Comforting an Orphaned Nation
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Representations of International Adoption and Adopted Koreans in Korean Popular Culture

Tobias Hübinette

Stockholm University
Department of Oriental Languages
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It’s a shame that Americans call Korea the largest exporter of toys and textiles and babies. We should be ashamed of ourselves and put a stop to this immediately…In Europe, in the United States, wherever I’ve been, I’ve seen our children. I am ashamed.

Kim Dae Jung in *Asia Week*, April 6, 1990.

Now you must forget your difficult past and renew your relations with your native country in order to work together toward common goals based on the blood ties that cannot be severed even if we wanted to…Your mother country is developing day by day to become a first-rated nation in the 21st century…I hope you maintain your Korean identity and help enhance the pride of the Korean people doing your best wherever you are.


Korea is now recognized as one of the global economic powers in light of its economy ranking 12th in the world. However, Korea is not called an advanced country, because it fails to meet international standards on various norms, such as the quality of living and care of the underprivileged. It is a shame that a substantial number of Korean children are still being adopted abroad every year, mostly by the United States and wealthy European countries…there are many who think Korea is poor, because they see Korean children adopted around them even in these prosperous times in Korea…the nation should endeavour to prevent their adoption by foreign countries in consideration of its image in the international community.

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Last but not least, it is important to remember that the Korean adoption issue is not just a Korean affair as it affects more than 15 Western countries. The migration of over 150,000 Korean children, starting from the end of the Korean War, directly involves millions of individuals, including biological and adoptive parents and relatives as well as extended family members and significant others such as spouses and children. All these people personally affected by Korean adoption have from the beginning been my primary intended readership, and I therefore dedicate this study to them and, above all, to the numerous fellow adopted Koreans
whom I have met and befriended in Sweden and Scandinavia, and during trips to North America, Korea and Europe, as it is mainly from them that I have received the continuous and necessary courage, support and inspiration to write this book.
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Chapter 1

Preliminary and introduction

Visualising an embarrassing and degrading practice

The origin of this study goes back to the summer of 1996 when I visited Korea for the first time as an adult adoptee, cordially invited by the Korean Embassy of Sweden to take part in the semi-governmental World Ethnic Korean Festival (Segye hanminjok ch’ukchôn) together with hundreds of others of Korean ethnicity living outside the peninsula, and including 20 or so adoptees from countries like Norway, Denmark, Swit-

1 Source: Hankyoreh, February 10, 1989.
zerland and the United States. During the course of the festival, which turned out to be something close to a crash course in how to become a “real Korean” the proper way, the adopted Koreans, including myself, were constantly followed by journalists hunting for dramatic life stories, tearful reunions with Korean parents, and compelling pictures and footages of adoptees dressed in hanbok, eating Korean food with chopsticks or practicing traditional Buddhist dance.

After a while it was not difficult to figure out what the organisers wanted us to feel and the journalists wanted us to say, besides making us all uncomfortable with their intimate questions – that essentially we were nothing else but Koreans, and Westerners only on a superficial level even if we were also expected to be grateful to our host countries and adoptive families. Moreover, that we finally had come home to the Motherland, that we suddenly had started to appreciate Korean culture and love Korean food as if this was what we always had missed, and that we eagerly wanted to search for and reconnect with our Korean relatives and, above all, the ever-present Korean ômma. It suddenly became clear to me that in Korea, contrary to the dominant perception in Sweden and in most other receiving countries in the West, international adoption was seen as something negative and bad, even if it paradoxically still continued, and that strong feelings of loss and sadness, and compassion and pity were articulated and present in the mediated spectacle. Little did I know that this way of imagining international adoption and representing overseas adoptees already had been going on for quite some years, and that 1996, in particular, was an important year in this development with its nationwide hunt for a bone marrow donor for Brian Bauman, an adopted Korean from the US.

After the festival I continued to travel to Korea on a regular basis, and slowly but steadily, I became aware of the existence of the Korean adoption issue turning up at the most unexpected and sometimes even bizarre occasions. During a trip taken in the winter of 1998–99, without any definite intentions, I systematically started to collect material on the issue, amazed and struck by both its diversity and quantity, including articles from newspapers and journals, academic dissertations and theses, conference papers and research reports, television dramas and documentaries, feature films and pop songs, comics and children’s books, paintings and art works, and novels, plays and poems. At an early stage, it was evident
that there were also certain common ways of dealing with and treating the subject of international adoption and adopted Koreans in spite of the heterogeneity of the material, and this realisation eventually prompted me to write about the Korean adoption issue in the form of this study. From the year 2001, I have continuously collected practically every single item and artefact that looks at international adoption and overseas adoptees, and I spent the autumn of 2002 in Korea gathering everything I could find on representations of adopted Koreans in various expressions of popular culture. My own private archive and collection of documentation related to Korean adoption and Korean adoptees has thus become the source material for this study.

This is a study of popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans restricted in scope to overseas adoptees in Western countries. The study is carried out from a postcolonial perspective, by the use of a cultural studies reading of popular cultural representation, and with four feature films and four popular songs as primary sources. Considering the ethnic and postcolonial character of Korean nationalism with its notion of the nation as family and its strong emphasis on unity, the starting point is the very existence of the adopted Koreans as a delicate threat to nationalist ideology, causing anxieties of disrupting a supposedly homogenous national identity, and calling into question what it means to be Korean and who belongs to the Korean nation. The aim is to examine how nationalism is articulated in various ways in eight popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans in light of the colonial experiences in modern Korean history and recent postcolonial developments within the contemporary Korean society, and the principal question addressed is: what are the implications for a nation depicting itself as one extended family and which has sent away so many of its own children, and what are the reactions from a culture emphasising homogeneity when encountering and dealing with the adopted Koreans?

Except from a general will and desire to understand the different layers and processes that lie behind and are fuelling the Korean adoption issue, I have been driven by several motives when writing this study on Korean images of adopted Koreans. Firstly, I am well aware of and extremely sen-

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1. The issue of domestic adoption and domestic adoptees in Korea arguably merits its own separate treatise.
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sitisised to the enormous power asymmetry involved in the politics of representation. Secondly, it is seldom that a homeland view is looked upon and examined in academic adoption studies. Thirdly, I am fascinated and enthralled by how international adoption and overseas adoptees complicate issues of ethnic identity and national belonging, as well as concepts of postcoloniality and transnationality. Finally, as there is no previous study of representations of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture, I hope that my own study is not just a critical commentary on the Korean adoption issue, but also a meaningful contribution to the still small but burgeoning field of Korean adoption/adoptees studies, which is at the moment in the making.\(^3\)

Before starting, it must also be said that my readings, interpretations and findings are naturally influenced by my specific situatedness of being an adopted Korean myself, as well as a long-time political activist in the adopted Korean movement. I am here making no secret of the fact that I am totally against any kind of continuation of international adoption from Korea, which I also have expressed in several discussion articles throughout the years.\(^4\) I am also deeply sceptical towards Korea’s essentialist and nationalistic attempts at making claims at, and wanting to recover and re-Koreanise adoptees like myself, while I am at the same time strongly critical towards European assimilationism, which strips the adoptees of everything Korean, as well as American multiculturalism with its ethnic chic and orientalist fetishism. The same ambiguous attitude goes for the fact that I do not on the one hand consider myself as being an ordinary member of the Korean nation or even a natural part of the Korean diaspora, while I am on the other hand anxious at bringing back the overseas adoptees to a Korean context, to at least give them a place in modern Korean history and in contemporary Korean society. So while I on the one hand feel a general sense of urgency of wanting to write and fight back against these stereotypical Korean images and representations

\(^3\) Transplanted children. Fifty years of international Korean adoption, the first academic collection of papers ever examining international adoption from Korea and overseas adopted Koreans, will for example soon be published by Haworth Press under the editorship of Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, M. Elizabeth Vonk, Dong Soo Kim and Marvin D. Feit.

\(^4\) For example in Dagens Nyheter, August 26, 2003, and in Korea Herald, March 1, 2005.
of people like myself, I also harbour a sincere wish to listen to the perspectives of a supplying country in this one-way asymmetrical, uneven and unequal flow of children constituting international adoption where the adopting countries wield the hegemonic power. The only thing I can say on all these perhaps inevitable and understandable tensions, inconsistencies and ambivalences that are running throughout the study, is that I hope that my own ability to practice critical self-reflexivity has been accomplished to the greatest possible extent.

Related and comparative studies

The issue of international adoption and overseas adoptees has to my knowledge never been discussed before in the field of Korean studies. Hence, it has been necessary for me to go beyond Asian studies to find previous related and comparative works having relevance to my study. This is in accordance with the Australian Japanologist Chris Burgess (2004) who argues for the embracing of cultural and postcolonial studies into Asian studies to move beyond and break away from classical European oriental studies and policy-oriented American area studies after the accomplishment of formal decolonisation and the end of the Cold War, to overcome the current disciplinary decline and crisis, and in the end to be able to reconfigure and revitalise the field itself.

International adoption can, of course, be studied from many different angles and perspectives. In Korea, the overwhelming majority of adoption studies treat international adoption as a child welfare service or as a legal process, and preferably in the fields of social work and family law (Bai, 1993, 2000; Ch’oe, 1993; Kim Dae-yul, 2000; Kim Hu-yong, 1996; Kim U-tok, 1987; Yi Pong, 1976). The most common research question posed by Korean scholars which fits well with the domestic agenda of disposing of a bad and humiliating image, is why the country is still sending children abroad for international adoption as the only OECD member doing so, and the solution most often suggested is to promote domestic adoption by the use of different legislative methods. Research interest in adopted Koreans has started to become more visible only in recent years, and the main issues raised are racial and ethnic identity development, the
impact of searching for Korean family members and the development of post-adoption services including visiting programs (Bae, 2003; Ch’oe, 1998; Chông, 2000; Huh, 1997; Kim Kyông-ju, 1998; Noh Ahn, 1989; Park In Sun, 1994, 1998; Yi Mi-sŏn, 2001; Yu, 2002).

At the other end in the West, studies of adopted Koreans have been conducted ever since the first children arrived in their host countries in the 1950s, and the majority have been qualitative works based on small samples of children or adolescents, and very often with adoptive parents as the main informants (Bagley 1993; Feigelman & Silverman 1983; Kim Dong Soo 1976; Kim Wun Jung 1995; Koh, 1981; Mullen, 1995; Simon & Altstein 1987; Valk 1957; Wilkinson, 1985; Yoon, 2001). Scholarship on the subject of adoption in the leading adopting regions of North America, Scandinavia and Western Europe tends to focus indiscriminately on the adoptees’ psychosocial adjustment and attachment to the adoptive family, and assimilation and acculturation to the host culture according to normative and modernist models of development and progress, and most researchers are either in medicine and social work, or psychologists and psychiatrists, besides frequently being adoptive parents or adoption professionals.

Reviewers and critics of this dominant and mainstream adoption research point out that as a result of these methodological and disciplinary limitations and shortcomings, the outcomes of the studies have almost without exception been interpreted as positive, and the deviant problems that have been identified are frequently pathologised and medicalised and attributed to a combination of pre-adoption and genetic factors, as if nothing imaginable can be perceived to go wrong as soon as the adoptees are benefiting from the wealth and civilisation of the West (Frasch & Brooks, 2003; Lee Richard, 2003; Lee Shiao, Tuan & Rienzi, 2005; Sloth, 2003; Telfer, 2003). Moreover, the politically sensitive issues of race and ethnicity are still often ignored when discussing international and Korean adoption and international and Korean adoptees in order to avoid being caught up in the same kind of heated and unpleasant debate on transracial adoption that has since the 1970s been ravaging in North America, Australia and Britain, where the domestic adoption of children from indigenous and minority groups to white families has been highly contested and charged and sometimes branded as ethnocide or cultural genocide.

Additionally in academic research and particularly in the social sci-
ences, international adoption itself is seldom perceived to be a migration, and international adoptees are almost never discussed and treated as a diaspora or as an ethnic group. Two exceptions are an article by Karen Miller-Loessi and Zeynep Kilic (2001) on the adopted Chinese seen as a unique diaspora, and the works of Indigo Williams (2001, 2003) on the global adopted Vietnamese diaspora. Because of this strong invisibility in ethnicity, migration and diaspora studies, international adoption has been termed the “quiet migration” by Richard Weil (1984), while Aaron Segal (1993: 113) compares international adoptees to other marginalized and peripheral transnational migrants like international brides and trafficked women. As a result of this academic disinterest in international adoption and international adoptees not surprisingly, the full history of international adoption from Korea has not yet been written, even if several limited attempts have been made (Chông & An, 1994; Daum, 2000; Freundlich & Lieberthal, 2000; Kjellås, 2000; McGinnis, Lieberthal & Clement, 1999; Stahl, 1999; Yi Sôn-ok, 2001; Yun, 1993).

Four rare works on Korean adoption are Erica Penner’s (1996) comparative thesis of international adoption from Korea and China, Park Soon Ho’s (1994, 1995) study of the adoption of Korean children to the USA, a paper by Rosemary Sarri, Yeonoak Baik and Marti Bombyk (1998) and Kristi Brian’s (2004) dissertation, both also covering adoption from Korea to the US. Penner reviews the adoption policies of Korea and China, and criticises the two countries for their mechanical use of the practice. Park examines the adoption of Korean children to America by locating the demographic distribution of the adoptees state by state. Park’s conception of international adoption as a forced child migration is not often heard of as child migration traditionally refers to the British children who were shipped out to populate the settler colonies at the time of the expansion of the British Empire, while forced migration nowadays almost exclusively denotes the movement of refugees and never international adoptees.

Sarri et al. regard the adoption of Korean children to the US as a goal displacement in the sense that the original intention as a way of solving immediate humanitarian issues after the Korean War for a long time has been replaced by its perfunctory continuance serving different interests, and, above all, the maintenance of a highly profitable adoption industry. The study also emphasises the almost complete lack of a social welfare
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system for unwed mothers and their children in Korea as one of the most disturbing ramifications of international adoption, a deplorable fact that has been pointed out by Huh Nam Soon (1993) and Sung Kyu-taik (1992) as well. Brian’s ethnographic study considers the different ways how adoption from Korea to the United States has been maintained as an uninterrupted institutionalised system and as a client-patron relationship for over half a century, and finds that international adoption relies primarily on a consumer-oriented approach, draped in an anti-racist and multiculturalist discourse and heavily steeped in American paternalism and white entitlement, rather than a problem-oriented one taking account of uncomfortable questions regarding race, class and gender, not to mention colonialism and imperialism. Brian concludes by hoping that the adopted Koreans themselves as members of a growing transnational activist movement questioning international adoption as taking part “in the best interest of the child”, will be the ones that are potentially the most well situated and positioned to activate and galvanise reforms and institutional change for the future.

A new research trend worth mentioning and symptomatically dominated by adopted Koreans themselves in academia, like myself, deals with the question of the emergence of a specific adopted Korean subculture, movement and community (Bergquist, 2000; Des Jardins, 1996; Harp, 1999; Hübinette, 2004; Johnsen, 2002; Lieberman, 2001; Mackie, 1999; Palmer, 2001; Traver, 2000). Here, for the first time, adopted Koreans are considered active agents capable of creating their own social spaces and expressing their own authentic voices instead of just being valuable commodities of Korea’s adoption program, grateful and privileged children of white elite families or idealised and perfectly assimilated adoptees in academic research. This ethnogenesis of an adopted Korean community with its extremely heterogeneous, completely deterritorialized, and uniquely parentless character takes place beyond the birth country’s nationalist vision of a global Korean nation, where the adoptees are automatically essentialised as Korean nationals and expected to reconnect with the Motherland, and a self-righteous Western culture portraying them as tokens and icons of anti-racism and multiculturalism.\(^5\)

\(^5\) In recent years there has been an exploding upsurge in studies examining international adoption from China and adopted Chinese, indicating that contrary to the great
Since the end of the 1990s, other non-adoptee academicians as well have increasingly come to write about different aspects of the existence and experiences of adopted Koreans. Dani Isaac Meier (1998) observes how adopted Koreans are continuously negotiating their multiple and contradictory racial and ethnic subject positions, Catherine Ceniza Choy and Gregory Paul Choy (2003) pay attention to the racialisation of Korean adoptee bodies in their critique of false Western assimilationist discourses, and Sonjia Hyon (2004) writes about the creation and performance of a virtual diasporic community of adopted Koreans in cyberspace. A paper by Signe Howell (2001) criticising the adopted Korean movement for espousing nationalism and biologism must also be mentioned in this context. In addition, David Eng (2003) conceptualises the adopted Koreans as a queer diaspora in his brilliant and extraordinary examination of the psychic realm of Korean adopteeness, while Eleana Kim (2000, 2004a, 2004b) studies the adopted Korean movement with its remarkably artistic and creative expressions. As part of the emergence of a global adopted Korean community, anthologies have been praised and acclaimed by critics, several novels have become bestsellers as well as having been translated into Korean, yearbooks are published by artists and painters, and documentaries and films have been broadcasted nationwide and awarded prestigious prizes.

Finally, there are two previous works on images of adopted Koreans in Korea relating to my study – Eleana Kim’s (2003) paper on a visiting program for adopted Koreans and Song Changzoo’s (1999) study of nationalism in postliberation Korea. As an anthropologist and participating observer, Kim takes part in Overseas Koreans Foundation’s visiting program of 2001 and experiences how stereotypical Korean perceptions of adopted Koreans clash with the adoptees’ own self-images, causing frustration, alienation and even active resistance as the adult participants start to question the paternalist and infantilising treatment coming from the side of the government representatives. Song tries to understand how nationalism has been maintained as an oppressive and anti-democratic force in majority of the older generations of adoptive parents to Korean children, today’s Western adoptive parents to Chinese children seem to construct immigrant identities of their adopted children from China to form and maintain a sense of belongingness to an imagined Chinese culture and nation (Anagnost, 2000; Dorow, 2002; Rojewski, 2005; Volkman, 2003).
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postcolonial Korea by pointing out how narratives and representations of overseas Koreans are filled with nationalist misconceptions and prejudices violently contradicting the realities and experiences of the exiled countrymen. Examining media representations of international adoption, which say that the adoptive parents are abusive and racist, the actual source of these statements can be found, according to Song's interpretation, in feelings of disgrace of belonging to a country not able to take care of its own children in spite of the nationalist rhetoric of the nation as one big family.

Ethnic and postcolonial nationalism

Nationalism is evidently strongly manifested and articulated within the Korean adoption issue. In his groundbreaking study of the formation of various European, Latin American and Southeast Asian nation-building projects, the American political scientist Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that all nation states are invented collective identities, known as imagined communities. Anderson has been followed by many others in the quest for understanding the roots and developments of nations and nationalisms in both Western and non-Western settings (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991; Chatterjee, 1986, 1993; Gellner, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990; Smith, 1995). Yet, a number of scholars have noticed that in Korean historiography and also sometimes in Korean studies conducted by Western academics, nationalism is still often taken for granted and treated as a given fact, and the Korean people are uncritically assumed to be of a uniquely homogenous race (tanil minjok or minjok t’ongilsong) after “5000 years” of genetic lineage, territorial unity, racial purity and linguistic and cultural continuity (Han, 2003; Kim Keong-il, 2003; Pai & Tangherlini, 1998; Palais, 1995).

Korea, known as the “Hermit kingdom” for its fierce and stubborn resistance against foreign intruders, was the last country in the Chinese world order to be opened up by the imperialist powers at the end of the 19th century. However, as Yi Tae-Jin (1998) points out, it is important to remember that the concept of the Hermit kingdom was constructed by Western and Japanese imperialists to portray Korea as a primitive, backward and isolated country in need of colonial civilisation and modernisa-
tion. As a consequence of its highly strategic location, the peninsula became a violently contested ground for rival states in the region. In 1910, after victories over China and Russia in wars that took place in the country and after cynical and mutual “gentlemen’s treaties” with Great Britain and the United States, Japan finally annexed Korea. The 1945 partition and the beginning of the Cold War again transformed the Korean peninsula into a hotspot for contending super powers, while the devastating war between primarily American and Chinese troops resulted in a massive foreign military presence. This violent and brutal entrance into modernity and the world system naturally made the Koreans suspicious of or even hostile to all things foreign.

It must be stressed that the bulk and the core of Korean nationalism, emphasising a shared genetic bloodline, a common ancestry and racial and cultural homogeneity, besides being extremely sexist and patriarchal, is a relatively new development. This is because it was formulated by urban and middle-class Westernised intellectuals like the modernist author Yi Kwang-su, the Social Darwinist Ahn Chang-ho and the nationalist and later anarchist Shin Chae-ho at the time of the colonial era, underpinned by the struggle for independence and in response to Japanese pan-Asianism and an assimilationist ideology based on the theory of a common Japanese-Korean origin (Eckert, 1999; Em, 1995; Jager, 2003; Pai, 1998; Schmid, 2002). John Frankl (2001) in an article on the foreign presence in pre-modern Korea, and John Duncan (1998) examining the question of Korean proto-nationalism have, among others, both critically addressed the issue of Korean nationalism and its myth of homogeneity. Frankl criticises what he calls “the myth of the Hermit kingdom” and shows how the country always historically has harboured many non-Korean minorities and individuals. Duncan argues that it would be wrong to talk about a Korean national identity during the Koryô and Chosôn dynasties as the elite identified itself more with other East Asian literati in the Confucian world rather than with commoners in its own country.

With a fractured and unfinished nation-building disrupted by Japa-

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6 As a latecomer among the world’s sovereign nation states, it is, for example, an undisputable fact that the Korean polity did not have a national flag (‘taegûkki’) until 1882, and a national anthem (‘aegukkka’) until 1902, and it was not until 1897 that a modern independent state was proclaimed in the form of an empire (‘Taehan cheguk’).
nese colonialism and American imperialism, and partition and civil war, and a modern history largely decided by external factors and foreign powers, Korean nationalism is categorised by Gi-Wook Shin, James Freda and Gihong Yi (1999) as ethnonationalistic. Ethnonationalism or ethnic nationalism is defined by Walker Connor (1994) as a nation conceiving itself of being ancestrally and biologically related, thereby stressing not only its primordial and spiritual character, but also its familial and racial aspects in contrast to civic nationalism. Concrete examples of the use of ethnonationalism as an ethnic mobilisation strategy are for Connor autonomist seeking groups like the Basques and the Kurds. Both Shin et al. and Song Changzoo (1999) stress this ethnonationalist character of Korean nationalism which, for Korea’s part, is a natural reference point given its highly contested nature from the left-populist and cultural nationalism of the minjung movement to the government’s anti-Communist and developmentalist state nationalism, and the fact that there are not just two nation states, and several autonomous administrative units in China and Koreatowns around the world worth considering, but also numerous widely scattered populations in such geographically disparate regions as Southeast and West Asia, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, the newly independent Central Asian states, and Europe and North America. Accordingly, there is not just one Korean nationalism, but several ones representing different nation states, political groupings and diasporic communities, while they at the same time undoubtedly tend to share this ethnonationalist attitude.

Even if Japanese colonialism is seldom dealt with within postcolonial studies, which Choi Jung-Bong (2003) both reminds of and deplores, Korean nationalism is, in every way, also typically postcolonial with its obsessive preoccupation with a pure pre-colonial past, its desperate pur-

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7 The nativist theory of minjung, which Korean social scientists created and elaborated on in the 1970s and 80s instead of relying on classical Western Marxism to better understand the social forces of modern Korean history, can be seen as a relativistic and particularistic way of challenging Western universalism (Wells, 1995; Yea, 1999). The same tendency is, according to Kang Myung Koo (2004), visible in Korean feminist and cultural studies, where there is a trend to indigenise Western theories or rely on Indian subaltern studies. The Korean sociologist Kim Keong-il (2001) calls this idea that Western theories are not always sufficient to describe Korean and other non-Western societies a pluralistic universalism.
suit of an authentic culture, its romantic glorification of victimhood, and its relentless attempts to reclaim and reconstitute an indigenous and future identity beyond the legacy of Japanese colonialism and today’s American imperialism. Cho Hae-joang (1998a), Choi Chungmoo (1997), Paik Nak-chung (2000), Sheila Miyoshi Jager (2003), Yang Hyunah (2003) and Lee Ocksoon (2003) among many others have all looked at various sides of the postcolonial aspect of Korean nationalism. Cho interprets the sudden emergence of cultural nationalism and the boom in “finding us” after the end of the Cold War as a response to modernisation and globalisation. Cho warns that this way of trying to overcome the postcolonial predicament easily ends up in the self-essentialising and all too often self-denigrating and self-loathing process of internal orientalisation or orientalism-in-reverse. Choi criticises the populist minjung movement’s appropriation of peasant culture as an expression of an original past, and questions Korea’s proclaimed independence considering the heavy US military presence in the supposedly sovereign state. She even sees the incorporation of Korea into the field of postcolonial studies as a deceleration of the actual process of liberation, just like David Lloyd (2003) does for the case of Ireland.

