybe I have. But what are they telling me? That I should hate my father? . . . White people think I’m just some gook.

White people who don't know me, that is. Can you speak English? Oh your English is very good. Where are you from? How long have you lived in America? I didn't really know what to say to that. How can I say that I feel I am more American than you, you third generation European immigrant. My family has been here since the 18th Century. My great-great-great-grandfather was making money in New York while yours was working some field in another country. Don't talk to me about speaking English. My mother is an English professor. That is what I think when white people are racist to me. What about Koreans? I'm one of them right? Wrong. Maybe it's just me, but I really feel out of place when I am around them. I also feel very . . . good. I'm one of them, yet there is always a sense of exclusion. . . . I need their acceptance. But I would rather not risk their rejection and simply just not have anything to do with them" (Hinds).

Recently Korean nationalism has started to call for adopted Koreans to "come back" and "return home." This essentialism, in the form of Koreanness—by letting oneself be reclaimed by Korean ethnonationalistic body politics and become a wannabe-Korean, is naturally also threatening to a white subject position. However, this is again not an easy alternative, given the almost incomplete inseparability between race, language, and culture in Korean nationalism. As Sunny Diaz reports, "This year in Korea has been a challenge for me particularly because I do not speak Korean well . . . Basically, people here think I'm some person who's trying to make them angry by deliberately not speaking what should obviously be my native language, based on my physical appearance. This is how most people react when they first meet me. And it always goes like this . . . : A guy in the street stops to ask me directions, speaking in rapid-fire Korean . . . After I clearly state that I don't speak Korean, the questions begin. First question: 'Aren't you Korean?' Second question: 'Well, then, don't you speak Korean?' Third question: 'Why not? Didn't your mother-father-[the] other Korean influences you had in your life growing up, teach you Korean?' How do you answer to this type of mentality? You can't. You will honestly go crazy if you try to."

It is my conviction that this besieged subject position as white, made fragile by having a non-white body that is perpetually under the threat of being fetishized, racialized, and essentialized, results in a permanent

state of tremendous stress, rage, agony, and melancholia, as well as the alienation and loneliness of never being able to fit in and always feeling like a misfit and an outsider. Kunya Des Jardins describes her experience: "Many have faced racial teasing and discrimination, looking different and being treated differently from their peers, taunts as children calling them 'Chinks' or 'Japs,' 'flat-face' or 'squint-eye' . . . the harm is doubly intensified by the adoptee's ignorance of his or her own culture and origin, lack of having many, if any, models; having to explain that 'No, I'm not Chinese or Japanese—I'm Korean' and not really knowing what that means. The difficulty that all adolescents face in trying to fit in with their peers is intensified in trying to look 'white,' act 'white,' and not looking like the people you are most likely to imitate—one's parents" (16). And Su Niles says that: "I walk in this skin. And in this skin, I am any American. A single image has been etched inside of me . . . But my skin conflicts with me. The world sees me as a Color. Crossing the culture gap with other pioneers who are braving the elements of their own prejudices, I realize how much energy it takes to open the mind, however willing the spirit. And I slam up against the impenetrable wall. It hurts so much to still be on the outside. It is altogether a lovely pain, one with which I am intimate" (23).

This pain and dislocation may also explain the high preponderance of suicide rates, mental illnesses, and social problems among international adoptees as reflected in the depressing and worrying results of recent Swedish adoption research that also bridges the gap between quantitative and qualitative studies.<sup>14</sup> New Swedish adoption research is based on huge samples of international adoptees from population registers, and shows that many adult adoptees have serious problems related to socio-economic and psycho-social issues such as substance abuse and suicide attempts, as well as criminality and unemployment, in spite of having been adopted by couples or singles predominantly belonging to the Swedish elite, as it is estimated that 90 percent of the adoptive parents belong to Sweden's upper and middle classes.<sup>15</sup> Having nowhere to hide and rest, no place to find solace, no free zone or safe space, and no one to defend (or at least understand and emphasize with) them as other non-Western immigrants from Asia and Korea arguably have in the form of families and friends,

adopted Koreans find they have death in the form of suicide as the ultimate way to escape from an endless struggle to survive, negotiate, and navigate between all these self-identifications, imaginaries, discourses, and interpellations, and in the end to be left alone. In this interpretation to the data, I am consciously ignoring and leaving behind mainstream positivistic adoption research dominated by psychologists and psychiatrists, which instead wants to explain such “deviant” results among international adoptees with genetic defects, low IQs, separation traumas, and attachment disorders. My interpretation is also a critique of post-modern concepts of nomadism and cosmopolitanism that glorify liminal existences and border crossings: passing and transgressing like an ethnic chameleon is not always either a self-liberatory act nor a pleasant state.