Paik focuses on Korea’s dependency on the West in his study of the country’s attempt at overcoming modernity and coloniality, and highlights how the partition system makes it impossible for the country to act as one nation state. Paik sees the perseverance of the Korean division system as an expression of the continuing hegemonic role of the American Empire, and hopes for a reunification not just for the sake of the Korean nation, but also as an abolition of the division system as a subset of the world system. Jager scrutinises the intimate relationship between gender and nationalism in connection with post-independent nation-formation, and finds that Korean nationalism has created new gender identities internalised from both Japanese and Western orientalist images of Korea. Yang shows that the Korean family law is a colonial heritage instead of being a reflection of “indigenous” and “eternal” Korean values, traditions and customs as it is popularly regarded as. She argues for the formulation of a postcolonial feminist jurisprudence to be able to accomplish gender equality and transcend the male-centeredness of the colonial legacy. This tendency to essentialise oneself and reduce a patriarchal family ideology merely to an effect of Confucianism and “Asian values”, not only results in
a reversed orientalism but also in a stubborn and fossilised self-image, which in the end hinders societal change. Lastly, Lee Ocksoon’s (2003) study of Korean images of India is a good example of how Korea, orientalised by both Japan and the West, in its turn not only orientalises itself but also orientalises other Asian countries, in this case India. The present state of (post)coloniality is, in other words, not just a question of the classical dichotomy of “the West versus the Rest”, but also of antagonisms and hierarchies between and inside non-Western countries and nation states themselves.

Postcolonial perspectives and processes

To apply postcolonial theory when studying international adoption from Korea may appear reasonable given the many aspects of coloniality involved in the setting: Korea’s semi-colonial status from the end of the 19th century and nearly half a century as a former Japanese colony, likewise the country’s half a century old subordinate position within the present day American Empire, international adoption as a colonial-style trade and trafficking in human commodities, and finally the adopted Koreans as subaltern subjects. Having a postcolonial perspective is according to me therefore arguably a useful approach to the Korean adoption issue.

In the 1970s, drawing eclectically from Marxism and critical theory, semiotics and psychoanalysis, deconstruction and discourse theory, and the writings of Jacques Derrida and other French poststructuralists, postcolonial, subaltern or tricontinental studies emerged as a literary theory dominated by diasporic intellectuals of whom many came from former British colonies, especially South Asia, and were affiliated to English studies departments at Western universities (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1989; Chakrabarty, 2000; Childs & Williams, 1997; Gandhi, 1998; Loomba, 1998; Young, 2001, 2003). Postcolonialism and the state of postcoloniality have been defined by Stefan Jonsson (1995: 117–158), the Swedish introducer of postcolonial theory, as the time after colonialism, as the situation in the former colonies, as a global condition after the classical colonial period, as a term denoting the relationship between culture and imperialism, and as an expression of the dual and ambivalent attitude
Postcolonial theory which, according to Pal Ahluwalia (2001), should not be conflated with poststructuralism or postmodernism, is openly political and oppositional as it seeks to deconstruct the Manichean dichotomisation of Self versus Other in European phallogocentric philosophy, which has been so decisive in the violent upholding of hierarchical difference between the coloniser and the colonised, and as it challenges Enlightenment notions of the modern and the universal, and questions linear temporality and developmental thinking. Moreover, it strives to unravel and cast off, to provincialise and decenter and, in the end, to destabilise and dismantle the grands récits of the West. Instead of falling prey to the coloniser’s ontologising representations of the colonised, the aim is to disrupt the West’s wielding of discursive power in order to be able to open up for interstitial spaces in-between and beyond binary oppositions like First/Third, West/East and North/South where new perspectives, conditions and experiences are acknowledged, and where resistance and agency are made possible. Ever since Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978), considered to be the founding text of colonial discourse studies, the dissemination and dissimulation of Western knowledge and power, the effects of colonialism on non-Western cultures, the counter-narratives of colonised people, the delicate intersections between race, gender, religion, sexuality and class, the issue of hybridity among postcolonial diasporas, and the relationship between identity and subjectivity are just some of numerous topics dealt with in the nowadays highly multi-disciplinary field of postcolonial studies.

My use of postcolonial theory is driven by the conviction that colonialism cannot be limited just to direct territorial control belonging to the classical imperialist period, but must be seen as the still existing relationship between the West and the non-West in terms of economic, political, social, linguistic and cultural dependencia, domination and subordination not to mention the moral and ethical aspects. Anne McClintock (1992), Ella Shohat (1992) and Stuart Hall (1996a) have all three also questioned the very concept of postcoloniality and its disorienting association as an infinite aftermath. For them, the term has become a mere substitute for the “Third World”, celebrates colonialism as what brought historical time to non-Western societies, gives the false idea of colonisation as a once-and-for-all and before/after process, reinstates the coloniser’s privilege to
define the state of the world and, above all, obscures the ever-present colonial projects of the West, which are still going strong. I regard international adoption to be one of these contemporary colonial projects.\footnote{This is despite the fact that it is today undoubtedly one of the most exclusive ways of immigrating to and entering the West together with marrying a Westerner given the sudden upsurge in anti-immigration and anti-refugee legislation in many affluent Western countries after the end of the Cold War and the outbreak of the War on Terrorism, as David Eng (2003) and Nicole Constable (2003) point out when comparing international marriage and international adoption of Asian women and children respectively. In spite of the fact that non-Western immigration, in general, and non-Western immigrants, in particular, are perceived to be a security threat \textit{per se} in the US after the events of 9/11, recently the newly established Department of Homeland Security changed the country’s immigration law after intense lobbying from the American adoption industry, in order to be able to automatically grant US citizenship to children adopted overseas by Americans. The same kind of legislations have been passed in many European countries as well, including Sweden, where exemptions from otherwise harsh visa regulations regarding entering an EU country have been made to satisfy the demands from powerful adoption agencies. In reality this means, for example, that war refugees from Colombia are not allowed to enter the EU and are instead smuggled in, while adopted children from Colombia are let into the EU without any problems. Further, many banks are providing generous loans to cover the adoption costs, several airlines are offering fare discounts for escorts affiliated to the agencies, and some governments are even subsidising and reimbursing the adoptive parents with some of the adoption fees, again, according to my interpretation, reflecting the exclusiveness and elitism surrounding the world of international adoption and its vital importance in upholding a Western self-image of humanism, moral authority, civility and benevolence. Besides, the influence of wealthy adoptive parents does not stop at the borders of their own countries, as in 2003, when Romania finally closed its doors to international adoption after a series of scandals, a Western adoption lobby led by high-profile politicians and celebrities threatened to stop the country’s entry into NATO if the decision was not revoked.}

Together with other critical postcolonial and feminist writers on international adoption, I consider the involuntary transferral of hundreds of thousands of non-Western children on a worldwide scale after formal decolonisation as a clear reflection of a global colonial reality and racial hierarchy, and a grim reminder of the still existing astronomical power imbalance between the West and its former colonies (Ahluwalia, 2004; Castañeda, 2002; Gailey, 1999; Herrmann Jr. & Kasper, 1992; Masson, 2001; Ngabonziza, 1991; Triseliotis, 2000). This is also the approach of Anthony Shiu (2001) in his lucid and powerful critique of international adoption, where he analyses the logic that is at stake with its flexible accu-
mulation of human objects, goods and commodities for economic profit. Sally Price (1989: 145) also notes, while writing on the widespread collecting of non-Western art by Westerners, the similarities of rescue fantasies, exoticisation of and desire for the racialised Other between her own objects of study and international adoptees, and she could also have added the dubious provenience behind the acquiring of non-Western artefacts and non-Western children, which both all too often have been bought or stolen and smuggled out by criminal means. Lastly, Janice Raymond (1993: 144–154) associates international adoption immediately with other global modes of reproductive exploitation like the trafficking in women, the marketing of surrogacy and “intrauterine adoption”, and the trade in organs, embryos and foetal tissues.

Moreover, it cannot be a coincidence that the 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 if civil wars, ethnic cleansing of minorities, and corrupt dictatorships also must be added to explain why these leading countries, which supply adoptable children on a global level, became involved with the practice in the first place: 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. For me, the fact that Asia is dominating as a supplying continent and that Asian children seem to be the most valued and marketable further underscores the orientalist imagery at work, where Asians in many Western countries are widely perceived as being docile and submissive, clever and hardworking, and kind, quiet and undemanding besides being cute, childlike and petite. The political economy of international adoption also cynically and depressingly reflects current geopolitical transformations and conditions as evidenced by the fact that Iran stopped sending children away for adoption after the Islamic revolution, that South Africa and Russia and other Eastern European countries started to give children up for adoption after the fall of apartheid and Communism, and that China and Vietnam started to become involved with international adoption as an integrated part of their respective reform policies and opening up to the world economy.

Contemporary international adoption, which has seen at least half a
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million children flown in to Western countries during a period of 50 years, has so many parallels to the transatlantic slave trade, which between 1510–1870 shipped 11 million Africans to the New World, to indentured labour, which between 1834–1941 dispatched 12 million Indians, Pacific Islanders and Chinese as “coolies” to the vast European empires, and to present day’s massive trafficking of non-Western women for international marriage and sexual exploitation, that a still non-existing comparative study of these four subsequent forced migrations, conceptualised as a long Western tradition of commodifying and transporting non-white populations inter-continentally, would be highly appreciated. Igor Kopytoff (1986) has also commented on the unsettling parallels between the commodification of slaves and adoptees in his anthropological study of the cultural biography of commodities, and David Smolin (2004) conceptualises international adoption as an unethical and neo-colonial mixture of slavery and trafficking from a juridical point of view. A crucial difference between the four forced migrations is however that slave trade and indentured labour in its classical versions belong to history, while trafficking in women is illegalised and universally condemned. Only international adoption remains largely uncontested, made legal through various “international” conventions, which, in reality, give priority to Western concepts of adoption over non-Western fostering traditions, and also rapidly on the increase after the end of the Cold War as a result of the globalisation of predatory neo-liberal capitalism, recent biopolitical transformations in the international division of labour, the mass popularisation of the discourse of multiculturalism and a middle-class birth rate that has fallen far below the replacement level in practically every Western country (Bibler Coutin, Maurer & Yngvesson, 2002; Brian, 2001; Federici, 1999; Leifsen, 2004; Varnis, 2001).

To substantiate my arguments, while reading Robert Harms’s (2002) detailed treatise on the voyage of the French slave ship the Diligent in the 1730s, numerous striking similarities come to mind when comparing the slave trade and international adoption. Both practices are driven by insatiable consumer demand, private market interests and cynical profit making, and utilise a highly differentiated system of pricing, where the young and the healthy are the most valued. Both are dependent on the existence of a native comprador bourgeoisie of intermediaries in the form of slave hunters and traders and adoption agencies and professionals, as well as a
reliable and efficient global transportation system of shipping routes and flight logistics. Both the slaves and the adoptees are separated from their parents, siblings, relatives and significant others at an early age, stripped of their original cultures and languages, reborn at harbours and airports, Christianised, re-baptised and assuming the name of their masters, and, in the end, only retaining a racialised non-white body that has been branded or given a case number. Especially the domestic or servant slaves must have been the closest parallels to international adoptees as both live permanently together with their masters and are legally defined as belonging to their household and their family.\footnote{Kathleen Bergquist (2003) compares international adoptees to multicultural mascots. I would add, that international adoptees could also be likened to exotic pets, puppies, accessories, jewels or toys, souvenirs of cultural tourism, charity cases and individual projects of philanthropy and development assistance or living trophies and war booties from conquered and subjugated peoples and cultures.} Notwithstanding, both practices are justified and legitimised by the same shallow argument that when moved to their new homes, the actual material situation of the slaves and the adoptees is unquestionably greatly improved. Last but not least, both groups are brought over only to please and satisfy the needs, demands and desires of their well-to-do buyers and owners.

However, it is important not to romanticise and idealise colonised cultures and postcolonial societies, something, which only serves to reify and naturalise an imagined and never-existent clear-cut boundary between coloniser and colonised. Looking once again at a Korean context, even if Korea in many respects may be subordinated to the West and particularly to the United States with its “white mythologies”, it certainly also harbours its own subaltern subjects and cherishes its own “yellow mythologies”. For me, the fate of the so-called comfort women closely parallels that of the adopted Koreans. In this regard, I argue that the adopted Koreans, together with the comfort women, can be likened to subalterns in the sense of Gayatri Spivak (1988), considering the invisibility and unspeakability caused by feelings of shame and dishonour that surround these two stigmatised groups. Just like the Hindu woman practicing sati or widow burning whom Spivak uses as an example in her opposition to the Eurocentric bias of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, the adopted Koreans simply cannot speak for themselves as they are already both spo-
ken for (vertreten) and represented (darstellen) by both white and yellow mythologies; as mute physical bonds and cultural ambassadors by the supplying and receiving governments, as grateful and pitiable rescue objects by adoption agencies and adoptive parents, and as diversity models and pioneers of a post-ethnic society by adoption professionals and researchers.

Besides, if anyone must be considered as marginalized and silenced subalterns within the Korean society and what is usually called the adoption triad given the fact that the adopted Koreans have, at least, recently started to come out and raise their voices, it must be the biological parents of the adoptees and particularly the mothers (Dorow, 1999; Kendall, 2005; Kim Do Hyun, 2004; Kim Hosu, 2006). The voices of the tens of thousands of Korean birth mothers of adopted Koreans, caught between tradition and modernity in the form of a patriarchal Korean nationalism and a racialised Western capitalism, are still not often heard of, and as a matter of fact Spivak also coincidentally mentions young female factory workers in Korea in her famous essay as examples of subaltern subjects, most certainly without knowing that this was the group who provided the most adoptive children during the heyday of international adoption from Korea from the early 1960s to the mid-1980s. However in my study, it is important to point out that I am not making any claims to speak for or represent any voices of the dislocated and the deprived, or the degraded and the dispossessed, as my purpose is only to examine different Korean images of overseas adoptees as expressed in various Korean popular cultural representations and how they relate to imagined and perceived nationalist identities and projects, and not the actual lived experiences of the adoptees or their birth parents.

Further, Park Jin-kyung (2002) points out that the recent uncovering of the comfort women’s previously subjugated memories and self-narratives allows us to understand the contradictory complexities of power not only coming from the Japanese, but also from native Koreans in their complicit role as intermediaries to mobilise and ship out the comfort women. Min Pyong Gap (2003) also reminds that Korea’s internal gender, class and regional hierarchies played a crucial role in the process, deciding who were to be drafted, abducted and recruited and who were not. This is for me analogous to today’s role of the Korean Government and adoption agencies in tracking down and flying out out-of-wedlock Korean children
for international adoption to Westerners as Western colonialism goes hand in hand with Korean patriarchy. So as Karen Dubinsky (2005) rightly points out in a paper on different ways of representing a trans-racially adopted child symbolically – neither the Western narrative of rescuing a Third World child from “primitivism and patriarchy”, nor the non-Western narrative of “evil and greedy whiteys” kidnapping, snatching and stealing “our” children do not suffice and are very helpful in order to be able to fully understand the politics of international adoption as both sides are without doubt equally implicated in the business. Yet another parallel to this, again highlighting the similarities between slave trade and international adoption, is how oral tradition in West Africa remembers slavery and tries to cope with feelings of loss and guilt for having played an intermediary role in the slave trade as part of an on-going reconciliation process in the region (Bailey, 2002).

Such postcolonial reconciliation processes to overcome colonial pasts and national traumas like forced migrations, genocides, wars and dictatorships have recently proliferated in many postcolonial societies, including, amongst others, South Africa, Argentina, Australia, India, Rwanda and Ireland (Barkan, 2000; Humphrey, 2005; Rajan, 2000; Vuckovic, 2003; Whelan, 2003). Collective remembering, commemorating and mourning to overcome losses and traumas and the uncanny and the unhomely can, according to Pal Ahluwalia (2002), even be considered to be the fundamental task of the postcolonial project itself. At the same time, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2002) warns that the ceremonial and ritual aspect of state inquiries and government apologies all too often ends up in both erasing historical crimes and covering up present and future wrongdoings, instead of fully transcending a terrible past, and demands for economic repatriations from the descendants of African slaves, Asian comfort women or Holocaust survivors have for example not yet been sufficiently met.

This global phenomenon of state apologies and truth commissions appearing at the time of the millennium shift concerns Korea as well. With democratisation, starting during the tenure of President Kim Dae Jung with his Presidential Truth Commission on Suspicious Deaths, Korea Democracy Foundation and second nation-building campaign, and continuing with the current President Roh Moo-hyun, the question of settling with the past (kwagô ch’ôngsan) and finding the truth (ûimunsa)
has finally come to the forefront in the Korean society, challenging the previous official state historiography of a smooth and uncontested nation-building narrative (Cho Hee-yeon, 2003; Kim Yu-jin, 2003). Hence, the historical issues of Korean War atrocities, and victims and sacrifices during the military regimes are nowadays all addressed, even if Koen De Ceuster (2001) and Kang Jeong-gu (2003) both argue that the problem of pro-Japanese collaboration (ch’inilp’a) at the time of the colonial era still awaits to be settled in a satisfactory way. I consider the emergence of the adoption issue, wrapped as it is in strong feelings of dishonour and shame, and guilt and regret, as being a part of this recent Korean politics of postcolonial mourning and healing.

Sam Durrant (2003), in his study of postcolonial narratives in the works of J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris and Toni Morrison, finds how reconciliation processes often are played out in cultural texts. This is similar to the presence of disabled people in modern African literature, which Ato Quayson (2002) interprets as an attempt at overcoming the eerie nightmares of the continent’s colonial history. Again, this is true also for Korea, whose high and popular cultural productions struggle to understand the devastating effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism, division and war, industrialisation and modernisation, and Westernisation and globalisation. Kim Kyung Hyun (2004), Kwak Han Ju (2003), Lee Hyangjin (2000), Paul Willemen (2002) and Rob Wilson (2003) to name but a few scholars who have examined the country’s unpleasant and uncomfortable paths from tradition to modernity as reflected and expressed in Korean media and popular culture all give many examples of this in recent Korean films.

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10 In 2005, parliamentary committees investigating forced labour during the Japanese colonial period and abuses during the military era were at work, and there was talk about a final truth commission both addressing the issue of collaboration with the Japanese, including the recruitment of the comfort women, and the injustices and assassinations committed by the military governments, for example, the Kwangju massacre of 1980.
Reading contemporary cultural texts

This study is carried out with the background of British cultural studies and one of its main theorist Stuart Hall’s understanding and reading of representations in mass mediated cultural texts. Cultural studies, also known as the Birmingham school of cultural theory and evolving in Britain from the 1960s in relation to the more conservative and elitist-minded German tradition of *Kulturkritik* and the Frankfurt school of critical theory, is concerned with the relationship between mass communication and the constant production and consumption of multiple and convergent ideologies and identities in the everyday life of late modernity (Chandler, 2002; Fornäs, 1995; Jansson, 2002; Mulhern, 2000; Storey, 2001). In cultural studies, the media is seen as a social force among others, instead of just being a device for transmitting information. Print media and audio-visual products are not just commodities made for profit as they consciously select and interpret “facts” and “events”, and frame and direct them in a specific and coded language recognisable to the audience. The media also has an enormous capacity in shaping a nation’s values and norms, and has, according to Benedict Anderson (1983), historically played a major role in spreading the gospel of nationalism. The mass media is therefore a crucial agent in the construction and reproduction of nationalist ideology as mediated images and representations produce meanings and interpretations, and establish individual as well as collective identities. The power of the media in building and reaffirming imagined bonds and collectivities between its consumers has also been shown by innumerable studies among different ethnic groups (Christiansen, 2004; Gillespie, 1995; Löfgren, 1990; Morley, 2000; Yang, 1997).

For Stuart Hall, being a part of the New Left via neo-Marxists like Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser and deeply influenced by the linguistic and cultural turn and the anti-foundationalism manifested in French poststructuralism, the connection between representation and power is, according to Chris Rojek (2003), pivotal to his thinking. In his work on media representation, Hall (1997a) distances himself from the reflective or mimetic and intentional approaches, saying that language mirrors true meaning or, at least, always conveys what the author intends it to mean. Instead, Hall chooses to adhere to a social constructionist approach, where meaning is produced within language by the work of repre-
sentation. Representation denotes the production of meaning through language. Language is used in a broader sense, embracing every expression of communication from words, sounds or gestures, to clothes, pictures or bodies, known as texts. There are two systems of representation involved in the production of meaning, where the first one consists of the concepts formed in the mind by which we classify the world into meaningful categories, while the second one is language communicating and exchanging these ideas. The mental representation is made up of signs, words and images conveying meaning and organised into various relationships, while language is governed by shared codes, the linguistic rules and social conventions unconsciously internalised and interiorised by members of a certain society or culture. Signs can be divided into two elements, the actual word or image, the signifier, and the corresponding concept or idea, the signified. It is the relationship between these two elements, ruled by specific linguistic and cultural codes, which maintains and anchors representation, and produces and reproduces meaning. These signs can only be defined and understood in relation to each other, conceptualised as binary oppositions, organised hierarchically and linearly, and establishing difference or sameness. Moreover, as the link between the signifier and the signified is completely arbitrary, meanings are never fixed but constantly slipping and sliding and apt to new interpretations and readings, making universal and final truths impossible to exist.

Culture is for Hall a set of shared meanings and conceptual maps for its members, and is considered as important as the material base in shaping government policies, activating social movements and creating historical events as texts are viewed as socially grounded frameworks based upon and connected to specific situations and institutions. Thus, it is the participants in a given culture or context who give meaning to people, things and events by naming and defining, categorising and classifying, and including and excluding, using unwritten but shared regulations, presuppositions and assumptions. In this way, meaning is constantly being produced, negotiated and exchanged in a culture, and Hall calls this process the circuit of culture:

The embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted is what we mean by “the practices of representation”. Meaning must enter the domain of these practices, if it is to circulate effectively within a culture. And it cannot be considered to have completed its
“passage” around the cultural circuit until it has been “decoded” or intelligibly received at another point in the chain. Language, then, is the property of neither the sender nor the receiver of meanings. It is the shared cultural “space” in which the production of meaning through language – that is, representation – takes place. (Hall, 1997a: 10)

According to Hall, there are two approaches to the study of representations. The first one is the semiotic approach, concerned with how representations are constructed and focusing on the signs and the meanings they convey. In semiotic analysis, the lexical and descriptive aspect is known as the level of denotation and the mental and cultural aspect the level of connotation. Culture is then seen as a semantic field of clusters of ideas and concepts or myths. The second one is the discursive approach focusing on the production of knowledge and meaning, and the effects and consequences of representations seen as formations of discourses. A discourse is the dominant way of representing the knowledge about a particular topic at a specific historical moment, and what is usually counted as truth. While semiotic analysis aims at studying the poetics of representation at work, seen as the bricks of meaning in culture, discourse analysis studies the politics of representation, examining what is possible to say or not to say on a certain topic.

The privileged medium of mass communication is for Hall undoubtedly one of the most important and influential representational systems in modern societies in its mass production and circulation of images recruiting and alluring us into subject positions through the process of subjectivation. By way of an example of the use of his method of reading media representations, Hall (1997b) examines what he calls the spectacle of the Other in British media, namely how ethnic alterity is represented by the way of stereotyping. Hall focuses on the process of differentiation, the essentialising of otherness by marking differences, and how these representations relate to each other through intertextuality. Intertextuality or dialogicity is a reflection of what Hall calls the regime of representation or a representational paradigm, namely the way by which these images speak to each other at any historical moment using a whole chain or web of signs and meanings, and a full-scale repertoire of reiterations and common references. These mediated representations with all their fantasies and fetishes effectively naturalise the binary opposition between Self (Us) and Other (Them). However, as representations are never completely fixed
and closed, Hall calls for a politics of representation for the represented to be able to reverse and transcode negative images with new self-appropriated and resignified meanings.

The media’s aspect of producing and reproducing ideologies and identities is even more apparent for popular culture with its fluid mobility and widely spread and easily consumed character, unfettered by time and space. Popular culture is here defined as mass-produced commodities associated with mass communication, spurred by commercial interests and intended for mass consumption. This study is underpinned by the conviction of the decisive role of popular culture in categorising and stereotyping, and in establishing and marking difference and sameness, and how these mediated representations and images quickly become accepted and recognised as “common-sense knowledge”. The critical importance of popular culture in constructing and spreading representations of adopted Koreans in the public domain and in the public consciousness is also the reason for me using films and songs as primary sources instead of high cultural genres of novels, short stories and poems, art works, children’s books, law texts or any other official documents. This is because this study aims at examining the popular level of the Korean adoption issue and popular images of international adoption and overseas adoptees rather than official ones coming from state and government.¹¹

On a superficial level, one could say that the Korean music and film industry make use of adopted Koreans in their productions merely because the spectacular and dramatic or even outrageous and scandalous appearance of the adoptees most probably sells. Nevertheless beyond this commercial appeal, when Korean producers of cinema and music use adopted Koreans in commodities made for profit, it is simply not just money that comes in. Rather as mass mediums of communication, cin-

¹¹ The adoption issue is without doubt a frequent theme in Korean novels, short stories and children’s books as well, while poets like Kim Hye-sun have touched upon adoption themes in some of their poems. Among several novels and short stories that come to mind, worth mentioning are Yu Hong-jong’s Sea of a Sad Poet (Sûlp’ûn si’innûi pada) (1994), Yi Yun-gi’s Roots and Wings (Ppuriwa nalgae) (1998), Yun Chông-mo’s Foreign Woman (Ttian nara yôin) (1999), and among numerous children’s books Son Yôn-ja’s Black-Haired Judy (Khambangmôri Chudi) (1998), Cho Ûn’s A Home Warm as the Sun (Haetbyôt ttattûthan chip) (1999), Han Hyê-yông Han’s Top Flower (P’aengikkot) (2001), and Kim Chae-jin’s Mother’s Smell (Ômma naemsae) (2002).
Preliminary and introduction

Cinema and popular music offer us dreams and fantasies of the world showing us who we are, where we come from and who we are different from. According to the cultural theorist John Fiske (1989), cinema creates meaning for its consumers, and consequently the relationship to its audience becomes a productive one. Sometimes, feature films can even be used in an empowering and emancipating way to resist hegemonic understandings and interpretations. The American song lyric analyst Lee Cooper (1991) sees popular songs as pieces of oral history whose lyrics offer impressions of the conditions in a given culture, and which have a strong conservative effect of subjugating and subordinating ourselves as ethnic and national subjects. In this way, feature films and popular songs produce and replicate a multiplicity and plurality of political ideas and cultural values and can be used as text sources for investigating and interpreting any contemporary society.

I am relying on this cultural studies understanding of how representational practice works, including its open-ended, critically reflexive and cross-disciplinary approach in my textual analysis of the popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans. As will be evident, I am not making a clear divide between a so-called materialist or structuralist interpretation, which often has a Marxist, Freudian or Saussurian origin, and a so-called poststructuralist one, which frequently goes under the label of postmodernism. Instead, I will continuously be drawing from both paradigms and traditions, and couple them together rather than exclude one or another in my narrative readings of the popular cultural productions. The works examined are four feature films and popular songs respectively, released for the domestic Korean market between 1991–2001. The study analyses the cinematic representations of adopted Koreans in Chang Kil-su’s Susanne Brink’s Arirang (1991), Park Kwang-su’s Berlin Report (1991), Kim Ki-duk’s Wild Animals (Yasaengdongmul pohoguyŏk) (1997), and Lee Jang-soo’s Love (1999), and the lyrical representations in Sinawe’s Motherland (Ômôniûi ttang) (1997), Clon’s Abandoned Child (Pôryŏjin at) (1999), Sky’s Eternity (Yôngwôn) (1999), including its music video, and Moon Hee Jun’s Alone (2001), including its album cover. I have found the titles by means of reviews in Korean newspapers, or simply by accident through browsing in Korean video stores and record shops. In other words, my selection of the corpus material has been heavily dependent upon the media exposure and the commerciality of the works. Accordingly, my col-
lection does not claim to be exhaustive, and it is most likely that there are even more feature films and popular songs representing adopted Koreans in a Western country, which I have not been able to track down and obtain copies of, and which could not be analysed in this study.12

The study is divided into eight chapters, the first one being this introduction with its survey of previous works on Korean adoption and adopted Koreans, an introduction to Korean nationalism, postcolonial and cultural studies, and details concerning the source material. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the historical and political context to the popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans. Chapter 2 gives the cultural background to adoption in Korean tradition and the history of international adoption from Korea. Adoption in pre-modern Korea is covered together with early displacements in Korean history, and the story of international adoption from Korea is told from its first careful steps during the Korean War, through its peak at the time of the authoritarian regimes, and up to the changes that have taken place after 1988. At the end, the demographics of international adoption both from Korea and on an international level are estimated in numbers. Chapter 3 consists of a contextualising account of the development of the adoption issue in the public domain and in political discourse. The account starts from the beginning of the 1970s, when North Korea accused South Korea of exporting Korean children, continues with the controversy following the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games when Western media unexpectedly highlighted the sensitive subject, and gives special attention to the years of Kim Dae Jung’s presidency between 1998–2002. The chapter ends with an overview of the appearance of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 analyse the cinematic and lyrical representations of adopted Koreans in the four feature films and popular songs. The eight titles have been divided into four groups according to the principal issues raised and how the contents of the works relate to and speak to each other intertextually, even if it is of course impossible to draw a sharp line between the themes and aspects taken up in the different works. By reading the narrative structure of the works chronologically and moving back and

12 A search of the Korean Film Database, http://www.koreafilm.or.kr/ (2004-07-05), finds as many as 202 titles, all released between 1920 and 1999, with synopsis texts containing the keyword “orphan”, 97 with the keyword “adopt” and 22 with “foster”.
forth along the denotative and connotative levels, and by identifying the various signifying practices and semiotic-discursive formations involved and their underlying conventionalised codes, which bind signifier to signified, the different contradictory and ambiguous ways nationalism is articulated in these representations of adopted Koreans are analysed and interpreted with the background of a historical and political understanding of international adoption from Korea and the Korean adoption issue. Chapter 4, the first reading, takes up the gendering of the colonised nation and the maternalisation of roots in Susanne Brink’s Arirang and Motherland, drawing on theories of nationalism as a gendered discourse. Chapter 5 examines the issue of hybridity and the relationship between Koreanness and Whiteness in Wild Animals and Alone, related to notions of third space, mimicry and passing. Chapter 6 looks at the adopted Koreans as symbols of a fractured and fragmented nation in Berlin Report and Abandoned Child, linked to studies of national division, reunification and family separation. Chapter 7, the final reading, focuses on the emergence of a global Korean community in Love and Eternity, with regards to theories of globalisation, diasporas and transnationalism. Chapter 8, the concluding part, summarises the findings of the preceding chapters, and at the end I take a closer look at and try to understand the role and place of the adopted Koreans for the postcolonial, divided and dispersed Korean nation.
Adoption as a cultural practice or as a legal institution is more or less a universal phenomenon that has been present in every human setting regardless of time and place, whether in ancient Greece, medieval Europe, Tokugawa Japan, Soviet Russia, the Swedish welfare state or among Inuits (Bernstein, 2001; Boswell, 1988; Bowie, 2004; Guemple, 2001).

1 Source: Chosun Ilbo, April 24, 1988.
1979; Moore, 1970; Nordlöf, 2001; Rubinstein, 1993). However, its function and meaning differs from case to case, a fact Irving Leon (2002), and John Terrell and Judith Modell (1994) point out when comparing modern Western notions with those among indigenous groups in Oceania. The same is, of course, true in Korean history, where adoption always has been practiced, but for a variety of reasons.

Nevertheless, to begin with it must be pointed out that it is the modern Western practice of adoption that is deviant in a worldwide anthropological perspective in the sense that it is overwhelmingly extra-familial, meaning that there is no hereditary or genetic relationship between the birth and adoptive parents, and above all that the link between the former and the adoptee is totally severed for them to remain unknown or even secret to each other with records sealed, while the latter gives the child a completely new identity by law. Donald Chambers (1975) and Wayne Carp (1998: 1–35) trace this Western Sonderweg in adoption practice to the first modern American adoption law, which was passed in Massachusetts in 1851, and Mary Kathleen Benet (1976: 14) proposes that this unique and peculiar Western mode of adoption can be seen as a compensation for the complete break-up of the extended family and its replacement with the nuclear family in Western countries already from the early modern age. A parallel to this, pointed out by several adoption researchers, is how middle-class Western concepts of “abandonment”, “orphans” and “abandoned children” diverge from those in non-Western societies, where the fostering and circulation of children among relatives are much more common than adoption itself, and are made universal on a global level through conventions like the Hague Conference on Intercountry Adoption (Fonseca, 2002a; Goody, 1969; Howell, 2003a; Panter-Brick, 2000; Yngvesson, 2004). This specific Western custom of stranger adoption and of obliterating the bonds between the child and the biological parents and changing the identity of the adoptee is important to bear in mind to understand the Korean adoption history.

To start from the beginning, the founding stories of Koguryo’s Chumong and Silla’s Sŏk T’alhae who both became kings after having been adopted by their predecessors, are often mentioned when writing about Korean myths where adoption plays a part in the plot (Han, 1995: 38–39; Korea Overseas Information Services, 1979: 78; Yi Yong-hûi, 1999: 387). The adoption cases occurring in Samguk sagi and Samguk yusa, the his-
torical chronicles of the Three Kingdoms and Unified Silla periods (57 B.C.–918 A.D.) compiled in the 12th and 13th centuries respectively, indicate, according to Kim Ch’ang-hûi (1985: 74), that adoption in ancient Korea was used primarily to secure an heir. Adoption during the Koryô dynasty (918–1392) continued to centre on the upholding of a descent line, while its use was influenced by the Buddhist tradition of showing mercy to orphans. In 994, King Sôngjong promulgated a law stipulating that orphans under the age of ten had to be given food and clothing. Moreover, in 1046, imitating the Tang code, an institute for the establishment of an heir (iphu) in the event of no son was introduced followed by the law of 1068 on the taking in of an abandoned child under the age of three (suyang) if there were no direct descendants (Deuchler, 1992: 48; Yi Helena, 1987: 11).

Mark Peterson (1974, 1977, 1978, 1983, 1996), the scholar in Korean studies who has written the most on adoption in pre-modern Korea, traces the Koryô dynasty’s practice to an indigenous Korean adoption system similar to contemporary Western notions of adoption. Contrary to the rules of the Chosôn dynasty, adoption did not require the child neither to be a male nor a relative as the majority of children adopted were non-relatives, and when relatives were taken in it was often a female relative’s child or a child from the wife’s side of the family. Again contrary to later regulations, when an adoption took place within the patrilineage, the son did not always come from the generation immediately below the adopting father’s. Records even show cases of adopting several children, and of widows and unmarried women adopting sons or daughters. Moreover, according to Martina Deuchler (1992: 48), adoptions increased towards the end of the dynasty and were also more often motivated by economic reasons such as securing servants and slaves rather than upholding a family line.

All vestiges of this indigenous Korean adoption system were completely wiped out during the Chosôn dynasty’s (1392–1910) Confucianisation period of the 15th and 16th centuries. The Confucian style of adoption, originating from the upper-class yangban families, would, in the end, permeate the whole of Korean society and the Korean attitude towards adoption in general, as there is evidence that even the slaves started to adopt in the aristocratic way, even if the German anthropologist Inge Roesch-Rhomberg (2003) argues that there are still to be found remnants
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of a cognatic pre-Confucian adoption tradition in the remote countryside. Adoption during the Chosŏn dynasty have been treated in detail by Peterson using government and genealogical records as primary sources, by Edward Wagner (1983) in his study of early Yi dynasty genealogies and by Deuchler (1992) in her excellent study of the Confucian transformation of Korea, as well as by several Korean scholars in anthropology and social science (Kim Ki-sŏn, 1972; Lee Kwang-kyu, 1975; Yun, 1993).

Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism, considered to be Confucian philosophy in its most orthodox version, was adopted as the state ideology by the Chosŏn dynasty and explains the differences in adoption practices between Korea and its neighbours China and Japan, which both continued to accept non-agnatic adoption and the adoption of daughters and sons-in-law (Chun Koh, 1983; De Bary & Kim Haboush, 1985; McMullen, 1975; Waltner, 1990: 4). This important difference in traditions, which Korea shares with Vietnam and its Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945), probably explains why Japan never experienced a mass migration of children for international adoption after Word War II with the exception of less than 2,000 mixed race children who were given up for adoption in the US, even if the country had to deal with the same problem of thousands of orphaned children as Korea in 1953 (Dower, 1999: 54–64; Koshiro, 1999: 159–200). The same is true for Taiwan, which experienced large concentrations of American troops in the early 1950s, resulting in quite a number of mixed race children, and, which, also like Japan, made use of international adoption before Korea did so, but again this never led to such enormous numbers as in the Korean case (Halvarson, 1991).

Peterson stipulates three rules for adoption that characterise the adoption policy of the Chosŏn dynasty: the adopted child had to be a boy, the adopted child had to be a relative and ideally a nephew, and the adopted child had to come from one generation below the adopting father in the clan genealogy. This use of adoption is still sometimes practiced in the Korean countryside for the sole purpose of upholding a household (chip) as has been shown by the anthropologists Choi Soo Ho (1995) and Yoon Hyungsook (1990). The framework for this adoption system was set up

As always a rule has its exceptions, and one of them is the famous queen Min (1851–95) who was orphaned at the age of eight and adopted in spite of being a girl (Salem, 1977).
during the 15th century through a series of laws included in the *Grand Code of State Administration* (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*) and dealing with lineal succession, inheritance and the problem of *sŏja*, sons born to secondary wives (Deuchler, 1992: 214–215). The laws defined an adoptee, *yangja* or *suyangja* as opposed to a foster child (*siyangja*), as a child who had been taken in before the age of three, and required every adoption among the *yangban* clans to be reported to the government.

Peterson detects a transitional period as the use of adoption increased when equal inheritance between the sexes decreased. This simultaneous development of daughters losing their position as heirs and an increased role of the eldest sons, resulting in a higher usage of adoption, took place after the Japanese (1592–98) and Manchu invasions (1627–36), a fact, which has made scholars speculate on the declining status of women after having been captured and possibly raped by invading armies (Peterson, 1996: 210–211). For the period 1618–1863, a 21-volume *Record of Adoptions* (*Kyehu tûngnok*) has been preserved, which together with lists of candidates in the state examinations (*kwagŏ*) where adoptees were marked out, make it possible to examine the extent of the practice. Expressed in numbers, the rate of adoptees among state examination candidates hovered between 1.6–2.81 percent in the 16th and 17th centuries, increased to 9.1 percent during the following century and climbed to 12.39 percent in the 19th century, with a record high of 14.3 percent for the year 1891 (Yun, 1993: 16).

In 1783, inspired by the indigenous enlightenment school of *sirhak*, King Chŏngjo issued a law for the protection, care and food provision of abandoned, vagrant and begging children, where adoption was mentioned as an alternative to institutions, and, which has been examined by Ch’oe Wŏn-kyu (1988), Kwak Hyomun (2001), Pyŏn Chusŭng (1998) and other Korean historians. At the end of the 19th century and with the gradual demise of the Chosŏn dynasty, attempts were made to reform the country from within as a reaction to intruding imperialist powers and Japanese aggression. In 1885, King Kojong ordered the establishment of orphanages, and in 1894 non-agnatic adoption was made legal as a part of

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3 Interestingly, this corresponds to an infertility rate of 10–15 percent considered to be the average proportion in any human population (Chandra, Abma, Maza & Bachrach, 1999).
the *Kabo* reforms in case the spouse or concubine failed to bear a child (Deuchler, 1977; Kim Ki-sŏn, 1972; Lew, 1974).4

However, it was not until the time of Japanese colonial rule (1910–45) that a fully-fledged modern adoption law was introduced in Korea. The civil law of 1912 (*Chosŏn minsaryŏng*), examined in detail by Yi Sŭng-il (1999), more or less reiterated the traditional Confucian way of adoption. Instead, it was its 1938 version, conceived as an outright attempt at Japanisation and consequently revised after liberation, that for the first time in half a millennium fully legalised adoption outside the family (Yi Sŏn-ok, 2001: 27–28). There are no annual statistics for non-agnatic adoption during this later stage of Japanese rule. However, according to Kim Ki-sŏn (1972), citing a government source, from 1939, when the colonial law came into effect, and until 1961, when independent Korea’s adoption law was promulgated, altogether 4,491 domestic adoptions were officially registered in the country.

**Early predecessors**

International adoption, sometimes also known as intercountry or transnational adoption, the movement of children from predominantly non-Western countries to adoptive parents in the West, was initiated on a large scale in connection with the Korean War, but Western settlers, soldiers and missionaries had occasionally adopted “indigenous” and “native” children already at the time of the classical colonial era.5 Such examples of domestic transracial adoptions preceding as well as paralleling the Korean case are the kidnapping of 18,000 Roma children in 18th century imperial Austria who were put into Catholic foster homes to dilute Romani bloodlines, the approximately 50,000 “lost birds” of Inuit and First Nations children in Canada and the US who were placed in white

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4 The strict and rigid rules for adoption during the late Chosŏn dynasty were sometimes even mentioned in the travel accounts of perplexed Western visitors at the end of the 19th century. See, for example, Percival Lowell’s *Chosŏn: The Land of the Morning Calm* (1886) and Homer B. Hulbert’s *The Passing of Korea* (1906)

5 In Jean Benoît-Lévy’s feature film *Itto* from 1934, a French settler couple living in French Morocco adopts an Arab orphan.
families even as late as the mid-1990s, and the “stolen generations” of between 25,000–50,000 mixed race Aboriginal children in Australia who between 1900–1970 were forcibly separated from their parents and transferred to the custody of Anglo-Celtic families as a civilising project (Barany, 2002: 93; Crichlow, 2002; Krieken, 1999; Strong, 2001). Further in a comparative perspective, the closest parallels to international adoption in the history of child migration would be the 130,000 children who were shipped from the British Isles to populate the Empire between 1618–1967, and the 110,000 American children who were transported by the “orphan train” from the East Coast and placed with substitute parents in need of cheap labour in the Midwest between 1854–1929 (Bean & Melville, 1989; Holt, 1992).

The orphan train program has an intriguing incident of its own where ethnicity and race played a major role, and, which Linda Gordon (1999) has looked into. In 1904, a group of 40 New York Irish foundlings were sent to live with Catholic families in an Arizonan mining town. However, the adopting Catholics turned out to be “greasy” Mexicans, and the local white Anglos were so outraged at this transgressing of race boundaries that they instigated a mass abduction of the children carried out at gunpoint by a vigilante mob, as the Irish orphans were suddenly whitened instead of being despised as “primitive paddies” of a “decaying and uncivilized Celtic race”. Through this violent direct action, transracial or transethnic adoption as a white supremacist privilege and monopoly was resolutely reinstalled, and one can only imagine the reactions if Korean middle-class couples, whether in Korea or living overseas, suddenly started to adopt white children, or for that matter if Korean children were to be sent to Latin American, African or other Asian countries for international adoption.6

Except for the white slavery stories and captivity narratives of settler

6 Such reversed adoptions still only belong to fantasy and are limited to popular cultural works like the Indian film version of Superman (1987), where Superman is adopted by an Indian couple, the Hollywood film The Jerk (1979), which tells the story of a white boy played by Steve Martin who has grown up with black adoptive parents, and the American comedy Fakin’ Da Funk (1998), which portrays a Chinese boy who is adopted by an African-American family. In the United States, some states went so far as to legislate not only against interracial marriage, but also against interracial adoption or even the fostering of white children by non-whites, and in the late 1990s a controversy erupted when a black woman in Detroit wanted to adopt a white girl (Kennedy, 2003: 389–392).
children taken as prisoners and sometimes being adopted by natives in Frontier America, Africa, Asia and Australia during the colonial period, and an odd number of modern anthropologists who willingly and voluntarily “go native” and let themselves be adopted by their informants, two famous but nonetheless extremely rare examples of such reversed, switched and almost counterfactual adoption cases or “resident aliens” as Gayatri Spivak (2002) calls them are the white orphans in Rudyard Kipling’s famous novel *Kim* from 1901 and in Rabindranath Tagore’s equally well-known novel *Gora* from 1924, both raised by Indians as natives in British India (Hubel, 2004; Lennon, 2003). However, again it must have been a deliberate choice by the two legendary authors to make use of Irish boys given the ambivalent position the Irish maintained in those days as sometimes being white and sometimes not being white.

In their comprehensive study of children as unaccompanied refugees, Everett Ressler, Neil Boothby and Daniel Steinbock (1988: 9–12) trace international adoption’s modern precursors back to World War I, when Armenian children, who had survived the massacres in the Ottoman Empire were moved to Greece and Russia. At the same time tens of thousands of children of war (*Kriegskinder*) from the disintegrating empires of Austria-Hungary, Russia and Germany were transferred temporarily as foster children to Great Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries under the supervision of the Red Cross and Save the Children (Janfelt, 1998). During the inter-war years, 20,000 Spanish children (*niños de la guerra*) were during the Spanish Civil War relocated to institutions and substitute parents in France, Latin America, Scandinavia and the Soviet Union, of whom 3,000 stayed permanently and never returned.

The same process was reiterated before, during and after the Second World War when 20,000 Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Central

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7 White American Indian adoptees reflecting the settler desire to “go Indian” figure prominently in many classical Western films like *At the End of the Rope* (1914), *Circle of Death* (1935), *Sons of the Plains* (1938), *The Navajo Kid* (1945), *Little Big Man* (1970), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *Black Robe* (1991) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), and in David Malouf’s novel *Remembering Babylon* (1994), a British boy is taken in by Australian Aboriginals (Baird, 1996). One might also add the thousands of European youngsters and adolescents who were captured, dragged away and sold as slaves by so-called Barbary corsairs from the North African coast between the 16th and 18th centuries (Colley, 2002).
Europe were brought to England and other Western European countries (the *Kindert transport*), and when 70,000 Finnish children of war (*sotalapset*) were moved temporarily to Sweden, of whom around 10,000 stayed as adopted or foster children (Kavén, 1994; Lomfors, 1996). In addition, the Nazi German *Lebensborn* program transferred at least 200,000 children from Poland, Norway and other parts of Europe, many having a German father, who, based on their appearances, were deemed racially acceptable and considered worthy of being Germanised, and therefore placed at special institutions and boarding schools or adopted into German families (Clay & Leapman, 1995). Finally, from the end of the war and up to 1953, around 5,000 children from China and Taiwan, Eastern Europe and Greece, Germany, Italy and Japan, many fathered by American soldiers, were transferred as war refugees to the United States for adoption, while more than 2,500 Japanese children in Manchuria abandoned by the retreating imperial army, were taken in by Chinese families (Lemke Muniz de Faria, 2003; Quinn, 1961; Tseng, Ebata, Miguchi, Egawa & McLaughlin, 1990).

If limiting the Korean predecessors of international adoptees solely to those children who were adopted by Westerners, the story of Antonio Corea often crops up in discussions concerning the subject as he is designated as not only the first Korean who came to Europe, but also sometimes as the first adopted Korean. According to Henny Savenije (2000), in his paper on early Western contacts with Korea, the boy was one of tens of thousands of Korean prisoners-of-war who were brought to Japan at the time of the *Imjin* wars (1592–98). Born around 1578, Antonio Corea arrived in Japan in 1597 and was bought by a Florentine salesman named Francesco Carletti (1964: 115) together with four other Korean boys. Carletti first took them to the Portuguese colony of Goa in India where he freed all but one who had learned Italian the fastest. In 1606 he was brought to Europe, converted and baptised Antonio Corea, and naturally caused a lot of commotion, and he is believed to have been the model for one of Ruben’s paintings. Eventually he settled down in the Italian town of Albi where he passed away in 1626 after having become the progenitor of the Corea family.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) In 1990, descendants of Antonio Corea visited Korea and took a chromosome test, which showed that they had no traces left of Korean blood after such a long time. The
A more recent example of an international adoptee from Korea is Kim Kyu-sik (1881–1950), famous for his leading role in the independence movement as a right-wing Christian during the first half of the 20th century (Pratt & Rutt 1999: 214–15). Orphaned at an early age, six-year-old Kim Kyu-sik was adopted by the American missionary Horace G. Underwood, who is credited for the introduction of the Protestant faith in Korea (Doh, 1993). In 1897, Kim Kyu-sik moved to the US to study at Roanoke College where he received an honorary doctorate before returning to Korea in 1904. Fluent in English and with his unique bicultural upbringing, Kim was a valuable asset for the Korean independence movement and served as a diplomatic expert and in the provisional government in exile before he passed away in 1950, deeply disappointed at the partition of the country.

Finally, another ethnic Korean who was adopted in the early days of the 20th century is the Soviet Korean Alexandra Kim Stankevich, famous for being the first female Korean Communist, whose parents had moved to Eastern Siberia in 1869, together with thousands of other impoverished Korean peasants from the Hamgyông province (Kim Timofeevich, 1979: 49–56). Alexandra was born in the Korean village of Sinelnikovo near Vladivostok in 1885. After the premature death of her mother, Alexandra grew up with her father who worked as an interpreter for a Russian railway construction company in Manchuria. In 1895, Alexandra’s father passed away, and she was adopted by his Russian friend Piotr Stankevich who sent her to a girls’ boarding school in Vladivostok, where she received an education as a teacher. She married her adoptive father’s biological son, but soon divorced him to become a Socialist activist in the Urals region.

Another famous orphan of the same period is the author Yi Kwang-su. I would like to thank Professor Andrei Lankov for providing me with the information concerning Alexandra Kim Stankevich.
Comforting an Orphaned Nation

In 1916, she joined the Bolshevik Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, and in 1917 Lenin sent her back to Siberia as a member of the Bolshevik committee for the Maritime province to form a Communist brigade among the internees and prisoners-of-war. In September 1918, when pro-Japanese White Cossack troops conquered Khabarovsk, at the age of 33 and as a volunteer of the Korean Red Brigade, Alexandra was captured and executed.