During childhood, this constant battle of acceptance of my heritage and the rejection of my looks created a kind of a constant, inner displacement, a gap which widened as I grew older. It helps when I can speak—because through my fluent Danish language, I can express my cultural heritage. . . . But when I am silent, my appearance overpowers me and takes control. This dominance makes me feel, on the one hand, sad. . . . On the other hand, I am sometimes overwhelmed by the longing to escape myself, which makes me extremely angry, because I feel predestined in a negative way. The result is a lack of balance when it comes to identity. I was looking for white features, hoping I was biracial, longing for blond hair, blue eyes, and ultimately hating my body and avoiding mirrors. (Gullach 57)

Our search for ourselves does not have an end—neither does the pain. You saw that, but what you couldn’t see was a way to ease the difficulty of your earthly journey. Somewhere along the way, you forgot to open your eyes and catch a glimpse of hope. A friend recently commented that we, as adopted Koreans, live a lie. In order to assimilate into not only a white society, but also our adoptive families, we learn to see ourselves as others want to see us. We turn our lies into betrayal—of ourselves. Maybe you got tired of wearing your mask. Maybe you forgot who existed

beneath the weight of that façade. (Ruth 35)

Alienation, or the feeling that one is alien, is unavoidable when people ask incessantly, “So where are you from? No, where are you really from?” Since when is “I’m from Austin, Minnesota” not a good enough answer? . . . Most adoptees have an “a-ha” moment at some point in their lives when they look in the mirror and realize, “I’m not white.” A painful self-consciousness usually follows, with sometimes comical and sometimes tragic attempts to “fit in” with the majority. I know a few adoptees who, in their childhood, would have literally “whitewashed” themselves if physically possible. Feeling rejected for never being white enough, some adoptees turn their backs on the dominant culture and look for acceptance and affirmation in the Korean American community, or will even go visit the “motherland.” Sadly, many discover even more hostility from the Korean people for not being “Korean enough.” . . . So the adoptee is left with the bewildering question: Who am I if I’m not white enough for America and not Korean enough for Korea? Where do I go from here? (Wood)

The adopted Korean existence is, in other words, not only characterized by paradoxical or even bizarre identifications, but also by constant, unwilling and uncanny passings. Passing is a familiar trope in African American literature, where it once evoked the stereotype of the tragic mulatto living on the borders of both the black minority community and the white majority society, suffering from a compulsory psychic crisis, and constantly fearing to be revealed and exposed as not completely white. Probably the most famous literary text of the Harlem Renaissance dealing with this issue is the novel *Passing* (1929), written by Nella Larsen who was herself of mixed origin: her father was a Caribbean and her mother Danish.<sup>16</sup> In *Passing*, a mixed-race woman named Clare passes as white and lives with Bellew, a white man who is a racist and detests black people. At the same time she is desired by Irene, another mixed woman who generally does not pass and tries to conceal her homosexual feelings. Trapped between this dangerous conflation of forbidden transgressions of race and sexuality, Clare is



finally exposed as a black woman and dies, either committing suicide or being killed by Irene. Through her death, Bellew regains his whiteness and Irene her heterosexuality.

In another work of the Harlem Renaissance, examined by Cynthia Callahan, the relationship between passing and adoption is addressed explicitly: Charles Chesnutt's novel *The Quarry*, which was rejected by a publishing house in 1928, and instead published posthumously in 1999. In this novel, a boy named Donald is a domestic adoptee of a white couple known as the Seatons. However, when Donald grows up rumors start that he has a mixed background. The Seatons visit the adoption agency and learn that this is correct: his biological father was a so-called "light mulatto." As a result, he is re-adopted into a working-class black family named the Glovers, who raise and educate him like an African American. During adolescence as a consequence of his light complexion, he gets many opportunities to pass as white, but he rejects them all successively. Years later, the Seatons are notified by the agency that they had mixed up the records, and that Donald is not mixed but of Anglo-American descent. The Seatons ask Donald to come back to them, telling him that they will give him all the opportunities a rich, middle-class white man can have, but Donald refuses and prefers to remain with his adopted community.