Children of war

The children of Korea suffered enormously during the Korean War as Seoul changed hands four times and armies with millions of men marched back and forth and up and down across the small peninsula, pillaging and ravaging the country and causing tremendous destruction. Already in 1951, the United Nations Korean Reconstruction Agency estimated the number of orphaned children to 100,000, and in 1953 there were 293,000 widowed women caring for 516,000 children under the age of thirteen (Republic of Korea National Red Cross, 1977: 71; Ressler, Boothby & Steinbock, 1988: 37–43). In 1954, when Western relief organisations started to arrive in the country, the International Union for Child Welfare (1954) assessed that 2 million children under the age of 18 out of a total of 5 million war refugees, had been displaced from their homes, and an estimated 10,000 orphans lived on the streets (Ressler, Boothby & Steinbock, 1988: 37–43). These catastrophic effects of war upon Korea’s children logically constitute the immediate and decisive prerequisites for international adoption from Korea, and are also revealed in the statistics for institutionalised children given by the Church World Service social welfare consultants Charles Chakerian (1968: 40–44) and Helen Miller (1971). In 1945, when Japanese rule ended, there were just 38 child welfare institutions in the country, home to an estimated 3,000 children, while at the outbreak of the war in 1950 after repatriation and refugee movements from the North, those numbers had increased to 215 institutions and 24,945 children. Finally, in post-war Korea of 1957, four years after the armistice and the separation and destruction of numerous families, there were 482 institutions and 48,594 children living there.
The immediate response among the foreign soldiers to the miserable plight of the orphaned war children was a mixture of refugee evacuations, ad hoc fundraising drives for food and clothing, the setting up of orphanages, and most importantly the spontaneous incorporation of children into care at military bases as regimental mascots, houseboys or interpreters, which, in many cases, developed into a kind of informal adoption (Tise, 1992). Examples are the evacuation of 14,000 North Korean refugees from Hŭngnam in December of 1950, and the contemporaneous “Operation Kiddy Car” when American pilots flew out 950 orphans from Seoul as the city fell to the Northern side and placed them in an orphanage on Cheju Island, later immortalised by Hollywood in Douglas Sirk’s classical orientalist film *Battle Hymn* (1956). Some of those war orphans, who were among the first to be adopted to the US shortly after the war, have written compelling autobiographies bearing witness to the humanitarian aid the military rendered Korean children, most certainly driven by a strong amount of bad conscience for having intruded upon and torn the small country apart (Anthony, 1960; Park Clement, 1998; White, 1995). Many soldiers and other Westerners, who had been involved in these rescue and relief actions for Korea’s war orphans, also wrote about their experiences after the war (Coleman, 1990: 149–152). **\(^{11}\)**

The first Western-style orphanages, an absolute precondition for the following mass migration of Korean children, had been set up by missionaries in the late 19th century, and many others were established by soldiers during the war (Paik [1927] 1980). Out of 273 child welfare facilities existing in 2002, 177 were established before 1960 and as many as 144 in the 1950s, of which the absolute majority can be attributed to Westerners

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**\(^{11}\)** See for example John Caldwell’s trilogy *The Korea Story* (1953), *Still the Rice Grows Green* (1955) and *Children of Calamity* (1957), Zigmund John Niparko’s *Kims and Sans* (1954) and Dean Hess’s *Battle Hymn* (1956). This subject has been dealt with by George F. Drake (2005), a Korean War veteran and adoptive father himself, and the founder and promoter of the Korean War Children’s Memorial, unveiled in Bellingham, Washington, on the 27th of July 2003 in memory of the American soldiers’ humanitarian contributions. Mr. Drake, who estimates that US forces helped save the lives of 10,000 Korean children and sustain over 50,000 in 400 temporary orphanages built by American servicemen between 1950–54, has generously provided me with copies of hundreds of documents and newspaper clippings on American military aid to the children of Korea. See also Mr. Drake’s homepage: http://www.koreanchildren.org/ (2003-02-28).
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(Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2001). Ch’oe Wôn-kyu (1996) argues in his study of foreign voluntary agencies in Korea that the introduction of charitable and philanthropic social welfare facilities by missionaries in the 1890s, followed by military relief activities for refugees during the war, laid the foundation for modern Korean social work and its focus on private and institutional care, thereby preventing the formulation of a comprehensive social policy and planning.

Actually, it is even possible to say that modern Western aid and assistance to developing countries was established at the time of the Korean War as so many of its practices, including the sponsoring, fostering and adopting of children, the setting up of hospitals and orphanages and educational and technical assistance, were tested and experimented with in Korea for the first time (Alvernaz & Tieszen, 1958; Molumphy, 1984: 107–134; Tieszen, 1966). In this way, Korea became heavily influenced by Western notions of nuclear family values and child rearing practices including, of course, adoption, and completely dependent upon foreign resources and private initiatives inhibiting the development of its own social welfare system. Institutionalisation was even encouraged as facilities received more support from foreign voluntary agencies if they had more children, thereby creating economic incentives for orphanage directors to take in as many children as possible, to store, hide and lock them in there, often without the consent or even knowledge of their parents and relatives.12 In 2004, around 25,000 non-adoptable children were still housed at 271 institutions in Korea due to divorce, financial problems, prostitution, teenage pregnancy or extramarital affairs, creating profit and sustaining the orphanage owners and their families economically by way of donations based on the number of inmates.13

Between 1950–53, 1.3 million Americans served in Korea excluding

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12 See, for example, Korea Herald, February 14, 1968, for the reporting of a scam when “professional orphans” had enlisted at an orphanage to illegally raise funds for a representative of a US voluntary agency.

13 See Korea Times, March 25, 2004. This pitiful analysis is based on a proposal submitted to the Mayor of Seoul and written by Ron Fowler, a former American soldier and English teacher living in Korea who in 1998 founded Trekkids, later renamed Yheesun, a network of both Korean and foreign volunteers working to improve the quality of life for institutionalised children and trying to reform the Korean child welfare system.
smaller contingents from South Africa, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, France, Great Britain, Greece, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the Philippines, New Zealand, Thailand and Turkey, which also took part on South Korea's side in the war as UN troops, while Denmark, Sweden, Norway, India and Italy participated with military hospitals (Halliday & Cumings, 1988). Further, 60,000 American soldiers were to stay permanently in Korea stationed as the Eighth US Army to protect America's security interests in the Pacific Asian region. As always in times of war, women fall to the lot of the conquerors, and the Korean War did not turn out to be an exception to this rule. Not surprisingly, a sexual exploitation of Korean women took place on a mass scale during the genocidal-like war as Western invasions in East and Southeast Asia always tend to deteriorate into full-scale “race wars” and indiscriminate slaughtering of combatants and civilians alike (Hanley, Choe & Mendoza, 2001). The numerous Korean women who had intimate contacts with foreigners were shunned and stigmatised by the Korean society, as were their children in a country obsessed with female chastity, pure bloodlines and clan genealogies (National Human Rights Commission of Korea, 2003; Okazawa-Rey, 1997). Consequently, a mass migration of Korean wives of US servicemen started immediately after the war after changes in the emigration laws of the two countries, resulting in more than 150,000 Korean women moving to America throughout the years (Hong, 1982; Kim Bok-Lim, 1972; Thornton, 1992). These women, comprising 10–15 percent of...
all ethnic Koreans in the country, have played an important role in Korea-American history as it is estimated that 40–50 percent of all Koreans in the US can trace their immigration to the sponsorship of a wife of an American military man.

The products of these unequal and all too often temporary relations between UN soldiers and Korean women, known by the neologisms “Amerasian” or “GI baby”, were often abandoned by both parents, even if the exact amount of mixed race children who were born in Korea during those years is not known. Using the American Chicago sociologists Robert E. Park’s and Everett Stonequist’s notion of marginal man for the children of American service men and Korean women, Hurh Won Moo (1972) estimates a total of 12,280 born between 1950–65, of whom half ended up being adopted to America or to other Western countries. The issue of mixed race children and their difficult conditions in Korea was openly discussed in the Western media, and their numbers were often widely exaggerated, even if most probably less than 1 to 2 percent of all homeless children were actually mixed race (Chakerian, 1962; Miller, 1971; Oh, 2002). National Geographic, Time, Life, Readers’ Digest, Saturday Review and Ladies’ Home Journal all published articles about mixed race children in Korea, the Christian Children’s Fund and Save the Children established and supported orphanages and programs for them, and the Christian relief organisation World Vision made a documentary. In 1954, World Vision’s documentary Other Sheep toured America to inform the public of the difficult situation for mixed race war orphans in Korea. At a meeting in Portland, Harry and Bertha Holt met with World Vision’s president Dr. Bob Pierce in person, and the meeting resulted in the couple’s decision to adopt eight mixed race children from Korea themselves and, in the end, to establish their own adoption agency.

The enormous public interest in and obsession with the mixed race children of post-war Korea, and especially those of white-Korean descent, is strongly reminiscent of how so-called “Eurasian” métis/métisse (franco-annamites) and gemengden (Indo-Europeanen) children in the French and Dutch colonies of Southeast Asia, products of informal concubinary rela-

17 The subject of a mixed race child adopted by an American couple in the 1950s has even appeared in Fred Lukoff’s A First Reader in Korean Writing in Mixed Script (1982), a textbook for international learners of Korean.
tions or simply rape and prostitution, were viewed and treated during the classical imperialist age. According to Ann Laura Stoler (2002), who has studied the “métis question” and the subject of intimate interracial relations in a colonial setting during the first half of the 20th century, these children were objects of rescue fantasies and relief projects for the European homeland populations and especially among feminist and Christian philanthropist and humanist circles. Represented as “abandoned orphans”, in reality the mixed race children were often physically and forcefully removed and separated from their native mothers and assembled and brought together at special orphanages and boarding schools, to uphold white prestige and protect their perceived Europeanness from being culturally, linguistically and morally nativised and indigenised, but also from becoming politically dangerous as anti-Western father haters or even patricides as adults.

The mixed race children epitomised the physical and bodily boundary markers between the colonisers and the colonised, by their very presence challenging Western concepts of child rearing and conjugal patriarchy just like the stolen generations of mixed Aboriginal children in Australia who were legally taken by force from their indigenous mothers to be uprooted and domesticated, and raised and educated as white Australians, again showing how Western ideas of adoption came to rule over and destroy non-Western concepts of fostering children among extended kin networks. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the mostly American concern for and adoption of mixed race Asian children in the 1950s differs fundamentally in one important respect from the way that the French and Dutch, and also the Portuguese, Russian and British empires in Asia dealt with the problem of mixed race children fathered by European settlers and expatriates before World War II, as few if any of these were ever adopted and moved to metropolitan Europe, and instead were left behind after decolonisation as in the case of the Anglo-Indians, who still today constitutes an ethnic group of their own in post-independent India (Caplan, 2001).

The author Pearl S. Buck (1964: 146–170), winner of the Nobel Prize in literature and an adoptive mother of seven mixed race children from China, who had coined the word Amerasian in the first place, obviously modelled on the older word Eurasian, was one of the most outspoken to encourage Americans and Western Europeans to adopt Korean children
in the 1950s and 1960s. Laura Briggs (2003) writes how Buck used tropes of child rescuing, anti-Communism, and American paternalist responsibility to argue for the adoption of Asian children, while she at the same time was branded as an “enemy of the state” by the American government for her sincere anti-racist views regarding American racial segregation. Buck would eventually involve her own adoption agency the Welcome House, founded in 1949 to adopt Amerasian children from China and Japan, in the adoption of Korean children. This early interest in Asian children is interpreted by Christina Klein (2000; 2003: 143–190) as an expression of a Cold War mentality and a discourse of familial love with America as the benevolent “white mother” creating emotional ties to Asian people through the sponsoring or adopting of Asian children, while Asians simultaneously were infantilised and feminised, and portrayed as unable to take care of their own children. As follows, international adoption therefore became an integrated part of U.S. foreign policy and empire building to facilitate political relations and legitimate anti-Communist interventions in the region, while, at the same, giving ordinary Americans a sense of personal participation in the Cold War as family ties became a political obligation.

The first formal and registered international adoptions of Korean children took place in 1953 under the provision of the American Seventh Day Adventists. Authorised by the Korean Government, it was made possible by the Orphan Act and Refugee Relief Act passed by the American Congress the same year, which allowed the dubious practice of proxy adoption, meaning that Americans were able to adopt a child in foreign courts by the way of a proxy agent acting legally on their behalf (Bowman, Gjenvick & Harvey, 1961: 35). Yet, it is impossible to say that the four cases processed during the year are the first international adoptions from Korea as there are archival traces and media reports of earlier informal adoptions taking place already during the war. A United Press telegram dated the 23rd of September 1952 states that the 10-year old Rhee Song Wo, one of those

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18 In 1964, Buck created the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, which still today provides sponsorship for mixed race children in Korea and in other Asian countries affected by American military presence (Moen, 1974). In 1991, the Welcome House merged with the foundation under the present name Pearl S. Buck International. Buck herself also wrote several books about mixed race children adopted from Korea: Welcome Child (1963), Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (1966) and The New Year (1968).
numerous orphans, who had been taken care of by soldiers, is on his way to his adoptive home in America by a special permission from Presidents Truman and Rhee, which overruled the then racially based immigration law banning the entry of Asians. Other wartime articles mention plans to adopt orphans, and in 1951 American authorities openly warned their soldiers not to become too attached to unofficially adopted children in Korea. In July 1952, Kim Yoon Joong arrived in San Francisco as the foster son of Mr. and Mrs. Beauchamp. Yoon Joong had been their son Victor’s bearer in Korea before he was killed, and Victor’s last wish was that his parents would bring the Korean boy to the US. Accordingly, an unknown number of Korean children must have ended up in Western countries accompanied by homecoming military and diplomatic personnel, and missionaries and relief workers as adoptive parents already during the war years.

The complete absence of a legal framework worried the Korean Government during these initial chaotic years of international adoption from Korea when foreign individuals and voluntary agencies considered themselves as self-proclaimed protectors, guardians and saviours of the country’s children. The sheer chaos in war-torn Korea makes it possible to understand how easy and tempting it must have been for UN soldiers and other Westerners just to make claims on any Korean “parentless” and “adoptable” child and bring him or her out of the country. In 1952, the

19 The telegram refers to the passage of the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. United Press, September 23, 1952. As the majority of soldiers were unmarried bachelors, the soldiers’ parents in most cases, legally adopted the Korean children.

20 See The Pacific Stars and Stripes, August 21, 1951. In 1951, a female North Korean guerrilla soldier assigned her newborn daughter to a Swedish nurse at the Swedish Red Cross Hospital in Pusan as one of these early “adoptions” receiving much media attention and which later tuned out to be a sponsored child relationship. See Stockholms-Tidningen, January 28, 1951. In October of 1951 Kim Song Nore, a 13-year old Korean boy “adopted” by the 1st Marine Division, was killed in an accident after having received special permission to enter the US. See The Pacific Stars and Stripes, February 9, 1952.

21 The Pacific Stars and Stripes, July 14, 1952.

22 In April 1975, two decades later in another Asian country deadly struck by an American military invasion, the evacuating US Army rounded up between 2–3,000 Vietnamese children of whom many were mixed race, and airlifted them to be distributed by Holt for international adoption to a dozen Western countries in what later became
Korean Government introduced a welfare facilities system and a foster parents’ plan as a response to the many children orphaned by the war, and these steps were to mark the beginning of domestic adoption in Korea (Yi Mi-sôn, 2001: 6). In 1955, the National Assembly tried to create a law for international adoption, but the draft was considered too premature (Yi Sôn-ok, 2001: 30).33 Instead, preparations for a second attempt started in 1957, when the Children’s Charter was promulgated which, in the end, resulted in the adoption law of 1961.

On 20 January 1954, with a presidential order and under the patronage of the First Lady Francisca Donner, the Child Placement Service (Adongyanghohoe) was set up with initial grants from abroad and subordinated to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs for the purpose of providing international adoption of mixed race children to the US and other Western countries, which had participated on the side of the country in the war (Bowman, Gjenvick & Harvey, 1961: 43–44; Chakerian, 1963: 19–20; Social Welfare Society, 2004: 17–20; Tahk, 1983).24 Between 1954–57, the Child Placement Service worked together with the Geneva based International Social Service, which had been handling child welfare issues since the 1920s, including the American adoptions of Japanese and German children after World War II, and signed bilateral agreements with the various receiving countries like Sweden and its Department of Social Affairs (1967: 38–41) in 1966, a country which was to dominate interna-

33 One early and famous domestic adoptive parent is the poet Ku Sang.

24 The Child Placement Service’s first director Oak Soon Hong has kindly provided me with valuable information concerning the founding of this first Korean adoption agency. Francisca Donner was of Austrian origin, and they had married in 1934 when Syngman Rhee was stationed in the United States as a representative for the Korean independence movement (Allen, 1960). The marriage bore no children, and eventually the presidential couple adopted two children themselves. The eldest son and intended heir Kang-Sok, shot himself and his birth parents when his adoptive father’s regime was toppled by the student revolution of 1960, while his younger brother In-Soo was to survive both adoptive parents.
tional adoption from the Child Placement Service for many years. In 1955, a third authorised agency entered the scene, when the Catholic Relief Service began placing Korean children in Catholic families in America. In 1957, the International Social Service initiated its own adoption program (discontinued in 1966 and taken over by the Social Welfare Society), and in 1958 Pearl S. Buck’s Welcome House also started to adopt children from Korea (Han, 2004: 97–107; Miller, 1971).

In 1956, the American farmer and philanthropist Harry Holt who himself had adopted eight mixed race children from Korea through the Child Placement Service, founded the adoption agency which still bears his name and rapidly developed into both Korea’s and the world’s dominating organisation in the field of international adoption placing half of the adoptions from Korea and altogether more than 100,000 children from various non-Western countries (Holt, 1982, [1956] 1992a, 1992b; Holt Children’s Services, 1985; Holt International Children’s Services, 1992). Actually, it is most likely that without the activities of Holt, international adoption from Korea would never have developed into such gigantic dimensions as it did. From the beginning, according to its many and vocal critics in the form of professional social workers, the Holt agency conducted speedy procedures, overused proxy adoption, making “mail order babies” possible, disregarded minimum standards, chartered whole flights filled up with children, which were perceived by some as modern slave ships, and accepted couples who had been rejected by other agencies, while at the same time prioritising Christian fundamentalists as adoptive parents and paying attention to specifications for age and sex as well as race matching (Herman, 2002; Isaac, 1965: 139; Oh, 2002).

Harry Holt, having no previous experience at all in child welfare, was instead feverishly driven by a Christian fundamentalist zeal to rescue, Christianise and civilise the children of Korea. In this manner, Christianity, missionary work and religion played an equally important role as American empire building and Cold War security politics to initiate international adoption from Korea on a mass scale. Just like contemporary Christian fundamentalists who encourage Jews to move to Israel to fulfil the prophecy of the Book of Revelation, Holt quoting Isaiah 43:5 prophetically conceived international adoption to play a part in a divine scheme for the fulfilment of God’s will (Holt, [1956] 1992a: 55):
I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

The evangelical couple from Oregon were turned into superstars and world celebrities for their missionary-style emergency program to rescue the children of Korea, and attracted so much attention in both Korea and in the West that many people today believe that they not only started the adoption of Korean children but international adoption itself.25 Successful lobbying by Holt saw the realisation of the so-called Orphan Bill or Orphan Eligibility Clause of the Immigration and Nationality Act passed by the American Congress in 1957, thus replacing the temporary Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and securing the future for international adoption from Korea to the US. In 1961, with a congressional amendment of the Immigration and Nationality Act, international adoption was eventually given a permanent place in American law as well as putting a stop to proxy adoption (Breckenridge, 1977; Holt, 1999).

Between 1953 and 1959, 2,899 Korean children were adopted overseas. Excluding missing data from the Catholic Relief Service, a small number adopted via the American Soul Clinic and the private adoptions going through, for example, staff at the Scandinavian run National Medical Center and Scandinavian Mission to Korea estimated by Miller (1971) to be one or two hundred a year, and more than half went through Holt. A majority were mixed race as their ratio constituted 70–90 percent until 1959, when full-Korean children started to take over. It was mainly Holt who at an early stage had moved into the adoption of full-Korean children, as 85 percent of the Seventh Day Adventist placements and 60 percent of those by the Child Placement Service were registered as mixed race (Bowman, Gjenvick & Harvey, 1961: 41–43). Chin Kim and Timothy Carroll (1975) give the exact number of 4,494 mixed race children being adopted

25 Holt is today a concept in Korea and a synonym for and a simile to international adoption itself, while Harry’s daughter Molly Holt, chairman of the Holt Foundation in Korea, is a celebrity in Korea after having spent most of her life in the country. When Molly’s mother Bertha “Grandma” Holt passed away in the year of 2000 at the age of 96 and like her husband Harry was buried on the grounds of the agency’s home for handicapped children in Ilsan north of Seoul, she was honoured with a state funeral with the First Lady and several high-ranking government officials being present.
abroad between 1958–74, of whom 955 were of African-American or another non-white origin such as Turkish, Thai or Filipino. The children who left the country during this first stage of international adoption from Korea were predominantly girls, abandoned during and after the war and handed over to temporary institutions or directly to adoption agencies (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1999). The main country of destination was America where Korean children would dominate international adoption for 38 years in a row. Besides, small numbers had also started to arrive in Norway (from 1955), in Sweden (from 1957) and in England (from 1958).

The adoption industry

In 1960, the student uprising of April 19 ended President Syngman Rhee’s increasingly autocratic rule, followed by a period of democratisation. The military revolution of 1961 abruptly stopped the brief experiment with democracy and installed a dictatorial regime with harsh oppression of students and workers and ruthless regimentation of its citizens, which was governed by fierce anti-Communism, developmentalism and modernisation theory (Choi Chungmoo, 1995; Shin, 1998). At the time of the military take-over, Korea was still an agrarian society suffering from the typical symptoms of a developing country, e.g., mass poverty and overpopulation. The two principal measures implemented to decrease the population were family planning and population control policy and emigration, while international adoption can be seen as a combination of both (Lee Sea Baick, 1989). Hence, the era of authoritarian regimes with Presidents Park Chung Hee (1961–79) and Chun Doo Hwan (1981–87) were to become the years, when international adoption witnessed its heyday as three out of four of all placements occurred during this period.

One of the earliest actions of the military government was to pass the Orphan Adoption Special Law (Koaibyangt’üngnyêbôp), Korea’s first modern adoption law on September 30, 1961, followed by the Child Welfare Act to facilitate international adoption as an alternative to costly institutional care (Chang, 1996; Kim Chin & Carroll, 1975; Tahk, 1986a). The decree at last created a legal basis for the international adoption of Korean children, illegalised private adoptions and established a framework for the
most effective adoption industry unsurpassed in the world characterised by efficient agencies, speedy procedures and secure logistics (Penner, 1996: 35–36; Pyôn, Yi & Kim, 1999: 47–48). After an amendment in 1967, the law stipulated that every adoption was to take place according to Korean law and through a government licensed agency working closely with a Western counterpart, both of which charged fees to adoptive parents (Tahk, 1986a: 80–81). The agencies mandated for international adoption were expected to employ professional social workers, medical doctors and nurses to run the orphanages as well as providing both long- and short-term pre-adoption foster care and domestic adoption. The passing of the adoption law and the setting up of an institutional framework for international adoption mark the professionalisation of social work and the bureaucratisation of social welfare in Korea according to the logics of social science and social engineering, and scientific expertise and methodology being so pivotal in implementing the Enlightenment project of societal development and progress. From now on, Korea embarked on its rocky road from tradition to modernity through a Korean version of a Foucauldian-style governmentality and instrumentality, and where international adoption was to become one of its most successful self-regulating and self-disciplining biopolitical technologies of social control and biological purification in the reproductive field.

In 1964, the Korea Social Service, the first agency to be entirely run by Koreans themselves, began to process international adoptions, and in 1965 the Child Placement Service was reorganised as a private agency and also renamed the Social Welfare Society in 1971 (Social Welfare Society, 2004: 29–32; Tahk, 1983, 1986a). In 1972, the Eastern Child Welfare Society was founded as the fourth Korean agency handling international adoption still today. Hence, at the beginning of the 1970s as many as seven agencies operated in the field of Korean adoption: the Seventh Day Adventists, the Social Welfare Society, the Catholic Relief Service, Holt Children’s Services, the Korea Social Service, the Welcome House and the Eastern Child Welfare Society (Chakerian, 1968: 49–57). To balance the number of international adoptions, a special agency for domestic adoption was created in 1962 with the help of the American Christian Reformed Church, the Christian Adoption Program of Korea, which, in turn, merged with Holt in 1975 (Han, 2004: 116–135; Holt, 1999; Yi Mi-son, 2001: 7).  

26 It is important to note that between the passing of the adoption law of 1961 and
1962–70, domestic adoption was openly promoted, requiring the country’s government workers and officials to take care of an orphan. As a result of this compulsory and strongly nationalistic campaign and the professional effectiveness of agencies like the Christian Adoption Program of Korea, the decade ended as the only one hitherto with domestic adoptions exceeding international ones – 8,247 cases as opposed to 6,166 (Chông & An, 1994: 13).

The family planning and population control program, launched in 1962, was to become the most successful population control policy in any developing country in terms of accomplishing the objective of lowering the fertility rate (Kim Son-Ung, 1981; Nam & Ro, 1981; Palmore, Park, Yap & Cho, 1987). By the time it was wound-up in 1996, the average number of children per woman had decreased from 6.3 in 1960 to 1.6 in 1990. The program included birth control and sex education, the popularisation of different types of contraceptives, economic incentives and tax reductions to persuade families to have less children, a somewhat lenient one child policy, abortion, which was made legal in practice in 1973, and the wide use of sterilisation with more than 220,000 cases registered only between 1962 and 1975 (Donaldson, 1981: 231). The family planning and population control program has been strongly criticised by Korean feminists for having regulated and restricted the reproductive rights of women, while, at the same time, having preserved the Confucian son preference and the male-centred family census register of hojuje (Cho Hyoung, 1997; Kim Eun-shil, 1996; Lee Hye-kyung, 1994; Oum, 2003).  

until 1990, when amendments in the civil code repealed the most old-fashioned regulations, domestic adoption was ruled by traditional Confucian and pre-modern concepts of what an adoption should be made for by, for example, prohibiting the adoption of an eldest son, except for a primogeniture line and allowing posthumous adoption and adoption via testament, which altogether may well have contributed to slow down the number of adoptions within the country (Roesch-Rhomberg, 2003). However, posthumous intra-familial adoption is still practiced sometimes, as the son of the last crown prince of the Chosôn dynasty, Lee Gu, died in 2005 without any children but two adopted daughters, and to be able to uphold the patrilineage, the Lee Royal Family Organization decided that Lee Won, a relative and great-grandson of King Kojong, will be adopted as his son. See Joongang Ilbo, July 23, 2005.

In 2005, the government eventually abolished the patriarchal family register system of hojuje after having ruled it unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court, and a new individual-oriented registration system will take effect in 2008, which among others will remove the distinction previously made between adopted and biological children.
Apart from that, Yeonoak Baik and Jin Young Chung (1996) have identified other ramifications of the program such as a severe disproportion in the sex ratio and an extremely high frequency of abortions. The skewed sex ratio at birth stood at 116.8 in 1990 compared to a normal 106.0, meaning that in 2015 there will be a high rate of bachelorhood and 700,000 extra males in the marriage market, and there are estimates that more than half of all married Korean women have had an abortion, which has made the country known as an “abortion paradise”, with one of the highest abortion ratios in the world (Kim Tai-Hun, 1997; Park Sook-ja, 2001; Tedesco, 1996). In 2003, the Korean birth rate had declined to a mere 1.17, representing the lowest in the world, and attributed to a trend in late marriage leading to low marital fertility and higher infertility rates and a drastic increase in the number of divorces (Lowe-Lee, 2003). This completely abnormal demographic decline should not come as a surprise after decades of patriarchal population policy in the form of sex-biased abortions, adoptions and sterilisations seriously decimating the fertility ratio of the female population, and the fact that tens of thousands of women have left the country for international marriage with Western men.

Sending people overseas as export products to countries in need of cheap menial labour was another method used by the Korean developmental state to decrease the population. From 1962–63, contract labour programs with Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Paraguay in Latin America, with West Germany, France and Scandinavia in Europe and with oil producing West Asian countries like Saudi Arabia sent hundreds of thousands of Koreans abroad who contributed to the country’s economic development by sending back remittances (Hong & Kim, 1979; Kim Dae Young & Sloboda, 1981: 115–117; Lee You-Jae, 2004; Stahl & Arnold, 1986; Yoo, 2006).

28 There are estimates that around half of women aged between 15 and 44 have had an abortion. The induced abortion rate peaked at 64 per 1,000 women at the beginning of the 1980s; afterwards it dropped to 20 per 1,000 in the middle of the 1990s (Henshaw, Singh & Haas, 1999).
29 In light of the Korean adoption history, it is easy to see the irony not just in the low fertility rate, but also in the fact that in February 2004 a Korean researcher happened to be the first in the world to succeed in cloning a human embryo. In 2005 with a record low birth rate of 1.16, President Roh announced that the government was studying a plan to offer tax benefits to young couples to encourage them to have more children, as a way of tackling the country’s demographic catastrophe.
Many of those who went overseas were actually re-migrants as there are estimates that half of all Koreans in Latin America and a quarter of those in the US originate from the North (Grinker, 1998: 104). Canada, Australia and more recently also New Zealand were also popular destinations for Koreans leaving their country during the period (Coughlan, 1995).

The most important host country during the post-war era was to be the United States, receiving more than three-quarters of those who went overseas and with annual immigration numbers from Korea exceeding 30,000 between 1974–90 (Chang, 2000; Tomasko, 1996; Yoon, 2001a). The main reasons for this US domination are the country’s semi-colonial status within the American world order and the resulting intimate military, political and economic relations between the two states, together with the amendment to the 1965 US immigration law, which since 1924 had discriminated against Asians (Lim, 1985; Takaki, 1998; Wu, 2002). However, there is a tendency among Korean-American and Asian American scholars to neglect both international adoption and international marriage when accounting for the emigration history even if the adoptees and the military brides together, according to Yu and Choe (2003/2004), constitute between one in four and one in three of the 800,000 Koreans who have emigrated to America since 1948. These two groups, products of a combination of American imperialism and Korean patriarchy, almost parallel each other in the statistics and can be seen as physical reminders of the unequal relationship between the two countries (Kim Bok-Lim, 1977).

Between 1962–77, 300,000 Koreans left the country, with international marriage (16.9 percent), international adoption (14.8 percent) and contract labour (68.1 percent) as the principal reasons registered (Hong & Kim, 1979: 42). In total, over 1 million Korean citizens have moved to other countries after the Korean War, of whom 15 percent are adoptees and 15–20 percent wives of Western men (Overseas Koreans Foundation, 1999).

Within a period of 30 years from the start of the first five-year economic plan in 1962, the authoritarian developmental state of Korea transformed itself from an agricultural economy to a modern industrial nation with astonishing speed and horrifying efficiency. Between 1967 and 1976, 6.7 million people, close to 20 percent of the population, migrated from rural areas to the rapidly growing cities, as the process of proletarianisation
created factory workers out of farm labourers and peasants in barely one
generation (Choi Jang Jip, 1995: 28). In 1960, 39.9 percent of the popula-
tion were working in agriculture compared to 9 percent in 1990, with 18.6
compared to 44.7 as the equivalent percentage distributions for industry.
An important aspect of Korean industrialisation emphasised by Hagen
Koo (2001: 23–45) in his study of the formation of the Korean working-
class was the heavy reliance on female labour. Therefore, the rate of
proletarianisation was higher among women than among men – an in-
crease of 7.4 times between 1963 and 1985 has been noted compared to five
times for the males. In 1976, women constituted 53 percent of the indus-
trial labour force, and two out of three were unmarried girls between 15–
25 years old – a fact important to bear in mind in order to understand the
conditions for international adoption from Korea during those decades,
as many of these young women were to become birth mothers of children
sent overseas (Hong, 1981; Kim Young-Ok, 2005; Spencer, 1988).

As a result of the industrialisation of the country and the rapid disap-
pearance of traditional society with its extended family kinship patterns
and networks, international adoption found its new supply among the
tens of thousands of Korean children born by young factory workers
(yôgong) and abandoned and declared foundlings in the brutal turmoil of
internal migration and fast urbanisation. The number of abandoned chil-
dren increased dramatically from 715 in 1955 to 11,319 in 1964, after when
it started to slow down, while the number of orphanage inmates reached
its peak in 1967 with 71,816 children affiliated to 602 institutions (Miller,
1971). Between 1955–70, a total of 80,520 children were abandoned with
urban poverty as the reason stated for half of the cases followed by handi-
cap (18.5 percent), family break-up (11.4 percent), parental neglect (6.7
percent), illegitimacy (5.5 percent) and prostitution (4.5 percent)

Starting from the end of the 1960s, Korea’s international adoption pro-
gram suddenly gained worldwide popularity in Western countries. Even
if the initial impetus arose out of a rescue mission to adopt mixed race
children, international adoption had by now developed into the last re-
sort to have a child for infertile middle-class couples under social pressure
in order to live up to the post-war mandate of building a normative het-
erosexual nuclear family, or for singles who did not have a partner at all
and those who did not want to disrupt their careers with a time consum-
ing pregnancy. In the West, international adoption became legitimised by a left-liberal ideology that framed it as a progressive and anti-racist act of rescuing a destitute child from the “miseries and barbarism of the Third World”, and a way to create a “rainbow family”, and later on also conceived as a revolutionising reproductive method for radical feminists and homosexuals (Kirton, 2000: 32–58; Solinger, 2003: 20–32).

The demand from Western countries for Korean children increased concurrently with a shrinking shortage of white children in the domestic adoption market as a result of the legalisation of abortion, increased availability of contraceptives, a growing societal tolerance for single mothers who were made eligible for social benefits, the “moral” ban on transracial adoption of native and minority children taking place from the mid 1970s, the lesser risk with international adoption of birth mothers changing their minds and coming back to reclaim and reconnect with their child, and, above all, the general strengthening of women’s rights after the revolution of 1968 as the major contributing force (Farrar, 1999; Solinger, 1992; Zelizer, 1985). Through the 1960s and 1970s, international adoption became almost synonymous with adoption from Korea, and was used by both sides as a bonding strategy to develop friendship ties between Korea and the Western host countries. In 1973, Holt’s director Jack Theis stated: “Korean orphans adopted abroad have turned into some of the country’s best goodwill ambassadors”. Two years later, the Swedish ambassador Bengt Odevall said in an interview:

The adoption program is one of the most successful undertakings between our two countries. Some 3,400 Korean orphans adopted by Swedish families from 1967 to 1974 have been well integrated into their adoptive families…I might say the relations between us can be likened to a blood-bonded one in consideration of the successful adoption program.

The precarious situation caused the Canadian social worker Sydney Byma (1974) to warn that international adoption severely crippled and hindered

10 It is important to bear in mind that this shortage only regards white children, as non-white and especially black children in America are still today over-represented among those placed in foster care or at institutions and deemed non-adoptable, and mixed race African-American children have throughout the years even been adopted to other Western countries as a result of the deep racial cleavages and prejudices within the United States.


12 Korea Newsreview, October 18, 1975.
the development of a domestic social welfare system in Korea, while the International Social Service and Save the Children concluded that the existence of an efficient adoption industry in Korea encouraged parents to abandon their children in their belief of a better material life in a Western country, or even more disturbing to the use of adoption as a form of retroactive abortion (Kim Una, 2002; Lee Hye-Kyung, 1993). Further, the Council of Europe (1980: 44–45) expressed concern over its usage in exchange for both economic aid and political support. An even stronger response came from Dag Ahlander (1976), secretary at the Swedish Embassy in Seoul, when he informed his countrymen that international adoption must be considered a white upper-class phenomenon and that it causes strongly negative reactions in the countries of origin. Ahlander referred to how the Korean media had portrayed the leading adopting country of Sweden in a negative way, as the Swedes every year demanded more and more Korean children.

The first half of the 1970s also saw international adoption as playing a part in the struggle for legitimacy waged between the two Koreas. North Korea accused its southern neighbour of selling Korean offspring for profit to Westerners (Park Soon Ho, 1994: 52). The negative attention led to several panic-stricken temporary stops to Northern Europe and the promotion of domestic adoption, while the adoption program itself was transformed into something close to a state secret, and its numbers were classified from 1974 and separated from emigration and diaspora statistics (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2002; Pyôn, Yi & Kim, 1999: 47). In response to the North Korean accusations and to bolster the negative image of the country, quotas demanding that 10 percent of all adoptions had

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33 *Korea Newsreview*, December 21, 1974.

34 Ironically, in 1999 another report from the Council of Europe (1999) strongly warned against the commercialisation of international adoption and resolutely condemned the market economy laws of supply and demand that rule the field as if nothing has happened in two decades.

35 Nevertheless, North Korea must be considered technically disqualified for accusing South Korea of sending Korean children to foreign countries as between 1951 and 1952, 2,500 North Koreans war orphans were relocated to various Communist countries, of whom many eventually stayed permanently and were adopted: 1,500 to Romania and around 200 each to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Mongolia and most likely also to China and Russia (Hübinette, 2002/2003).
to be domestic were introduced in 1973, a total revision of the law renamed the Act for Special Cases of Adoption (Ibyangt’ungnyêbôp) took place in 1976 to make domestic adoption, foster care and sponsorship easier, and a plan for the gradual phasing out of international adoption with the exception of mixed race and handicapped children by 1981 was announced to curb the outflow of children (Chun, 1989; Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2002; Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998). At the same time, the number of receiving countries were restricted to eleven, and the agencies which were limited to four were required to be wholly run by Koreans: the Social Welfare Society, Inc., Holt Children’s Services, Inc., the Korea Social Service, Inc., and the Eastern Child Welfare Society, which today calls itself the Eastern Social Welfare Society, Inc. Accordingly, from 1977 Holt Children’s Services became independent of its American parent agency and developed into a full-Korean organisation. The Five Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care (1976–81) aimed at reducing the number of international adoptions by 1,000 annually and simultaneously increasing domestic adoptions by 500 through the introduction of a system of quotas, regulated by the Social Welfare Society and based on the number of domestic adoptions placed the previous year (Kim Una, 2002; Yun, 1993: 42–43).

In 1979, President Park Chung Hee was killed by one of his closest aides, and again after a short democratisation period the new military strongman Chun Doo Hwan came to power through a coup d’état. In 1980, the new government discontinued the 1976 policy when it was evident that the plan would not be fulfilled due to a failure to increase domestic adoption, and outlined its new approach to international adoption, integrated in the so-called non-governmental foreign policy (min’gan oegyo) to expand the emigration program and further develop friendships with Western allies (Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998). Through a process of government deregulation, the quota system was abolished and the four agencies were allowed to compete with each other to track down unrestricted numbers of adoptable children. Consequently, a thriving adoption economy was created, resulting in 66,511 international placements, the largest numbers ever sent abroad in a decade (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 1999). The 1980s were also the years showing the highest emigra-

17 Korea Times, October 12, 1980.
tion movement from Korea to nearly the same Western countries affected by international adoption.

The agencies became involved in profit-making business activities and real estate investments. They were also running their own delivery clinics, baby reception centres, temporary institutions and foster homes for pre-adoption care, and, most importantly, a growing number of maternity shelters and homes for young, single and unwed mothers in order to secure a continuous supply of newborn and healthy babies, as children coming from intact families had been exempted from adoption in 1984 after a scandal broke out with “lost” children found to have been placed abroad “by mistake” without the consent and knowledge of their parents (O, 1994; Yi Sŏn-ok, 2001: 37). By the mid-1980s, Korea had achieved an acceptable level of economic wealth, and Park In Sun (1998: 229) has called those who were dispatched abroad as “goodwill ambassadors” in the decade, the “forgotten children” and “victims in pursuit of greater national economic prosperity”. The years 1984 to 1988 saw international adoption from Korea peaking with 6,500–9,000 cases annually, and representing an amazing 1–1.4 percent of the country’s annual living births (Kim Una, 2002).

Already from the beginning of the 1970s, the absolute majority of the children adopted overseas were by now full Korean and still mostly girls although the proportion of boys was on the increase. The abandoned children who had constituted 55–65 percent of the total in the 1960s as well as those coming from broken families, had by the end of the decade increasingly been replaced by children of unmarried and single mothers from middle-class backgrounds, even if about half of the birth mothers still were young factory workers up until the mid-1980s (Spencer, 1988; Tåhk, 1986a, 1986b). Furthermore, the ratio of disabled children was gradually growing constituting one out of four adoptions. Among the receiving countries, it is no coincidence that those who had sided with the anti-Communist alliance in the war and continued to be important political allies and trade partners took in the most children: the US, Norway and Sweden beginning in the 1950s, Denmark, Canada, France, Australia, Belgium and the Netherlands from the 1960s and finally Luxembourg in 1984. In addition, since the 1960s Korean children also went to West Germany, Italy and Switzerland and smaller numbers to England, New Zealand, Ireland, Spain and Finland.
New directions

The events of June 1987 with student demonstrations, labour strikes and massive popular protests effectively and definitively ended a quarter of a century of military rule in postcolonial Korea, and President Chun was forced to step down and announce that a democratic election was to take place (Korea Democracy Foundation, 2005; Lindström, 1993). Even though his right-hand man Roh Tae Woo was elected president in the following December election due to an unfortunate split in the opposition, Roh’s government (1988–92) is commonly seen as the transitional stage to full democracy in Korea. The 1988 Seoul Olympic Games showcased a proud and newly democratised and industrialised Korea on display to the world. All of a sudden, Western journalists started to write about the adoption program, and portrayed the host country as the leading global exporter of children. Criticism of international adoption had been heard before in Korea, but never hitherto had the negative attention been so strong and massive as in 1988. As a result, during the Olympics sending Korean children abroad was temporarily suspended to avoid further negative attention, and the following year the number of international adoptions was reduced substantially due to government coercion and strikes among agency employees caused by dissatisfaction with the uncomfortable situation.

In September 1989, new guidelines for the improvement of the country’s adoption policy and practice were issued, with the aim of reducing the annual number of children going abroad and to eventually stop overseas adoptions by 1996, except for mixed race and handicapped children. At the same time, the agencies were publicly criticised for having overcharged for both domestic and international adoptions and for having provided generous “delivery fees” to medical institutes in their ruthless quest for adoptable children (Sarri, Baik & Bombyk, 1998; Yun, 1993: 44–45). The agencies were also forced to downsize and lay off employees due to the drastic decline in international adoptions. Tax reductions were provided to encourage domestic adoption, which was projected to grow by 400–600 placements a year, while overseas placements in reality were restricted to cases of children born by young and unwed mothers at the agen-

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cies’ maternity wards, shelters and homes, which from now on started to function more or less like baby farms.

Yet in August 1994, this second government plan to phase out international adoption was overturned on the grounds that the number of domestic adoptions remained too low, and instead an annual flexible decrease of 3–5 percent was set up with a more distant deadline of 2015 (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2002; Pyôn, Yi & Kim, 1999: 53–54). In 1995, the adoption law was changed to its present name the Special Law on Adoption Promotion and Procedure (Iyangch’okchin mit chôlch’ae kwahhan t’üngnyébôp), and underwent two minor revisions in 1999 and 2000 (Yun, 1995). Between 1991–97, the Korean Government managed to keep the number of adoptions down to a little over 2,000 cases a year, but during the Asian economic crisis of 1997–99 international adoption was allowed to increase again and placements suddenly climbed to 2,400 annually consisting of so-called “IMF orphans” (Kim & Finch, 2002). Meanwhile, the government has encouraged domestic adoption, which by the end of the 1990s accounted for one third of all adoptions, and has since 2001 supported the development of a long-term foster care system based on Western models and promoted international adoption among ethnic Koreans overseas (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2002).\(^\text{39}\)

\(^{39}\) In 1999 Stephen Morrison, an Korean adoptee in the US, founded MPAK, Mission to Promote Adoption in Korea, to increase open adoption among both native Koreans and Korean-Americans. MPAK organises conferences and events for domestic adoptive families with the aim of making adoption more visible and thus socially acceptable in the Korean society. Anti-Baby Export, a similar group created by a domestic Korean adoptive father, was formed in 2004. Besides, as the number of refugees from North Korea continues to increase, the adoption of North Korean children by South Koreans may become a reality in a not too distant future. Actually, according to Wolgan Chosun, January 7, 2002, ethnic North Korean children from Manchuria have already started to arrive as adoptees, albeit in very small numbers. In January 2002, two orphaned North Korean children who, together with thousands of other parentless children, had crossed the fragile Tumen river border area in search for food, were provided asylum in South Korea, and in the debate that followed the American missionary Tim Peters stated in an interview in Korea Times, March 18, 2002: “I think adoption is an excellent solution. You might remember that many orphaned South Korean children were adopted by Western families after the Korean War. It is time for South Koreans to do the same.” North Korean children have also figured in the adoption statistics of countries like Canada and Sweden, but those children are most probably South Korean children who have been wrongly registered by immigration officers or by their adoptive parents.
As a result of these efforts, 22,925 children were adopted overseas during the 1990s, the absolute majority being extramarital as there are estimates that between 80–90 percent of all children in the country born out of wedlock end up for adoption compared to, for example, 1 percent in the United States (Chandra, Abma, Maza & Bachrach, 1999; Kim & Davis, 2003). This is in spite of the fact that Korea with just 1 percent of women experiencing teenage motherhood has the lowest rate of teenage pregnancy among all OECD countries, while the United States with 22 percent is topping the list according to the United Nations Children’s Fund (2001). The mothers, who give up their children for adoption, are nowadays mostly teenagers or at least under the age of 25, often spending their pregnancies behind the secluded walls of the agencies’ own maternity homes where they are counselled and coerced to relinquish their children, and the majority comes from a middle-class background, where the stigma of pre- or extra-marital sexual activity or a former marriage has the potential to ruin future social advancement for both the parent and the child (Yi Sôn-ok, 2001: 70–73). The proportion of boys is slightly higher than girls, while as many as one out of three are categorised as handicapped. Lastly, the recipient countries have been restricted to eight as of 2004: the United States, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, Australia, and Canada.

Park In Sun (2002) points out that the current Korean situation is strongly reminiscent of the situation in Western countries before the change of mores that took place after the social revolution of the late 1960s.

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40 See Dong-A Ilbo, September 27, 2001. As late as in 1973, one in five of unmarried young mothers in the United States handed over their child for domestic adoption.

41 In 2001, according to a survey, 8.1 percent of a group of female high school students had had sexual intercourse, and among them 10.8 percent had experienced a pregnancy. Of these 8 percent had experienced miscarriage, 77 percent chose abortion, 10.7 percent were living with their child, while 4.5 percent had given up their child for adoption. See Korea Herald, February 7, 2001. Another recent survey from 2005 found that 27.7 percent of Korean college and university students had had a sexual experience, but only 36.8 percent had found the sex education in school very helpful. See Chosun Ilbo, May 25, 2005.

42 However, as the number of single parent families reached 2.2 million in 2000 due to a rapidly increasing divorce rate reaching 47 percent, meaning that over 15 percent of all Korean families are nowadays headed by single parents and of course mostly single mothers, one may expect that the stigma of being a single parent will soon disappear.
She indicates that Korea will soon also have to look after its own children rather than blaming the consequences of war or the prioritisation of economic growth. These excuses are still sometimes used to hide behind, not to mention the self-orientalising images of Confucian thinking and bloodline clannishness. The culturalist and traditionalist explanation is, of course, as shallow and false to justify the adoption imperative for extramarital children as it once was in Western countries before the sexual revolution at the end of the 1960s. International adoption is, in other words, still today used as one of the Korean modernity project’s most long-lived biopolitical technologies of power to eradicate and cleanse the country of “impure” and “disposable” outcasts in the name of social engineering and eugenics, whether stigmatised by illegitimacy (sasaeng’a), by disability (changae’a) or by race (bonhyöra), as mixed race children have somewhat ironically returned as a “social threat” and, therefore, as an adoption category, this time fathered by guest workers and sex workers from South or Southeast Asia and consequently known as Kosian children.

[43] In 1960, like a mirror image of today’s Korea, the powerful Child Welfare League of America, in its influential manual on unmarried and single mothers, conveniently blamed cultural norms instead of acknowledging the underlying patriarchal mechanisms at work (Solinger, 1992: 166): “In our society, parenthood without marriage is a deviation from the accepted cultural pattern of bearing and raising children. It represents a specific form of social dysfuncitoning which is a problem in itself and which in turn creates social and emotional problems for parent and child…It is generally accepted in our society that children should be reared in families created through marriage. The legal family is the approved social institution to ensure sound rearing and development of children.” Ironically, birth mothers in many Western countries including Australia, the United States and the Netherlands, whose children were given up for adoption before the social revolution of 1968, are nowadays coming forward and raising their voices. They are writing books about their experiences and speaking out about how they were pressured and coerced to give up their children by parents and families, and social workers, adoption agencies and religious groups. Moreover, together with a domestic adoptees reform and rights movement they are challenging confidentiality and sealed records, and advocating open adoption practices where the link between the biological parents, the adoptee and the adoptive family is not completely severed.

[44] Not surprisingly, both the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the National Human Rights Commission of Korea have also repeatedly criticised Korea for not implementing measures to counter sexual, social and racial discrimination, while the United Nations Children’s Fund (1999) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) express concern for the continuance of international adoption from a country having the world’s 10th largest
Demographic overview

Official statistics from the Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare show 156,242 international adoptions having taken place between 1953–2004. Over 150,000 children adopted overseas is also the number most agreed upon for Korea’s part although some like the Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice and Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link mention as many as 200,000, including thousands of unaccounted private adoptions. 104,319 are American cases, constituting nearly one third of all international adoptions in the country and one out of ten of the Korean-American population (Park Soon Ho, 1994, 1995). International adoption (54 percent) together with international marriage (36 percent) actually dominated emigration from Korea to the US between 1950–59, and as the number of Koreans emigrating have decreased substantially during recent years, the 2,000 Korean children who are brought to the country annually today again embarrassingly represent more than half of all immigrants from Korea, while the other half mainly consists of wives to American men (Yoon In-jin, 2001a).

The 46,564 adopted Koreans in Europe in the countries of France, Germany, Switzerland, England, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, again represent an estimated one out of three of all international adoptees on the continent. France is the leading country with 11,090, altogether 8,288 have been placed in Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg, while half or 23,604 can be found in the three Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark. In Scandinavia, the group constitutes half (Denmark and Norway) to one fifth (Sweden) of all international adoptees, besides being the largest East Asian minority, and it totally dominates the ethnic Korean presence in and migration to the region as there are very few Korean immigrants living there (Park Hyeon-Sook, 2000: 60–66). Sweden with its 45,000 international adoptees from over 130 different countries, is proportionally the leading adopting country in the world and, in absolute numbers, the second only economy since 2004. Further, as of 2005, Korea was ranked 54th among the 58 countries participating in the United Nations Development Programme’s yearly Gender Empowerment Measure, meaning that it not only placed the country behind all other OECD countries but also behind all other East and Southeast Asian countries.
after the United States. In the US, the Scandinavian-Americans are remarkably dominating international adoption as well, and naturally also adoption from Korea as an estimated 15–20,000 or 15–20 percent of the adopted Koreans in the country have been placed in the very Scandinavian-like state of Minnesota where the group constitutes more than half of the ethnic Koreans living there (Drenning Holmquist, 1981: 572–579).  

Lastly, there are 5,547 adopted Koreans dispersed throughout Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where they again make up a substantial part of the international adoptees in those countries. There are altogether less than a hundred adopted Koreans in Ireland, Finland and Spain, plus those who have ended up in Greenland, Iceland or the Faeroe Islands by way of Danish adoption agencies. The receiving countries of India, China, Hong Kong, Ethiopia, Guam, Paraguay, Poland, Tunisia, Turkey and the mysterious Buland turning up in the statistics are most possibly explained by Western adoptive parents living there as expatriates. In light of Korea’s highly negative experience with Japanese colonialism, it is also highly surprising to say the least that 320 Korean children were sent for adoption to Japan and Okinawa between 1964–84, although it is impossible to say how many of the adoptive parents who were Japanese nationals, Western expatriates or American military servicemen stationed there.  