For adopted Koreans, unlike for Donald and those African Americans who pass, the ability to pass is in no way a voluntary one. Instead, it has been enforced on them. They have been born in Korea, adopted to the West, and socialized as whites absolutely without their own knowledge and consent. Most adopted Koreans are probably not even always conscious of the fact that they are able to pass, even if they are arguably sometimes aware that they can be identified with Asia and Korea in certain contexts and situations. However as Butler always reminds us in her analysis of Larsens's *Passing*, the boundaries between different power asymmetries are governed by numerous regulatory and circumscribing juridical laws, cultural customs and social conventions which delimit and constrain the potentialities for passing, and which punish those who dare to by social marginalization or biological death as in the case of Clare (*Bodies* 167–85). So it may be that adopted Koreans are disembedded, free-floating signifiers and bodies who have gone completely out-of-place and out-of-control, and who constantly

disturb and disquiet the boundaries of race, culture and nationality, but just like Clare they always risk ending up severely punished for their transgressions. Just like Donald in Chesnutt's *The Quarry*, they also mostly chose to stay with the family and community that fostered them, even if they are often abused within them.

## Conclusion

To conclude, my main argument is that adopted Koreans have been fully acculturated and socialized into a self-identification as white, while at the same time having an Asian body. They are incessantly liable to a whole regime of Orientalist imaginaries that try to fetishize them into an ethnic stereotype. Furthermore, as non-white persons, Korean adoptees face an ever-present discourse of immigrantism that wants to racialize them into non-Western immigrants, and lastly, as biological Koreans, nowadays they are also warmly interpellated by a nationalistic diaspora policy essentializing them into and hailing them as overseas Koreans. Contrary to the liberationist interpretations of Butler's performativity theory so common in queer studies, I regard this acquiring of a white self-identification by adopted Koreans as a complete subordination to white hegemonic power, and as a magnificent symbol of the final triumph of the colonial project. Here again, it is important to note that this does not mean that I am advocating an essentialist understanding of what a non-white body should consist of, as I am aware of the fact that the white subjectivization of adopted Koreans may also well be interpreted as a subversive undermining of whiteness itself. However, we understand its revolutionary potential on a theoretical level, I believe that this self-identification is highly problematic in real life for a non-white person of a non-Western descent living in a heavily racialized and colonial culture like the Western one. In this way, I go against dominant normative adoption ideology where the acquiring of a white self-identification is the primary goal of international adoption itself, conceptualized as attachment and assimilation, and even idealized as a blessing. I further argue that this white self-identification is constantly questioned and disturbed by the mighty interventions of the colonial imaginary of Orientalism, the racist discourse of immigrantism, and the nationalist interpellation of Koreanness, which always threaten

to turn adopted Koreans into Oriental stereotypes, Asian immigrants or tourists, and ethnic Koreans. The dilemma of the Korean adoptee also sends out signals to other non-Western immigrants in Western countries who struggle so deeply and painfully to fit in, to “assimilate” and “integrate”: this struggle is meaningless, as they will never be fully acknowledged as Westerners.