Several demographic attempts have been made to quantify the extent of the entire global flow, exchange and transferral of children during given periods. Richard Weil (1984) and Kirsten Lovelock (2000) limit their studies principally to the US, and Francisco Pilotti (1993) concerns himself with the years of 1979–91 and Sweden and the US as receiving countries. Saralee Kane (1993) focuses on the 1980s and estimates the global number to be 170,000–180,000 for the decade and an estimated 16,268 placements a year. Peter Selman (2002) suggests an annual average of 23,857 cases for the early 1990s and 32,295 for the late 1990s, while Ethan Kapstein (2003)

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45 With a population of 5 million, Minnesota is without doubt the region in the world, which has the highest density of adopted Koreans. The question why ethnic Scandinavians apparently dominate the field of international adoption both in Europe and in the United States is perhaps worthy of a study itself.

46 The still unidentified Buland may be a misspelling of Poland, while China is, in fact, the Republic of China, namely Taiwan.

47 Koreans adopted by Japanese actually figure in Yi In-jik’s novel Tears of Blood (Hyŏlŭi
calculates a dramatic increase in international adoption placements between 1988 and 2001 from 19,000 to 34,000 annually. All scholars agree that America takes more than two thirds, that the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark have adopted the most proportionally per capita, and that Korea was the uncontested leading supplier country in the world for 38 years from 1956 to 1994, when it was replaced by China and Russia.

By adding Weil’s (1948–78) and Pilottis’s (1979–88) American statistics to the US Department of State’s official numbers from 1989, there are a total of 358,538 international adoptions going to America between 1948–2004. This would mean an additional 140,000–150,000 placements for Europe and Oceania and consequently an estimated global number of something like 490,000–500,000 international adoptions between 1948–2004. Accordingly, Korean children most likely represent almost one third of all international adoption placements that have taken place worldwide ever. There are no reliable statistics for the second and third largest supplier countries, possibly China, India, Guatemala or Colombia. According to Pilotti, 11,122 adoptions from Colombia and 10,092 from India alone ended up in Sweden and the US between 1979 and 1991, and around 10,000 Indian children and 30,000 Chinese children were transferred to America and other Western countries for adoption in the 1990s. However, mǔ) (1906) and in the Korean-American author Lee Chang-rae’s novel A Gesture Life (2001). The legendary Ito Hirobumi, himself an adoptee, is said to have adopted a Korean girl named Bae Chong-ja who ended up as a Japanese spy in Manchuria. There is also the authentic story of Choi Yong Sul who was abducted and adopted by a Japanese man at the age of eight at the time of the colonial era and who, after his adoptive father the Aiki-Jutsu Grand Master Takeda Sokaku had committed suicide at the end of the war, as Asao Yoshida returned to establish the martial art of hapkido in his birth country.

In a recent paper, Selman (2005) even estimates an increase of 30 percent since 1998, meaning that at least 40,000 children were adopted by 20 different states in 2003. Proportionally from a demographic point of view, Selman finds that Scandinavia, Spain and Luxembourg are the leading receiving regions and countries, and that Eastern Europe, Korea and Guatemala are the leading supplying ones.

See http://travel.state.gov/orphan_numbers.html (2004-12-16). The 2000 US census number of 257,792 foreign born adoptees making up 13 percent of all adopted children in the country is obviously an underestimate, as adopted Koreans are said to account for just 56,825, representing 22 percent of all American international adoptees (Kreider, 2003).
Comforting an Orphaned Nation

all of them are still a long way off from challenging Korea’s absolutely unique six-figure number and its uncontested top position in the field of international adoption.
The Korean adoption issue

Trading and trafficking in children

With a history stretching back to well over half a century, international adoption and overseas adoptees have naturally surfaced now and then in the Korean media. However, it was not until the begin-

ning of the 1970s when the struggle for legitimacy waged between the two Koreas entered an even more bitter and intense phase that the adoption issue for the first time came to be treated and discussed as a distinctive and independent subject in itself.2 The year of 1970 started with North Korea aggressively accusing its southern neighbour of selling Korean offspring to Westerners for profit as an appalling example of “flunkeyism” (sadaejjuûi), the opposite attitude being of course Kim Il Sung’s divinised concept “self-reliance” (juche), and that the wretched country had nothing more valuable to export but its children.3 The adoptive parents were portrayed as child abusers, white supremacists and colonial exploiters, and propaganda pictures of South Korean children adopted by “American perverts” were displayed on the streets and shown at exhibitions in North Korea.4 In 1973, The Pyongyang Times wrote in its editorial, using a mixture of nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric typical for North Korean propaganda texts of their time:

The traitors of South Korea, old hands at treacheries, are selling thousands, tens of thousands of children going ragged and hungry to foreign marauders under the name of ‘adopted children’.5

The negative attention led to temporary stops, which mainly concerned the leading adopting Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway and Denmark between 1970–75. This was partly motivated by a high prepon-

2 As there are very few signs of any media coverage of adopted Koreans before the 1970s, it is reasonable to assume that international adoption was conceived of as a relatively uncomplicated and uncontroversial emigration practice and treated as an integrated part of the child welfare issues of mixed race and abandoned children during the previous decades. Mr. Kwok Sa Jin has kindly provided me with a huge collection of hundreds of newspaper clippings dated between 1946–1989 and dealing with mixed race children in Korea, and it is true that international adoption and adoption agencies like Holt and Pearl S. Buck’s Welcome House now and then are mentioned in the articles but never as a specific subject in itself. Additionally, a search at Chosun Ilbo’s electronic archive (http://archive.chosun.com/daliy.htm) (2004-12-17) using the keywords “ibyang’a” (“adopted child”) and “ibyang’in” (“adoptee”) gives only one hit before 1991 but hundreds afterwards. The only article being found before the 1990s is from August 17, 1961, and consists of an interview with the Korean adoptee Penny Kim and her adoptive family in Rhode Island, the United States.

3 Dagens Nyheter, January 8, 1971.
When they showed up, adoptees almost immediately upon arrival were placed at institutions and foster homes, and the discovery of cases of maltreatment of adopted Korean children in those countries, and partly by the open reporting of North Korean criticism in the left-leaning Scandinavian press. Nevertheless, business as usual was resumed after a combined and intense lobbying from the three Scandinavian countries, while the Korean adoption agencies expanded their partnerships with American adoption agencies during the same period to compensate for the sudden economic loss of profit caused by the temporary stops in Scandinavia. Particularly Sweden played an important role in the campaign to abolish the temporary prohibitions by making use of its delicate position in the United Nations Security Council. During the turbulent period, adoptive parents were encouraged to come to Korea and pick up their children on the spot to avoid negative publicity of escorted “mail order babies”, and they were explicitly told to observe secrecy in the media concerning their adoption of Korean children.

The adoption issue also passionately involved the pros and cons of the two Koreas. In Sweden, the two Southern friendship organisations, the Korean Association in Sweden (Koreanska sällskapet) and the Swedish-Korean Society (Svensk-koreanska föreningen), openly promoted the adoption of Korean children in Sweden, while its Norwegian equivalent, the Norwegian Korean Association (Norsk Koreaforening), did the same in Norway and eventually even transformed itself into the adoption agency known as the Children of the World (Verdens barn) in 1978 (Verdens barn, 2003). At the same time, the pro-Northern overseas Korean organisation Ch’ongnyôn (Chosen Soren) in Japan started to automatically and proudly

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7 Korea Newsreview, February 8, and October 18, 1975.
8 The Swedish-Korean Society was founded in 1951 under the leadership of Swedish National Socialists and extreme rightists, and the same circle also formed a Swedish section of the World Anti-Communist League whose secretariat is located in Seoul, an international of anti-Communists, Fascists and Nazis from all continents founded by President Syngman Rhee in 1954 (Hübinette, 2003b). In this way, ironically Nazis came to play a crucial part in popularising the adoption of Korean children in Sweden, who, it must be said, are definitely the wrong kind of master race Sonnenkinder post-war Nazis tried to procreate in order to lay the foundations of the Fourth Reich.
include “compatriots adopted overseas” when addressing their bombastic letters and messages to the worldwide Korean diaspora as a way of displaying “ethnic solidarity”.9

Yet in 1976 in spite of the North Korean accusations and to the surprise of all parties involved, the self-confident and arrogant President Park Chung Hee unexpectedly invited the 15,000 adopted Koreans then living in Scandinavia to a “homeland tour” together with the Danish, Norwegian and Swedish military hospital personnel who had served during the Korean War.10 As the overwhelming majority of the adoptees were still infants and small children at the time, this symbolic invitation lead to nothing more than the first official recognition of the existence of the adopted Koreans. This might also be the first example of how the adopted Koreans were represented as ethnic Koreans overseas and automatically incorporated within the broader Korean diaspora. Criticism of the country’s adoption program continued in the latter half of the 1970s. In 1978, the Tokyo based dissident journal Hanyang published a fiercely nationalistic and highly conspiratorial attack on international adoption, which it conceived as an “indignity against the nation”:

Then for what purpose do these Westerners import Korean orphans? Western life is thoroughly ruled by such vices as exploitation, suppression, xenophobia, and egoism, and it cannot be possible that such people are adopting our orphans all the way across the ocean out of sympathy. Why should such people ever want to raise our orphans to become decent human beings? There cannot exist such a virtue in their society where the law of the jungle reigns. The only possible reason for their adopting our orphans would be money… For sure they will have to invest some money to raise these children until the latter turn into a productive labour force. Do not conquerors always train the natives according to the ways of the former so that the latter would be docile to any colonial exploitation by the former? For the same reason, Western parents would educate their Korean children to be good ‘house slaves’. Considering this, how great would be the hardship of these adopted children! In New York in September 1972, an “adopted” Korean girl, Marie Ford, who was in reality kidnapped, was killed by her adoptive parents because she did not obey them. Her adoptive parents grabbed the girl’s hair and threw her down to the floor, ruthlessly trampled on the little girl, and killed her. This unforgettable news report is still alive as a bitter grudge in our nation’s heart. Such tragic stories pertaining to Korean adoptees never stop. In December 1974 a five-year-old Korean orphan sold to a Swiss family committed suicide by jumping from the third

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floor of a hospital. The pains and sorrow that the foreign country gave the child were too grave to endure and he decided to kill himself.\footnote{Translated and cited by Song Changzoo (1999: 241–42).}

By linking international adoption to colonialism and slavery and depicting adoptive parents as abusive kidnappers and Westerners as evil, heinous and vicious, Hanyang most certainly touched the right chord at a time when the Korean democratic movement bitterly fought President Park’s repressive and US-supported yusin regime. These negative and stereotypical Other-representations of white people, in general, and adoptive parents, in particular, have continued to live on in popular cultural productions, rivalling the hegemonic discourse on international adoption coming from mainstream media and government circles.

Throughout the decade, the existence of the adopted Koreans unexpectedly came to play a part in the struggle between North and South Korea and their various sympathisers, and between the democratic movement and the authoritarian regime. The adoption program was, at the same time, a political tool for the government to create and uphold friendship ties with Western allies, and an effective source for oppositional critique coming from dissident circles as the adopted Koreans were exploited either as goodwill ambassadors or as victimised objects for the democratic struggle to heighten anti-Americanism. Finally, critical voices against the adoption program were again raised in the 1980s, the decade witnessing the highest number of Korean children sent abroad so far. The media reported on trafficking of Korean children for sexual purposes, and on adoption scandals due to hasty procedures and deliveries when non-adoptable children had been sent abroad by mistake, and when infants had died of dehydration during transportation as flights sometimes required 24 hours and escort women were responsible for up to five children each.\footnote{For adoption scandals and rumours about trafficking of Korean children for sexual exploitation, see Korea Herald, August 9, 1980, and Joongang Ilbo, August 6, 1986.} The negative attention was, according to Sarri et al. (1998), particularly heard of in connection with the 1986 Asian Games, the dress rehearsal of the 1988 Summer Olympic Games.
The orphan exporting country

The 1988 Seoul Olympic Games marked the symbolic breakthrough for a newly democratised and industrialised Korea ready to join the international community, and had an enormous impact on making the country known in the world (Kim, Rhee, Yu, Koo & Hong, 1989; Totten, 1988). Journalists from all over the world started to write about Korea, which, for many years, had been just another one of the many poor countries and military dictatorships in the “Third World”. However, Western media also scrutinised Korea’s adoption program, which was highlighted as a trade in human beings. Leading Western magazines and newspapers like Newsweek, New York Times, Herald Tribune, Daily Telegraph and Washington Post and television broadcasters like American NBC and Swedish SVT all extensively covered international adoption from Korea.¹³

The American magazine The Progressive opened up the debate by publishing Matthew Rothschild’s (1988) investigative feature story “Babies for sale” in its January edition. The article portrayed Korea as a country dealing in the full-scale business of selling its own children, which was said to bring in an estimated $15–20 million per year. The text was immediately serialised in North Korean The People’s Korea as well as being translated and published in the leftist South Korean journal Mal, while its thought-provoking cover, depicting a Korean child bathing in dollar bills, ever since has functioned as the classical intertextual visual reference when bringing up the Korean adoption issue, appearing over and over again in television documentaries and in popular cultural productions like Susanne Brink’s Arirang and Sky’s Eternity.¹⁴ Following in the footsteps of Western newspapers, the Korean journalists labelled their own country as the global number one orphan or child exporting country (koasuch’ulguk or agisuch’ulguk), a humiliating self-appellation which still haunts Korea even if the country is not anymore the world’s leading supplier in the field of international adoption.¹⁵

¹⁵ In 1995 after 38 years in a row, China and Russia finally surpassed Korea but, at the time of writing, the country still remains the third or perhaps after Guatemala the fourth biggest global supplier of children for international adoption.
The following two years, Korean newspapers exploded with angry editorials and excited columns demanding a drastic decrease in or an immediate stop to international adoption, to address the negative image of the country conveyed by the Western media as the world’s leading supplier of adoptive children. For the first time since the beginning of the 1970s, previously classified statistics revealing the whole scale of the gigantic dispersal of Korean children were published, and policy-makers and government officials such as the Minister of Health and Social Affairs, who, for a long time, had refused to grant interviews on the sensitive subject, felt themselves forced to speak out in public. Adoption agencies, government officials, policy makers and birth parents all received their share of harsh criticism for exporting Korean children, yet without no mention at all of the internal patriarchal structures being the absolute precondition for the practice to exist in the first place:

The sharp rise in the “shameful export of children” largely abandoned by irresponsible parents is attributable to the lack of responsibility on the part of our government, which is to be criticized for its virtual connivance at reckless commercialised activities by domestic adoption-arranging agents for foreign adopters…Some of the commercial arrangement agents reportedly even advertise to the effect that Korean orphans are clever but can be adopted at little expense. One shocking news report indicated that there exist obstetric clinics and midwives who even make reservations to take over and send abroad infants, newly born of unmarried women in most cases…The abandoning of blood relations itself is indeed an immoral act, which is intolerable for ethically responsible parents. The planned phase down of the shameful export of abandoned kids must be stepped up to see an early discontinuation of the internationally disgraceful commercialisation at issue.

The heated discussion not only involved the media, but also women’s organisations, civil rights groups and religious denominations. The vocif-
erous public anti-adoption stance most certainly influenced and probably forced the government’s decision to stipulate the year 1996 as the deadline for international adoption. In February 1989, *Hankyoreh* summed it up by calling for a more responsible and comprehensive approach to the adoption issue and the creation of a modern social welfare system:

The issue of international adoption, designated as “orphan exporting”, “trade and traffic in children” and other shameful appellations, is not just to be blamed on the nature of the adoption agencies and the adoption policy of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, as it involves the characteristics of a whole country of 40 million citizens, and it is only when we approach the features of a welfare state that a final settlement will be possible to discern.  

During the following years, criticism and coverage of international adoption continued to be voiced, albeit on a smaller scale. Foster parents, physicians, maternity home staff and other professionals affiliated to adoption agencies stepped forward and argued both for and against the practice. At the beginning of the 1990s, Korean editorials optimistically foresaw the final years of the country’s adoption program as the number of international placements had been on the decrease for several years in a row. Nevertheless in 1994, to the dismay and disappointment of those who had struggled so hard to regain the honour of the nation, the government decided to postpone the plan to eliminate international adoption in favour of the more distant year of 2015. This approach to the adoption issue, giving absolute priority to the image of the nation over secretly sent overseas for adoption to Anglo-Saxon countries (Milotte, 1997). The existence of this classified Irish adoption program was ultimately revealed by journalists in 1996, and ever since the subject has been widely discussed in public as something of a national trauma. Another example is the drastic fall in international adoptions of Brazilian children during the 1990s as a result of the media’s frequent reporting of adoption scams, which has created a negative image of the practice itself (Fonseca, 2002b).

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the welfare of single mothers and their children, has continued to be heard the most of in the mainstream media and among government representatives. At the same time, adopted Koreans themselves who in the beginning had been conspicuously absent in the public debate, have started to appear more and more in the media.

Adopted Koreans in the media

The first generation of adult adopted Koreans began visiting Korea already from the second half of the 1970s, either as individuals or as participants in tours organised by friendship associations and adoption agencies like Holt (from 1975), the Norwegian Children of the World (Verdens barn) (from 1982) or the Adoption Centre (Adoptionscentrum) of Sweden (from 1983) as part of their so-called post-adoption or post-placement services. At the same time, the first sporadic articles on adopted Koreans written by foreign correspondents were published in Korean newspapers. These earliest portrayals and profiles of adopted Koreans with headings like “Mixed American adopted child meets his mother after 20 years”, “Brothers reunited after 27 years”, “Adopted ROK youths visit homeland” and “ROK war orphan’s success in US”, firmly laid the foundation for the present day’s heavy focus on searching for roots (ppuri ch'akki) and visiting the motherland (moguk pangmun), and the disproportionate attention paid to “successful” and “famous” adoptees.


4 Rare but occasional interviews with adoptees living in Western countries had been made now and then even before the 1970s. See, for example, the portrayal of a mixed race child in America named Clemens in Chosun Ilbo, March 4, 1959, an interview with a mixed race Korean adoptee who returns to Korea as a soldier in the US Army in Chosun Ilbo, August 20, 1964, and a feature article on the mixed adoptee Debbie and her adoptive family in the US in Chosun Ilbo, December 25, 1966. However before the 1970s, overseas adopted Koreans of mixed origin were never really perceived as being ethnic Koreans in patrilineal and racist Korea but rather as children having returned to their “natural home” and “fatherland”.

At the end of the 1980s, ads placed by adopted Koreans searching for their Korean parents and relatives and, above all, their birth mothers (*saengmo*), started to appear on an intermittent basis in the Korean media. Henceforth, thousands of ads accompanied by a child and adult picture, using an almost ritualistic language to locate Korean family members, have been published regularly in Korean newspapers. The widely seen KBS television show *Morning Forum (Ach’im Madang)*, which every week since 1991 airs a search for a missing person and often raises the question of international adoption, is a good example of how the problem of separated families has developed into a therapeutic and catharsis-like collective media spectacle, as the reunions take place live in the studio, and virtually every Korean individual has a “lost” extended family member and, therefore, can relate to the problem of separation. In 2004, KBS also started to air the entertainment show *Happy Sunday* on primetime Sunday evenings, where the reunions between the overseas adoptees and their birth parents instead are taking place in the Western host countries. Through programmes like *Morning Forum* and *Happy Sunday*, intimate feelings of longing are mediated and commodified, the audience becomes implicated in the event and the private is turned into the public in a most spectacular and commercial way.

In 1990, Seoul YWCA set up its annual visiting program for adopted Koreans, which has become the blueprint for numerous others organised by authorities, associations and schools like Overseas Koreans Foundation (from 1999), the National Institute of International Education Development (from 2000), Inje University (from 2001), the Social Welfare Soci-

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\[16\] See, for example, *Dong-A Ilbo*, May 14, 1997: “Please find my parents! According to the documents, I moved from my mother and siblings to my grandmother’s house in Chônju at the approximate age of six. There, I lost my way and was separated from my parents, and I can explain from my memory that this happened outside a house beside the railway, a police station and an antique shop. Please call…” In 2000, 76 ads appeared in *Kookmin Ilbo* alone. Already from the 1960s, some mixed race Korean adoptees had been searching for their biological parents through the media, but those early ads had symptomatically only concerned the other way around, namely their biological fathers in America.

\[27\] In 2004, eight searches made by the programme on behalf of overseas adoptees ended successfully with reunions taking place live in the studio. See *Joongang Ilbo*, April 7, 2005.
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ety (from 2003) and the International Korean Adoptee Services (from 2004). These visiting programs always include field trips to historical sites, national monuments and scenic spots, a Korean language course, cooking classes, and introductions to mask dancing, hanbok dress, kite flying, the tea ceremony, pottery making and other practices deemed to be traditional Korean customs, as the purpose with the best of intentions is to produce domestic Koreans out of Westernised adoptees. The setting up of these visiting programs for overseas adoptees, which, for Elena Kim (2003), is linked to the construction of a global Korean community, and, for Trudy Rosenwald (2004), is conceptualised as an attempt at reculturing the adoptees, and imbued with what Barbara Yngvesson (2003) calls the mythology of roots in her study of a Swedish “root trip”, has together with the establishment of a growing number of native Korean organisations

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Domestic Korean organisations actively supporting adopted Koreans are, for example, the International Korean Adoptee Services (from 1999), Supporters to Adopted Koreans Overseas (from 2000), the Bridge of Adoptees from Chonnam-Kwangju (from 2001), the Foundation of Overseas Adoptees Center and its House of Korean Roots (from 2002), and the International Educational and Cultural Exchange Foundation and its Adoptees’ Homecoming Support Center (from 2003). In addition, Kyunghee University and Geumgang University both offer a tuition fee discount for adopted Koreans, Ewha Women’s University (from 2002) and Sogang University (from 2002) among others both have scholarships exclusively for adopted Koreans, the Korean Sharing Movement supports the creation of a network of adopted Koreans, while the 2003 Right Livelihood Award winner Citizens’ Coalition for Economic Justice sponsored a 1995 pan-European meeting of adopted Koreans in Germany. There are also associations based among ethnic Korean communities overseas supporting adopted Koreans like the Global Korean Network in Los Angeles, the Korean Adoptees Ministry in Minnesota, the Korean Residents in Sweden, the Korean Adoptee Mentoring Program in Boston, and the UK Sponsorship for Adopted Koreans in London, not to mention numerous community leaders and church reverends, language teachers and restaurant owners, academics and researchers, psychologists and physicians, and other prominent diaspora representatives who are actively helping Korean adoptees. Particularly in the USA, these associations and individuals help organise regular “culture camps” together with adoption agencies and adoptive parents where adoptees are introduced to Korean culture and traditions. Finally, there is also a growing activity and movement among adoptive parents of Korean children manifesting itself in organisations like Friends of Korea, Korean Focus and the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network in the USA, journals and publishing houses like the Minnesota-based Korean Quarterly and Yeong and Yeong Book Company, the Swedish Q Books, and language institutes like the Saet Byol Korean School in Australia.
actively supporting adopted Koreans naturally resulted in more and more adoptees visiting the country.\footnote{The Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare has from 1993 collected statistics on the number of visiting adopted Koreans, including their family members, and the results are as follows: 1993 – 1,236, 1994 – 1,374, 1995 – 1,283, 1996 – 1,837, 1997 – 1,857, 1998 – 1,971, 1999 – 2,124, 2000 – 2,629, and 2001 – 2,760. In 1994, adopted Koreans who had resettled in Korea set up a branch of the Belgian association Euro Korean League, followed by the Global Korean League in 1996, and the more activist oriented Korean Overseas Adoptees in 1998 and Adoptee Solidarity Korea in 2004. In 1998, returnees living permanently in Korea for shorter or longer periods for studying or working and who according to their own estimate number close to 500 individuals, created the current organisation Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link, and in 2004 French speaking adoptees from France, Belgium, Quebec and Switzerland founded Adoptés vivant en Corée. I am grateful to Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, a Belgian adoptee, who has been living in Korea as an artist since 1993 and who has played a crucial role in the setting up of the above-mentioned organisations, and has also initiated a global network of adopted Korean artists, for the information on the adopted Korean movement in Korea. In 2000, Lemoine published a book, I am 55 percent Korean, about her experiences as an adoptee activist and professional artist in Korea.}

At the beginning of the 1990s, adoptees became increasingly visible in the Korean media in connection with the reporting of the emergence of an organised adopted Korean movement.\footnote{The first adopted Korean organisation was founded in Sweden in 1986 – the Adopted Koreans’ Association (Adopterade Koreaners Förening). The Swedish example was followed by Arierang in the Netherlands, the Forum for Korean Adoptees (Forum for Koreansk Adopterte) in Norway and The Korea Club (Korea Klubben) in Denmark in 1990, the Euro-Korean League in Belgium (from 1996 Korea-Belgium Association) and Minnesota Adopted Koreans in 1991 (dissolved around 2000), the Association of Korean Adoptees-Southern California in Los Angeles, Dongari in Switzerland, Hodori in Germany (dissolved in 1998) and Racines Coréennes in France in 1994, Also-Known-As in New York and Asian Adult Adoptees of Washington in 1996, the Association of Korean Adoptees in San Francisco and Boston Korean Adoptees in 1997, Kimchi in Switzerland in 1999, the Adopted Korean Connection in Minneapolis in 2000, and American-Korean Adoptees of Portland, Chicago Korean Adoptees and Korean Adoptees of the United Kingdom in 2001, the Michigan Adopted Korean Network in 2002, and the Chicago based activist group Helping Adoptees Lead Together in 2004. In addition, there are numerous Internet based groups, homepages, live journals, bloggs and communities, which suggest the fact that the adopted Korean movement is very much a virtual community. The most influential of these, the listserv Korean @doptees Worldwide, was founded in 1998 by the Norwegian adoptee Sunny Johnsen, a key adoptee activist on the Internet to whom I owe my gratitude as she throughout the years has posted numerous invaluable information on her various listservs. This organi-}
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who, in one way or another, had made himself or herself a name, was prevalent from the beginning, reflecting an almost exclusive interest in “model citizen” adoptees. Among adopted Koreans coming back over and over again in the Korean media throughout the years, worth mentioning are the Hollywood actress Nicole Bilderback, the world champion kickboxer Kim Messer from the USA, the Norwegian taekwondo master Nina Solheim, the White House adoption policy adviser and Holt policy director Susan Soon-Keum Cox, the 1999 Miss Pennsylvania Susan Spafford, the Washington State senator Paull Shin and several authors who have published books in Korea and artists who have held exhibitions. The most renowned overseas adoptee in Korea is without doubt Soon-Yi Previn, the adoptive daughter of the American celebrity Mia Farrow. The media concern for Soon-Yi Previn was especially prominent after the shocking exposure of the intimate relationship with her stepfather the filmmaker Woody Allen and their following marriage and adoption of two children.

ised adopted Korean movement started to interact globally in the 1990s. In 1994, Euro Korean Network was founded by adopted Koreans in Europe, and in 1999 the 1st International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees was held in Washington D.C., the second two years later in Oslo, Norway, and the third in 2004 in Seoul, Korea, when the network International Korean Adoptee Associations was created. The highly diverse adopted Korean movement does not even have a common self-designation as some call themselves Korean adoptees (abbreviated as KAD or Kadop, coréens adoptés in French and coreani adottivi in Italian), and others overseas adopted Koreans (abbreviated as OAK), Korean overseas adoptees (KOA) or simply adopted Koreans (adoptKo or adoptKos, geadopteerde Koreanen in Dutch, and adoptivkoreaner in German and “Scandinavian”).

11 The Italian adoptee Hyun-Yung Tarrani, the Swedish adoptee Astrid Trotzig, the American adoptees Robert Ogburn, Elizabeth Kim, Jane Jeong Trenka, Katy Robinson, Paull Shin and Thomas Park Clement, the Belgian adoptee Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, and the Norwegian adoptee Eivind Gulliksen have, for example, all published books in Korea and in Korean.

12 Mia Farrow is possibly the world’s most famous international adopter with altogether 14 children, of whom nine are adopted, including Soon-Yi Previn. See Farrow’s autobiography What Falls Away: A Memoir (1997). Being a celebrity, Mia Farrow’s adoption of Soon-Yi had been reported in the Korean media already in the 1970s just like so many other famous people’s adoptions of Korean children in the form of politicians and CEOs, journalists and academics, artists and authors, and actors, singers and musicians. See Korea Newsreview, May 21, 1977.

13 See Woody Allen’s film Wild Man Blues (1997). It is important to note that Woody Allen was not the adoptive father of Soon-Yi but her stepfather, a fact which makes
The tendency to focus on and become obsessed by an individual adoptee’s life trajectory became even more pronounced at the end of 1995 when Brian Bauman, an adopted Korean attending the US Air Force Academy and diagnosed with leukaemia, requested the Korean media to help him find a compatible bone-marrow donor to save his life. As a result, the first half of 1996 was wholly dominated by the dramatic hunt for Bauman’s relatives, a search that took place through newspaper articles, radio transmissions and television programmes on an almost daily basis. The search ended successfully when thousands of relatives of children given up for adoption had contacted newspapers and television channels or registered with blood banks. Because of Bauman’s military connection, the ROK army required all its enlistees to register, and a donor was eventually found. In September 1996, Bauman visited Korea for the transplant, and two years later he returned to meet his Korean mother.

The story of Brian Bauman dramatically raised the awareness of the existence of the adopted Koreans among ordinary Koreans, and functioned as a powerful reminder of the genetic bond existing between adopted and domestic Koreans. His search also resulted in an actual increase in the number of listed bone marrow donors in Korea. Bauman has been followed by other overseas adoptees suffering from leukaemia and in need of bone-marrow donors in Korea. However, not all of them have ended in success. For instance, a boy adopted by a couple in the USA passed away after a failed search in 2003.

In response to the medical need of developing routines to track down Korean relatives of adopted Koreans, several databases have been established, where adoptees and their

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34 Several documentaries were aired like the KBS Sunday Special Who Will Save Brian Bauman?, and Bauman’s life and his dramatic rescue was turned into an autobiography, Brian Sungduk Bauman’s Life Story (1997).

35 Another much publicised example of this aspect was when the illegitimate but nonetheless biological son of the deceased industrialist Lee Won Man, founder of the Kolon conglomerate, came forward in November of 2004 as the American adopted Korean Peter Roach and filed a lawsuit claiming that he had been cheated out of his inheritance by the adoption agency Holt. See Associated Press, November 28, 2004.

supposed family members are able to register through DNA samples. After Bauman’s story, a more mature approach to the adoption issue has slowly but steadily gained ground, linking the causes of international adoption to gender issues and the plight of handicapped, biracial and extramarital children in Korean society. This new approach is discernable in books written by prolific debaters and writers who openly discuss incentives to increase domestic adoption, the tabooisation of teenage pregnancies, the lack of sufficient sex education in schools, and the growing number of admissions to institutions after family break-ups (Ch’oe, 2001: 14–18; Myông, 2001: 153–157; Yi Dong-wôn, 2001: 231–266; Yi Yong-gyo, 2001: 282–287). A good representative of this self-critical or even masochistic attitude is the journalist Cho Sông-gwan (1998: 85–111) who bluntly states that the adopted Koreans are nothing else but victims and products of the country’s Confucian face saving culture and patriarchal family system, and that Korea will never be acknowledged as a modern developed and advanced nation in the Western world as long as it continues to send its children abroad for international adoption. Meanwhile, the elitist interest in “successful” and “famous” adoptees has continued to dominate media portrayals of adopted Koreans in contrast to the majority of popular cultural representations, which instead tend to highlight the negative aspects of international adoption.

Finally, the then ruling Kim Young Sam was also the first Korean president to show an active interest in the adoption issue in a more serious and pronounced manner. Linking the problem of international adoption to the government’s welfare budget, the president, who was painfully aware of the fact that Korea was the OECD country in the world spending by

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37 In 1996, the American adoptee Wayne Berry set up the Korean Adoption Registry, while the returnee organisation Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link administers yet another search registry. Since 2000, the Korea Welfare Foundation operates the main DNA database with the support of the Korean Government, and several Korean biotechnology companies like Kogene and Identigene offer free DNA testing for adopted Koreans and their supposed relatives.

38 The adoption issue sometimes figures in more unusual contexts, like in Chông Wôn’s Last Letter (2001), an anthology containing last letters from dying people, which includes a letter from a biological mother to her adopted daughter, and in Ch’oe Chae-ch’ô’s Everything Alive is Beautiful (2001), where the author writes that even animals practice adoption more frequently than Koreans do.
far the least on social welfare, attempted to implement reform measures in order to enhance economic and social justice (Byun, 1991; Kwon, 1999). According to Song Ho Keun (2003), by 1997 social welfare expenditure accounted for 6.8 percent of the Korean GDP (up from a mere 2.6 in 1987), meaning that Korea lagged far behind not just other OECD countries with normally between 30–50 percent, but even some Latin American developing economies with per capita incomes much lower than that of Korea. This socially conscious perspective was to be continued during the subsequent presidency of Kim Dae Jung.

Kim Dae Jung and the adoption issue

The adoption issue was particularly accentuated during Kim Dae Jung’s presidency as part of his struggle to construct a modern social welfare system. At the time of the economic crisis of 1997–98, it was evident that the country’s minuscule social welfare budget had little to offer its victims together with the thousands of “IMF orphans” who were sent abroad for international adoption. After the crisis, the Kim Dae Jung government set out to create a productive welfare system, symbolising an ideological paradigm shift from the status of a developmental night-watch state to a social democratic-like welfare policy (Kim Young-Hwa, 2003; Mishra, Kuhnle, Gilbert & Chung, 2004; Moon & Yang, 2002; Office of the President, 2000).

Kim Dae Jung’s personal interest in the adoption issue may well go back to his own family background as the alleged extramarital son of a second wife and widowed mother in the impoverished Chôlla province (Oh, 2001). This specific familial, social and regional background and belonging has naturally placed him within the indigenous Korean populist discourse of minjung, and has made him instinctively aware of marginalized and stigmatised groups and individuals in the Korean society. In addition after the premature death of his first wife, Kim Dae Jung married Lee Hee-ho who more or less adopted his two sons as her own. In her career as a professional social worker, Lee Hee-ho may also have had

personal firsthand experiences with international adoption. It is also worth noting that already in 1982 in one of his famous prison letters to his wife, Kim Dae Jung had asked himself how it is possible to morally defend the annual sending abroad of thousands of children for international adoption in spite of a fast developing economy.

I read in the newspapers published in prison last month about people who were adopted abroad when young and returned as adults to the motherland to visit, either alone or with stepparents. I could not but feel touched and shamed as well when I thought about the fact that although their homeland abandoned them, they came to this land again. (Kim Dae Jung, 1986: 238)

During his time in opposition and exile, Kim Dae Jung had met and befriended several adoptive parents of Korean children like the son of the famous Asian studies scholar Edwin Reischauer. One of these encounters took place in Stockholm in 1989, when Kim Dae Jung visited the Swedish Institute of International Affairs in Stockholm to give a lecture on human rights (Hübnette, 2003a). There he met Lena Kim, an adopted Korean woman who at the lecture asked him the disconcerting and provocative question as to why Korea was selling its own children to foreign countries like Sweden. Kim Dae Jung was so touched by this incident that he often refers back to Lena Kim when bringing up the adoption issue. A second meeting between Kim Dae Jung and Lena Kim took place again in Stockholm in 1994. Kim Dae Jung told Lena Kim that there is a special bond between the adopted Koreans and Korea, even if they are presently citizens of another country. He also stated that in a desperate situation he would himself be prepared to give his own children up for adoption, and he would also himself consider adopting a foreign child.

During the course of the 1997 presidential campaign, Kim Dae Jung accused the Kim Young Sam government of not moving more swiftly to end international adoption. After the electoral victory and his inauguration as President of the Republic of Korea in early 1998, he stated that international adoption was to be one of the main issues to be addressed during his period of office. On October 23, 1998, Kim Dae Jung arranged a meeting in the presidential residence the Blue House in Seoul with 29 spe-

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40 Lena Kim’s interview with Kim Dae Jung was published in *Um & Yang*, 3/1994, the magazine of the Adopted Korean’s Association of Sweden.
cially invited adopted Koreans from eight countries, including Lena Kim, where he, on behalf of the country and the government, delivered an official apology for having sent away over 150,000 Korean children for adoption. Caught between an ambiguous mixture of guilt for having exiled the adoptees and gratitude to the adoptive parents and the host countries, Kim Dae Jung told them:

It is a great pleasure to welcome all of you, from eight different countries of the world to which you were adopted at a young age. Welcome back to your homeland. It has been eight months since I became president. During this period, I have met countless people. But today’s meeting with all of you is personally the most meaningful and moving encounter for me. Looking at you, I am proud of such accomplished adults, but I am also overwhelmed with an enormous sense of regret at all the pain you must have been subjected to. Some 200,000 Korean children have been adopted to the United States, Canada, and many European countries over the years. I am pained to think that we could not raise you ourselves, and had to give you away for foreign adoption. The reason for the adoption was primarily economic difficulty. But there were other reasons. Koreans traditionally have a habit-of-the-heart that placed too much importance on blood-ties. And when you don’t have that, people rarely adopt children. So, we sent you away. Imagining all the pain and psychological conflicts that you must have gone through, we are ashamed. We are grateful to your adopted parents, who have loved you and raised you, but we are also filled with shame.42

Kim Dae Jung’s apology must be set in the context of a late global reconciliation process including among others American apologies to the descendants of African slaves and Japanese-American internees, English apologies for the Great Famine (An Gorta Mór) of Ireland and the 1919 Amritsar massacre in India, Swedish apologies to the indigenous Saami minority and for not helping Jewish refugees on the eve of World War II, and, above all, the groundbreaking work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Gibney & Roxstrom, 2001; Gong, 2001). All these official apologies took place at the time of the millennium shift as perpetrators and victims alike obviously wanted to leave behind the violent and bloody memories of the dark 20th century in order to be able to enter a new era, and President Kim’s apology to the adopted Koreans is undoubtedly one part in the development of this international reconciliatory process played out in a specific Korean context.

After the apology two of the American participants, Thomas Park

Clement and David Um Nakase, were elected as members of the Advisory Council on Democratic and Peaceful Unification of Korea, originally founded by President Chun Doo Hwan in the 1980s. As both are of mixed origin, the selection of these two adoptees not only meant that adopted Koreans are considered to play a part in the reunification process, but also indirectly contributed to paying attention to another vulnerable group in the Korean society as mixed race children even now often face racial discrimination.\textsuperscript{43} Other adoption-related acts and events during Kim Dae Jung’s presidency were a symposium on the human rights of adopted Koreans held at the National Assembly in 1998, the opening of the semi-governmental Adoption Information Center or Global Adoption Information and Post-Service Center in downtown Seoul in 1999 as a resource centre for visiting adoptees with the motto “We are one family” (\textit{Uri han kajok}), and the dispatching of Kim Duk-Soo and his \textit{samul nori} group in 2000 to Northern Europe in order to conduct a tour, with the specific aim of spreading Korean culture to the adopted Koreans living in the region (Hübinette, 2003a).\textsuperscript{44}

In his apology and on other occasions, President Kim Dae Jung portrayed the adopted Koreans as a unique bond between Korea and the West. This physical relationship was a recurring theme every time the president visited a Western country affected by adoption from Korea. In March 2000, Kim Dae Jung was in Germany and in his speech he mentioned the adopted Koreans in the country, and, in October 2000, when visiting his colleague Jacques Chirac in Paris, who himself like so many other high-profile western politicians is an adoptive father, a special ceremony was arranged with Marie-Emmanuelle, an adopted Korean woman in France.\textsuperscript{45} This official way of perceiving and depicting the adopted Koreans, dating back to the 1970s, was especially evident in regions like Scandinavia, where the group almost solely makes up the ethnic Korean pres-

\textsuperscript{43} For an updated inquiry into the vulnerable situation of mixed race people in today’s Korea, see a report from the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2003).

\textsuperscript{44} Special concerts and events explicitly aimed at spreading Korean culture to adopted Koreans overseas have continued to be held, like the Christian performing group Jega travelling to Northern and Western Europe in 2001, Dankook University’s Amare Ensemble coming to Sweden in 2002, and the Korean Traditional Music Association touring both Australia, Europe and North America in 2003.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Kyunghyang Shinmun}, October 20, 2000, and \textit{Munhwa Ilbo}, March 9, 2000.
ence. In December 2000, President Kim was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which he received at a ceremony in Oslo and a subsequent meeting was held with Prime Minister Göran Persson of Sweden in Stockholm. Both in Oslo and Stockholm, special meetings were held with the First Lady and groups of adopted Koreans, and in Oslo Anne Weider Aasen, an adopted Korean woman and journalist working for the Norwegian television, covered the president’s visit to the childlike delight of the charmed Korean media.\footnote{Dagens Nyheter, December 14, 2000; Joongang Ilbo, December 11, 2000, and Korea Herald, December 14, 2000.} In Stockholm adoptees were employed and contracted by the Korean Embassy of Sweden to administer the practical details, and the bridge created between the two countries and cultures was again the theme as both the laureate and the Swedish host mentioned the adopted Koreans in their respective speeches. At the same time, President Kim met with Lena Kim for a fourth time. In 2002, Anne Weider Aasen again created headlines in the Korean newspapers by coming to Korea in search for her Korean mother in the company of the Prime Minister of Norway Kjell Magne Bondevik.\footnote{Hankook Ilbo, January 25, 2002.}

In 2000, the First Lady Lee Hee-ho officially stated that she was strongly committed to the adoption issue and saw herself as a supporter and patron of all adopted Koreans overseas.\footnote{Kookmin Ilbo, March 24, 2000.} Later during the year, Pearl S. Buck International elected Lee Hee-ho as Woman of the Year for her contributions to the rights of children in Korea including adopted children. Lee Hee-ho also actively supported the adopted Korean movement by taking part in meetings, by sending greetings to conferences, by regularly inviting groups and individuals to the Blue House, and by always emphasising the importance of building a network between Korea and ethnic Koreans around the world. Several meetings in the Blue House took place as in 1998 with a group of adopted Koreans from New York, in 1999 when the Hanulsori Kids, an American percussion ensemble composed of ten adopted Korean children, played samul nori for the First Lady, and a huge gathering of 280 people, adopted Koreans together with their family members, in July 2000. In 1999, Lee Hee-ho greeted the 1st International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees in Washington D.C. with the
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following wordings, which openly reclaimed the children once sent away as objects of the country’s diaspora policy:

Now you must forget your difficult past and renew your relations with your native country in order to work together toward common goals based on the blood ties that cannot be severed even if we wanted to. Even though there are many of you who have already visited Korea, we are always prepared to welcome you warmly. We are also making efforts to help you grow up into excellent and active members of the society where each of you belongs. Your mother country is developing day by day to become a first-rate nation in the 21st century. It will be a warm and reliable supporter for all of you. I hope you maintain your Korean identity and help enhance the pride of the Korean people doing your best wherever you are.49

The story of Adam King is yet another illustrative and representative example of Lee Hee-ho’s commitment to the adoption issue. In 1998, the First Lady attended a meeting of 46 adopted Koreans and their family members in Los Angeles. At the meeting, one of the youngest attendants, a severely handicapped boy named Adam King, asked the wife of the president if they could visit Korea. Lee Hee-ho answered by promptly inviting all adoptive families present to visit Korea, which they also did later that year. On 5 April 2001, on the First Lady’s initiative, the then 9-year-old Adam King solemnly opened the Korean professional baseball league by pitching the first ball at Chamsil stadium in Seoul.50 As former guest pitchers had been presidents, celebrities and beauty pageant winners, this spectacular event received massive national media coverage and drew attention to the issue of disability in the country. According to official statistics, between 1954–2001, 33,880 disabled Korean children were adopted abroad compared to 195 domestically. This astronomical disproportion, pointing to the fact that eugenic and elitist thinking is widespread in Korea, does not seem to show signs of changing in spite of the fact that since 1996 the government has been giving an economic allowance to domestic families adopting handicapped children.

Spurred by a growing interest in the adoption issue, voices were again heard in the media calling for a direct stop to international adoption to

50 Just like Brian Bauman, Adam King was also the subject of several television documentaries and newspaper feature stories turning him into something close to a national mascot, and an autobiography, Adam King’s Family Story (2001), was released as well as a children’s book about his life. Adam King was also elected “honorary ambassador” of Asiana Airlines making him eligible for free trips to Korea for two years.
bolster the still negative image of Korea in Western countries caused by its protraction. In May 2000 like a repeat of the 1988 discussion and as if nothing had happened in over a decade, Korea Times wrote in its editorial:

Korea has thus earned a sore notoriety as an "exporter of orphans" to the disgrace of its traditional self-esteem as a model country of Confucian morality and benevolence as well as its remarkable economic progress in the recent decade...What is the merit of economic development if the country fails to properly manage its child care programs and leaves a vast majority of its parentless children to the mercy of foreigners? In the face of the humiliating infamy, successive Korean governments have taken a variety of measures to decrease, if not put an end to, the foreign adoptions. However, the steps have all but failed because they have been cosmetic, unrealistic and, what's more inconsistent. For the first few post-war decades, it might have been inevitable to resort to foreign adoptions in light of the country's economic plight and prevailing bias against mixed-blood. However, with the lapse of nearly half a century since the war, those excuses can no longer count...both public and private sectors must combine their stepped-up endeavours to implement realistic and workable means and thus put an end to the protracted export of orphans. Otherwise, South Korea cannot be free from national disgrace no matter what achievements it scores in other fields.

The mainstream media's anti-adoption stance still refusing to address the underlying patriarchal structures at work was again particularly strong at the time of the country's co-hosting of the 2002 Football World Cup together with Japan. Continuous international adoption was seen by many as perpetuating an image of Korea as a backward and primitive country, thereby destroying the goodwill that had been gained through the successful event and threatening to cripple tourism and foreign investment. Symptomatically in the year 2001, the journalist Ch’oe Ŭn-hûi of Christian Kookmin Ilbo received a journalistic prize after having covered international adoption and adopted Koreans on an almost daily basis from August 2000 to January 2001 publishing hundreds of articles. See Kookmin Ilbo, April 18, 2001. See also Hankyoreh’s series on the global Korean diaspora from May to July 2001, which included adopted Koreans as well. Several Christian and Buddhist denominations are also deeply involved in the adoption issue, as religious groups traditionally have embraced marginalized and stigmatised groups in the Korean society. Here, my deepest thanks go to John Hamrin and Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine who both have continuously updated me on the status of the Korean adoption issue by sending me newspaper clippings, magazine articles and popular cultural productions throughout the years.

According to a review of a report written by a high ranking Korean diplomat in Korea Times, March 22, 2004, the international image of Korea is still today dominated by the Korean War, the partition and international adoption.
Ema Kristina Demir (2002) has also convincingly shown in her reception study of Swedish images of Japan and Korea acquired through television material at the time of the World Cup that ordinary Swedes still today associate Korea mostly with adoption and orphans, turning the country into a poor dictatorship, while Japan, on the other hand, connotes high technology and over-development. During the World Cup, even the immortalised coach of the 2002 Korean national football team, the Dutchman Guus Hiddink, told the perplexed Korean media that he harboured an interest in the adoption issue as he had met several adopted Koreans in his home country, the Netherlands. As a result of the criticism in July of 2002, a government program was adopted to improve the country’s international reputation, including the promotion of welfare for handicapped people and the phasing out of international adoption:

The government yesterday unveiled a package of measures to raise the nation’s international reputation, which has received a major boost following the successful co-hosting of the World Cup finals. The steps include efforts to protect human rights of foreign workers employed by local companies at home and abroad, promote welfare for the handicapped and less privileged, and phase out overseas adoptions of children.53

No other Korean president has showed such a concern for the adopted Koreans as Kim Dae Jung who through his apology and his acts managed to put the adoption issue firmly on the country’s political agenda and vastly increase the awareness of the group among the general public. At the same time, like his predecessors, President Kim made use of the adopted Koreans to uphold friendly ties with Western host countries and as a way of expanding the country’s diaspora policy vis-à-vis overseas Koreans. Moreover, Kim Dae Jung, it must be said, had a somewhat contradictory attitude towards the adoption issue, with his official apology not having actually stopped international adoption, as a true reconciliation process can never be accomplished before a complete and final end to the practice itself.

In February 2003, Kim Dae Jung’s party colleague Roh Moo-hyun assumed the presidency, and his wife Kwon Yang-suk became the new First Lady. After the presidential election in December 2002, Mrs. Kwon, consciously following in her predecessor’s footsteps, stated that her main concern during her period was to replace international adoption with its do-

53 Korea Times, July 8, 2002.
mestic counterpart. Hence, if this is not just lip service, it is most likely that the history of international adoption from Korea will at last come to an end in a not too distant future. One expression of President Roh’s adoption policy is that the Ministry of Health and Welfare has announced that May 11 and the following week will from the year 2005 and henceforth be observed officially as the Adoption Day and the Adoption Week. There will be a variety of promotional campaigns, symposiums and events taking place to encourage Koreans to adopt domestically. Yet at the time of writing, Korea is still sending over 2,200 children annually to eight Western countries for international adoption.\(^{54}\)

Finally in August 2004, the 3rd International Gathering of Adult Korean Adoptees took place in Seoul with over 400 participants from 15 different countries, and this time the Korean media focused mainly on the burgeoning and lively adopted Korean movement and community.\(^{55}\) Not surprisingly, again editorials appeared in Korean newspapers expressing shame for still sending children abroad to Western countries in spite of being the world’s 10th biggest economy, while, at the same time, as usual voicing feelings of gratitude to the adoptive parents and linking the adoptees to the country’s diaspora policy:\(^{56}\)

Back in the 50s, adoptees were mostly war orphans, but now they are mainly children born out of wedlock. Korea has since grown to become the world’s 12th largest economy, but up to 2,400 children are still being adopted by foreign parents a year, far more than the 1,600 children adopted here. The nation is contradicting itself by encouraging childbirth by policy while sending more children overseas. It has yet to shed the stigma of a “baby-exporting country”…The time has long past for Korea to pass its social duty to foreigners. Korea is one of a few OECD member countries that still send its children abroad. A country’s social responsibility ends not with economic or political power, but with guaranteeing the human rights of minorities…Fortunately, most overseas adoptees seem to have grown wonderfully, overcoming any social discrimination. We should feel thankful for them while appreciating the devotion of their adoptive parents. The government must take far better care of them by helping them trace their roots and maintain contacts. It also needs to form a network of Korean overseas adoptees as bridges with their adoptive countries.\(^{57}\)

\(^{54}\) 2004 ended with 2,258 international and 1,641 domestic adoptions.
\(^{57}\) Korea Times, August 6, 2004.
Ever since the beginning of the 1970s, when the subject was raised for the first time, nationalism has been the dominant element in the rhetoric of all sides concerned with the adoption issue. In the media discussion, the adoption issue has continued to be linked to and centred on nationalist discomfort and humiliation, even if the social aspects started to be highlighted in a more serious manner during the presidential terms of Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. The negative image and reputation of Korea in Western countries caused by the continuation of international adoption and the existence of adopted Koreans, provoking uneasy and anxious feelings and constantly risking to disrupt the master narrative of the Korean success story, has always been more important and prioritised than the dismantling of the adoption industry, the uprooting of prejudices against extramarital, mixed race and handicapped children, and the building of a comprehensive welfare system for single mothers and their children.