I am aware that theories of hybridity and the third space are mostly linked to colonized subjects and postcolonial diasporas. However, for me it is the adopted Koreans who provide the most perfect example of a third-space existence going beyond all kinds of classical categories normally associated with ethnicities and diasporas, like kinship and territory, culture, religion, and language, and memory, and myth, because they are completely severed, estranged, and isolated from both the North and South Korean national communities and other diasporized Korean, Asian and non-Western minorities, as well as being marginalized and otherized in their Western host countries. Therefore my use of Bhabha’s third space derives its legitimization from a cautious and critical understanding of the meaning of hybridity. In this study, I consciously do this by refusing to romance the state of hybridity, by refusing to disregard the brutal violence present in the colonial encounter, by not fetishizing and racializing the hybridized as a bridge between cultures and as a symbol for interethnic harmony, and by understanding deeply that a marginal and liminal life and a borderline existence is most often not a voluntary choice. Instead, I agree with Ella Shohat’s careful note that hybridity must be understood and examined in a non-universalizing manner, and above all with regards to conditions of forced migration and assimilation, internalized racism, self-rejection, and self-denigration, products of a colonialism that is still strong and an anti-colonial struggle that is far from over yet. So in spite of the general cheering for the concept in postcolonial studies, I suggest there is seldom any liberating potential in hybridity, and a third space existence as an Other among the Others is most often neither a self-chosen nor a pleasant state. However, even if many adopted Koreans understandably may feel like mistranslated white Westerners, misrepresented Orientals, misrecognized Asian immigrants or tourists, and misappropriated overseas Koreans, some of them have apparently come to accept that the only way to understand, define, and accept the

fate of being an adopted Korean is precisely to say that it as a never-ending story of misfiring and infelicitous performatives. As Jennifer Arndt describes it, “I have struggled much of my life to understand the complexities of my identity. At one point I believed I was white. Soon however, racist comments destroyed that misconception, and I grew to loathe the mirror’s reflection and its seeming contradiction. According to others, I was not American, yet in my mind neither was I Korean. After I grew to identify as Korean, I traveled to South Korea where I was promptly informed that I was actually American. In the end, I finally returned to the United States and became Korean-American. . . . After such a complex path to self-discovery, I have now dedicated my life to helping redefine what it means to be ‘American’” (50).

Lately, I have had to confront a pastiche of labels: Asian, Korean, American, and adopted. A situation such as this has made me realize identity is not something that can be buried or ignored. I have too many hyphens to interconnect what it is that supposedly constitutes my existence that I have given up attaching any kind of “label.” Ultimately, there is no term that will explain entirely that which makes me. So, call me what you will, but keep it clean. (Keats)

I don’t fit into any pre-existing categories: I’m not Caucasian, Korean, Korean-American, or biracial. . . . I can’t choose an ethnicity intelligibly. . . . Is ethnicity a question of choice? . . . But I’ve accepted my liminal status. I’ll try to dance while trapped in this perpetual limbo. (Woyke)

## Multicultural Centre, Stockholm, Sweden

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### Notes

1. See Benet; Ressler, Boothby, and Steinbock.
2. See Hong.
3. See Chakerian; Miller.
4. See Tahk.

5. See Melosh; Carp.
6. See Kirton; Solinger.
7. See Sarri, Baik, and Bombyk.
8. See Hübinette.
9. See Castañeda; Gailey; Herrmann Jr., and Kasper; Ngabonziza.
10. See Bibler Coutin, Maurer, and Yngvesson; Kapstein; Varnis.
11. Coincidentally, Spivak also mentions female factory workers in Korea as examples of subalterns in her celebrated essay, the group who provided the most children during the heydays of international adoption from Korea from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s.
12. See Bailey.
13. See Bergquist; Harp; Hübinette.
14. See Hjern, and Allebeck; Hjern, Lindblad, and Vinnerljung; Hjern, Vinnerljung, and Lindblad ; Lindblad, Hjern, and Vinnerljung.
15. To give a couple of examples, 6.6 percent of the international adoptees had a post-secondary education of three years or more compared to 20 percent among biological children of the adoptive parents whom they grew up with as siblings. 60.2 percent of the international adoptees were employed compared to 77.1 percent among ethnic Swedes, and 29.2 percent of the international adoptees were either married or co-habitants compared to 56.2 percent of the majority population. Furthermore, the odds ratio for psychiatric hospital care was found to be 3.2, for treatment for alcohol abuse: 2.6 and for drug abuse: 5.2. The odds ratio for severe criminality leading to imprisonment was 2.6 and for a suicide attempt, 3.6. The most shocking finding is a record high odds ratio of 5.0 for suicide compared to ethnic Swedes. In an international perspective, this is only comparable to the staggering suicide rates registered among indigenous people in America and Australia with, for example, a suicide rate exceeding the national rate by four times for American Indian children adopted into white families.
16. See Ahmed; Blackmer.

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