Media representations of adopted Koreans have strongly focused on individual stories, searching for roots and visiting Korea instead of investigating the actual situation of the majority of adoptees in their host countries, while ambivalent feelings of gratitude to the adopting countries undermining the country’s self-confidence and self-respect often are expressed. The tendency to focus on success stories can be interpreted as a refusal to deal with the negative aspects of international adoption to not be entangled in even more guilt, and a somewhat cynical way of taking credit for “model citizen” adoptees in order to raise the country’s national prestige and pride in the Western countries. The tropes of searching for roots and visiting the Motherland are also present when the adoption is-
sue crops up in popular culture, while, on the other hand, the majority of popular cultural representations instead look at the negative sides of international adoption.

Adoption in Korean popular culture

The Korean adoption issue has left several marks upon contemporary Korean popular culture figuring in a wide range of genres.\(^{60}\) The following survey of the appearance of international adoption and adopted Koreans in television dramas and soap operas, cartoons and comic strips, plays and musicals, and popular songs and feature films does not claim to be exhaustive, and the works mentioned should rather be seen as illustrative examples of the extensive and diverse pervasiveness of the Korean adoption issue in Korean popular culture than a full overview.

On Korean television, the adoption issue sometimes surfaces at the most unexpected occasions. In a 1990s entertainment programme, where a television team travels around Korea and meets with local people who are encouraged to perform a song, a middle-aged woman once proudly stated in front of the camera that she dedicated her song to her adopted daughter in Sweden. Additionally, in a December 1998 episode of the playful MBC role-playing programme *Non-Invited Guest* (*Ch'odaepatchi anûn sonnim*) the young participants were asked to act out a scene, where an adopted Korean girl returns to her hometown and meets her Korean mother. They managed this, even if they found it difficult not to giggle or even laugh, indicating how a grave situation can be turned into catharsis-like humour.

However, it is, of course, in the ubiquitous genre of Korean television

\(^{60}\) The issue of adoption is a common subject in contemporary Western media and popular culture as well, and particularly in tabloid newspapers, soap operas and Hollywood films. Danae Clark (1998) writes about the commodification of adoption as a theme in the current media discussion, Leslie Hollingworth (2002) on the image of transracial adoption in American newspapers, and Christine Gailey (2005) on depictions of adoptees in commercial films, while Geir Follevåg (2002) is examining “adoptees” in older and more classical American popular culture like Spiderman and X-men.
The Korean adoption issue drama and soap operas highly popular both within Korea and nowadays also in other Asian countries, where the adoption issue and adoptees as plot devices and fictional characters mostly figures. Excluding the numerous Korean drama series where domestic adoption and fostering occur in one way or another, in 1996, SBS aired the drama series *When the Salmon Returns* (*Yônôga toraol ttae*), where the star actress Hwang Su Jung plays Cheri Straw, an American adoptee who comes to Korea and becomes acquainted with Kang-chae, a Korean journalist who covers the adoption issue. The two end up as a couple and want to marry each other, but Kang-chae’s mother objects and demands to know more about the past of Cheri’s Korean family. In 1996, in connection with a growing interest in ethnic Koreans overseas, *1,5*, a television drama set among Koreans in the US was aired on MBC. The title refers to the Korean-American genera-

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61 The domestic adoption question is raised in the 1996 KBS2 drama *Men of the Bathhouse* (*Mogyôkt’angûi namjadûl*), in the 1997 KBS2 mini series *The Last Game* (*Magimak sîngbu*) and in the SBS drama *Chang-mi’s Tears* (*Changmiûi nunmul*) (1997), where two twins are adopted to different families. Family problems and adoption are treated in the 1999 MBC drama *See You Again* (*Pogo tto pogo*), and in SBS’s *Tô-ki* (1999), while domestic adoption plays a role in the plot of the MBC Best Theatre short-film *Courtesy of Love* (*Sarange taehan yêûi*) (2000) and in MBC’s mini series *Love Letter* (2002). The KBS series *Autumn Tale* or *Autumn in My Heart* (*Kaûl tonghwa*), the most popular television drama of 2000 and made into the feature film *Autumn Fairy Tale* by director Yoon Seok-Ho, must also be mentioned in this context, as it tells the story of two girls who by mistake are switched at birth, and of the subsequent problems that follow when the mistake is exposed. Finally, the year 2002 saw the 16 episode-long MBC drama *Gift* (*Sônmul*) kindly depicting the life of a domestic Korean adoptive family with its six adopted children. However, domestic adoption is not always treated positively in Korean television dramas, as the 2004 MBC series *Lotus Fairy* (*Wangkkot Son’nyonim*) dealing with the sensitive subject of shamanism, received sharp criticism from the Korean adoption agencies for portraying a female domestic adoptee disparagingly.

62 *Chosun Ilbo*, January 29, 1996. It should also be mentioned that Asian Americans and Korean-Americans have made songs, plays and films about adopted Koreans. In 1998, the New York based hip-hop artist Jamez released the song *Now You’ll Never Know* dedicated to “sistah” Cindy Rosenbaum, a female adopted Korean who had committed suicide, and the Korean-American writer Sung Rno’s surreal and unsettling play *Cleveland Raining*, which premiered in 1995, portrayed an adopted Korean girl known as Storm alongside two orphaned Korean-American siblings, while the Minnesota based Theater Mu has set up several performances dealing with Korean adoption and adoptees. Moreover, Anouk, an adopted Korean woman from France, has a role in Wonsuk Chin’s film *Too Tired to Die* (1998). In 2001, Jay Koh released his film *True,
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tion arriving in America above the age of six, and thus falling in-between
the first and second generation of immigrants. One of the characters of is
the male adopted Korean Chin-ho, played by the very popular actor
Shin Hyun-Jun whose adoptive parents have divorced and who meets a
Korean international student and starts a relationship with her. The year
1997 saw MBC air the 42 episode-long romantic drama Power of Love
(Sarangbandamyon), where a Korean boy ends up being put up for inter-
national adoption after his mother has remarried.

In 1998, international adoption also played a part in the MBC drama
Say Woman (Yôjarûl malbanda) as a young woman has to relinquish her
son who is sent to the US, but comes back as the English teacher Michael
and happens to get his Korean mother as one of his pupils. A French
adopted Korean with a difficult past appeared in MBC’s 16 episode-long
Love (Sarang) (1998), and SBS’s Mister Q (1997), a television drama set
among Koreans in the USA, again contained an adopted Korean. In
MBC’s Hotelier (2001), the hotel attorney Dong-hyuk receives a message
from his father that he has an unknown sister named Jenny in America.
The 2002 one hour-long KBS Drama City film Gangster Father (Kkangp’ae
appa) tells the story of a gangster who once sent his son away for interna-
tional adoption, and now starts to search for him. In SBS’s The Escape from
Unemployment (Baeksu t’aleh’ul) from 2003, an overseas adoptee from the
US played by actress Kim Hyun Soo comes back to Korea to search for
her grandmother, and initiates a relationship with a native Korean man.

In 2004, MBC produced the 16 episode-long mini series Ireland where
actress Lee Na Young stars as the adopted Korean woman Jung-ah who
grows up in an Irish-American adoptive family. However, when the fam-
ily moves back to Ireland and her adoptive brother becomes involved in
the IRA and the Irish republican movement, her adoptive parents get

where an adopted Korean named Bobby appears, and in 2003 Justin Lin’s award-win-
ning Better Luck Tomorrow contained a female adoptee known as Stephanie as the lead
character. In director Dong Hyeuk Hwang’s Miracle Mile from 2004, a taxi driver
dnamed James Hudson picks up a Korean girl at Los Angeles airport who has arrived in
America to search for her biological brother who was once given up for adoption and,
in the end, they both come to realise that they are actually siblings. Finally, in the
American independent director Alexander Payne’s Sideways (2005), an adopted Ko-
rean woman named Stephanie who has a half-black daughter figures, played by the
Korean-Canadian actress Sandra Oh.
killed. Deeply traumatised, Jung-ah then goes to Korea where she ends up unknowingly falling in love with her biological brother.

The most popular Korean drama series at the end of 2004 with a viewer audience of 30 percent, KBS’s Sorry I Love You (Mianhada sarangbanda) accompanied by soul singer Park Hyo-sin’s music video and specially written songs by top singers Suh Young Eun and Bada, featured Mu-hyeok, a young man who grew up as an overseas adoptee in an abusive adoptive family in Australia. The self-destructive Mu-hyeok returns to Korea to exact revenge on his Korean mother for abandoning him, and he becomes involved in the Korean underworld working as a pimp. In the end, it turns out that he has a biological twin and that his mother is a famous actress. SBS’s 2004 melodramatic series Stained Glass (Yurihwa) has an unusual Korean adoptee in Japan, Dong-ju, as its main character. Played by Lee Dong-gun, Dong-ju has been adopted by the president of a Japanese insurance company, and after having become the heir to the corporation he returns to Korea to look for his best friend from the orphanage. Lastly, the spring of 2005, saw a number of Korean feminist inspired television dramas having “dysfunctional” but nonetheless strong-minded and independent women, teenage and single mothers, and spinsters and divorcees, as main characters, and one of them, MBC’s My Name is Kim Sam-soon (Nae irûmûn Kim Sam-soon) which reached a record viewer rating of 37.7 percent at the end of June, contains a biracial Korean-American man whose mother is an adopted Korean in the lead cast. This character named Henry Kim, is played by actor Daniel Henney, who through the series overnight became a top model in Korean commercials and advertisements, and who himself also in reality is the son of an American adopted Korean woman.

The adoption issue also turns up now and then in Korean plays and musicals. Brian Bauman’s story inspired play writer Kim Chong-suk to stage the opera musical Barry – A Forgotten Lullaby (Pari – ithyŏjin chajang’ga) at Seoul Arts Center in 1998, attracting much media mention. The musical tells the story of a female American adoptee played by the actress Lee Sun-hee who travels to Korea and starts to search for her Korean mother. In 2000, Kim Chong-suk returned to the adoption issue in

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her *Raining Como Pass*, staged at the Opera House of Seoul Arts Center. The genre of the musical drama is used to tell the story of Sun-ae, a Korean woman at the time of the Korean War who is forced to give up her only child for adoption. A highly spectacular adoption play making use of the classical antique drama of Oedipus is the rock musical *Sphinx* (2002), written by Hong Won-ki, in which the leading character Tommy, an adopted Korean from the USA, visits Korea and accidentally and unknowingly kills his Korean birth father and falls in love with his Korean birth mother.

One of the 1994 MBC Best Theatre short-films was *White Journey* (*Hayan yôro*), a drama about an American adopted Korean returning to Korea as a US Army soldier. The adoptee was played by the famous actor Cha In Pyo who five years later was to appear as another adopted Korean, and this time in Canada in the music video of Sky’s *Eternity*.65 Cha In Pyo is but one striking example of the surprisingly high number of Korean celebrities, who have been variously involved with the adoption issue, while an adoptee character returning and searching evidently is one of the more frequently used themes in Korean popular culture. In 1997, there were for example newspaper stories about the author Lee Yun-Taek wanting the world-famous Korean nude model Lee Sung Hee to play the leading character in his play *Wild Rose* (*Haedanghwâ*), where a female adopted Korean from the US comes to Korea in search of her parents.66 Lee Sung Hee also played a Canadian adoptee, Phoebe, in Jung Soo Kang’s *A Night on the Water* (1998), an erotic drama produced in the US which tells the story of a Korean businessman falling in love with Phoebe, a prostitute addicted to alcohol and drugs due to her adoptive father’s abuse during her childhood.

Besides Cha In Pyo and Lee Sung Hee, veteran actors Choi Jin-sil, Shin Hyun-Jun, and Hwang Su Jung have all played adopted Koreans, celebrities like the baseball player Park Chan Ho have sponsored activities related to adoptees, and authors have given away their royalties to Korean adoptee associations. Another example of this strong celebrity involvement in and commitment to the adoption issue is a charity concert at the jazz club Once in a Blue Moon in Seoul in April 1999 with actor Kim Misuk and legendary rock star Shin Hyo-bom to raise money for the returnee organisation Global Overseas Adoptees’ Link. In April 2004, singer Uhm

Jung-hwa, actress Chon Do-yun and several others took part in a spectacular reality television show known as *Celebrity Foster Mum* where a child who is about to be sent abroad for international adoption is taken care of by a celebrity for a week or two, and with the purpose of helping to change the Korean attitude towards adoption. At the end of the programme, after a farewell party at the airport, the child departs from Korea, but the actress Yoon Suk-hwa became so attached to her foster child that she in the end chose to adopt it herself. Further in July 2005, the Korean economic daily *Financial News* organised a concert at Seoul Arts Center as part of its campaign to help overseas adoptees to find their Korean family members, with Korea’s world renowned conductor Gum Nanse and his Euro-Asian Philharmonic Orchestra, and with the biracial Korean-American violinist Richard Yongjae O’Neill, famous from several Korean television documentaries, and whose mother is an adopted Korean.

The adoption issue sometimes also appears in Korean cartoons and comics. Adopted Koreans are visible in several episodes in the celebrated cartoonist Park Kwangsoo’s two volumes *kwangsoo’s thoughts* (1998), and the author openly pleads for the replacement of international adoption with domestic adoption. The same is true for the *Hankyoreh* cartoonist Park Si-Baek who in a number of strips has looked at the adoption issue from a critical perspective, while an adopted Korean from New York named John plays a prominent role as a priest and sorcerer in Youn In-wan’s and Yang Kyung-il’s seven-volume long comic epos *Island* (1998–2001) by coming back to Korea and meeting his birth parents. Jake, another American adopted Korean, is the main character in Pak Kyông-jin’s two volume-long comic book *The Sea above the Sky* (*Hanûl wiîtî pada*) (1999). Jake is a high school student who longs for his family in Korea and has difficulties to cope with his adoptive parents. One day Hyê-sin, a female international student from Korea, comes to his American hometown, and the story follows the unusual couple through their ups and downs. Relationships between domestic and adopted Koreans also appear in several of the popular songs and feature films.

Ever since Seo Taiji and the Boys entered the scene in 1992 with their revolutionising style appropriated from the African-American subculture, Korean popular music (*kayo*) has been characterised by a high degree of indigenisation and hybridisation of Western genres, encompassing rap and hip-hop, house and techno, jazz, blues and reggae, and even a
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Koreanised version of punk (Epstein, 2000; Howard, 2002, 2003; Morelli, 2001). In 1997, the Korean rock band Red released its debut album containing the song Adoption, where the lyrics portrays a female domestic adoptee who longs for her birth mother and wants to introduce her to her boyfriend. One year later, the jazz musician Chung Won Young named his third album and a song after a fictitious Young Mi Robinson (1998), an adopted Korean woman in the US. The album cover is a reproduction of a painting by Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, an adoptee from Belgium. In 2004, the talented female singer Sol Flower debuted with 10 Million Ways to Live, which had on it the reggae-inspired hit song Kiss the Kids. The music video shows a female adopted Korean from Canada named Suzy who visits Korea to meet her Korean mother, and experiences herself as a Korean child 20 years earlier, and authentic photographs of adopted Koreans are inserted between the scenes as well as being printed on an inside folder of the album cover. The same year, male singer and songwriter Lee Kwang Pil released an album called White Night, with the title song depicting “the feelings of a 15 year old adoptee in Northern Europe” according to an interview. Besides, on the album Lee Kwang Pil also sings the unofficial Korean national anthem Arirang together with three adopted Koreans from Europe.

The history of Korean cinema spans from the classical golden age from the 1950s to the 1970s, when melodrama was the dominant genre, through the social realism of minjung “new cinema” films of the 1980s, to the spectacular films of the millennium shift, constituting an important element of the “Korean wind” (han’nyu) sweeping through Northeast and Southeast Asia where Korean popular culture nowadays has a mass following and constitutes an important element in the potential creation of a new pan-Asian identity (Huat, 2004; Kim Kyung Hyun, 2002a, 2004; Lee Hyangjin, 2000; Min, Joo & Kwak, 2003). Just like with Korean television dramas, numerous Korean feature films look at adoption-related issues, clearly reflecting not just a Korean obsession with blood ties and biological roots, but also the actual presence of countless of orphans and abandoned children within the country. With this in mind, it is probably hard to find any other national cinema with the same impressive amount of adoption-related films, again an expression and reflection of what the

country and its people have gone through during the last century as a result of what could well be called the birth pangs of the nation after an exceptionally violent and dramatic path to modernity. One of the most well-known examples of this frequent use of an orphan, a foster child or a domestic adoptee in Korean cinema is Im Kwon-Taek’s blockbuster film Sôp’yônjê seen by more than one million people in 1993, and telling the story of a male p’ansori artist and his two children, one adopted and one whose mother died during childbirth (Choi, 2002).

When limiting the subject of adoption in Korean cinema solely to international adoption, already in the 1960s and 1970s overseas adoptees began appearing in Korean feature films, most of whom had been adopted in China or Japan, but some also in Western countries. An extraordinary example is Jang Il-ho’s Bridge of Hyonhaet’an (1963), where a Japanese girl is abandoned when the Japanese leave Korea and is adopted by a Korean couple. As an adult, she tracks down her biological parents in Japan but decides to stay with her adoptive family in Korea.

68 Other recent Korean feature films, in which orphans and foster children appear, to name just a few are Jang Sun-Woo’s Timeless, Bottomless, Bad Movie (Nappûn yônghwâ) (1997), a drama documentary about orphans and homeless children living on the streets of Seoul, Bae Chang-Ho’s My Heart (Chông) (1999), where a woman takes in a girl, whose mother has been forced to abandon her, Im Sang-Soo’s Tears (Nunmul) (2000), which depicts runaway children and delinquent youths, and Moon Seung-wook’s The Butterfly (Nabi) (2001), where an orphan named K desperately searches for his lost family. Besides, in 1999, Dong-A Ilbo reported that the veteran director Ko Young-Nam planned to make a comedy titled Dangerous Scent (Wihômhan hyang’gi) about a female domestic adoptee searching for her biological parents. Domestic adoption is also examined in Han Ji-Seung’s A Day (Haru) (2001), where a young couple’s obsession with having a baby ends with them deciding to adopt domestically, in Im Sang-Soo’s third feature film A Good Lawyer’s Wife (Paramnan kajok) (2003), where a couple has adopted a boy due to infertility, in Joo Kyung-joong’s A Little Monk (Tongsûng) (2002), which tells the story of an orphan growing up in a Buddhist temple, and in Park Ki-hyoung’s extraordinary and highly original horror film Acacia (2003), where a domestic adoptee appears. The adoptee in the film is abused by his adoptive parents, and therefore disappears from the adoptive family to come back and haunt them in a supernatural way. During the DVD commentary track, director Park Ki-hyoung explains that he considers Acacia to be his statement on the Korean adoption issue, and expresses his discomfort of coming from the country in the world sending away the highest numbers of children for international adoption. The director further urges the Korean people to look differently at adoption, and reconsider what makes up a “real” family and a “real” parent.

69 An extremely rare example of the other way around is Jang Il-ho’s Bridge of Hyonhaet’an (1963), where a Japanese girl is abandoned when the Japanese leave Korea and is adopted by a Korean couple. As an adult, she tracks down her biological parents in Japan but decides to stay with her adoptive family in Korea.
ily example of the first instance is Kang Dae-jin’s film *A Miracle of Gratitude* (*Poûnûi kijôk*) from 1967, where Hanako, a Japanese woman who has been living in colonial Manchuria, becomes separated from her daughter Humiko while fleeing to Japan at the end of World War II, and instead herself takes care of an orphaned Korean boy, whom she names Hideo. Twenty years later, Hanako tracks down the biological parents of Hideo in Seoul, and finds out that they had taken in and adopted her own lost daughter Humiko. In the end, Hideo and Humiko marry each other, signifying some kind of reconciliation between Japan and Korea. Another example is Lee Seong-ku’s *Julia and Tokugawa Ieyasu* (1973), where a Korean girl is captured during the Japanese invasions of the 1590s and is adopted by a Japanese man and gets to know Tokugawa Ieyasu himself. However, despite his interest in Julia, she exiles herself to a deserted island and never gives up her hope of returning to Korea. A mixture of both is Kwon Young Sun’s *Between Love* (*Chôngwa chông saiê*) (1972), where a Korean girl, Michie, is adopted by the Brown family from America at the time of the Korean War, and is then re-adopted by the Ichigawa family from Japan. In Japan, she suffers from racism and discrimination against Koreans, and when Michie’s birth mother finds her, she decides to return to Korea. She also decides that she will spend her summer vacation at the Brown’s in the United States and her winter vacation at the Ichigawa’s in Japan to keep in contact with both her adoptive families.

The earliest of works depicting an adopted Korean from a Western country must be director Cheong Jin Woo’s *When April Goes by* (*Sawôli kamyôn*) from 1967 where Mun, a Korean woman adopted by a French family at the time of the Korean War, visits Korea for the first time in 18 years and gets to know Seong-hun, a man working for the French Embassy in Seoul. The two fall in love with each other, but Mun has to return to her adoptive family in France. In Lee Du Yong’s *A Guilty Woman* (*Choemanûn yôin*) (1971), the Korean male adoptee, Young-Hun, returns from America after his adoptive father has passed away in order to marry Kang-Ae, his childhood sweetheart who now is married to another man. *A Guilty Woman* ends with Young-Hun understanding the futility of his attempts to win Kang-Ae back. Byeon Chang-ho’s action film *Black Butterfly* (*Hûgnabi*) from 1974 has as its lead character Jang, a female Korean War orphan who has grown up as the adopted daughter of an American big business owner and is married to an American man. Jang returns for a
visit to Korea to search for friends she grew up together with at the orphanage. However, all of her former friends are mysteriously killed, and when she eventually understands that the murders are carried out by the order of her American husband, she commits suicide as she wants to end her life in the country she was born in. Film director Lee Du Yong returned to international adoption in *44th Street, New York* (1976) where a Korean man known as Dong-wuk comes to New York and meets Henry, a rich antiquities dealer who has an adopted Korean daughter named Jane. Dong-wuk tries to get hold of Henry’s fortune but is instead killed by an American woman he abandoned and betrayed for Jane. Two other early adoption films are Choi Hyeon-min’s *Anna’s Will* (*Annaûi yusô*) (1975), where a young woman working as a prostitute outside an American military base gives her daughter Eun-mi up for adoption to an American couple, who, as an adult, later comes back to Korea to visit her birth mother’s grave, and Lee Won-se’s *Festival of Migrants* (*Chôlsaedûllûi ch’ukche*) (1978), in which Seung-hee, a Korean woman who has grown up at an orphanage, gives her mixed race son up for international adoption to America.

In Lee Kyu Hyeong’s *Grown-Ups Just Don’t Understand* (*Ôrûndûrûn mol’layo*) (1988), a parentless boy named Min-yong is taken care of by Jun, a boxer. Min-yong causes a lot of trouble for his benefactor Jun, and the film ends with him leaving Korea to be adopted to a Western country. In Nam Ki-nam’s *Taekwondo Boy Ernie and Master Kim* (1989), a Korean adoptee known as Michael learns taekwondo from a Korean master on a visit in the USA. In February 1990, there were big headlines in both the Korean and Western media that director Kim So-yong had plans to make a feature film called *American Dream*, in which an American couple adopt a Korean child with the sole and cynical purpose of it serving as an organ donor for their biological child who needs a new heart. In the end, this spectacular and controversial film project came to nothing as a result of massive and angry protests from the US Embassy and adoption agencies. In 1990, Park Chul-soo’s *Oseam Hermitage* came out, a film where international adoption figures. Based on a popular story written by Jeong Chae-bong, the orphaned siblings Kil-son and Kam-i run away from a Catholic orphanage after having been informed that the boy Kil-son is to

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be sent away for international adoption in the Netherlands. The siblings
desperately try to find their home and mother, and finally end up at a Bud-
dhist hermitage after an odyssey through a rapidly changing 1970’s Korea
filled with hardships. In 2003, Jeong Chae-bong’s story Oseam Hermitage
was again made into a film, this time in a stunningly and beautifully ani-
mated version by director Sung Baek-yeop. Park Ho Tae’s melodrama Red
Wild Berries 5 (Ppalgan aengdu 5) from 1990 shows an adopted woman
from the US, Soo-ra, coming back to Korea to exact revenge on the mur-
derer of her birth mother. She also manages to drive the murderer to sui-
cide, but ends up in jail herself.

In Jang Young-il’s drama The Exit of Love Hotel (Lôbhútel’êl pisang’gu)
(1993), the street thug Ko-min rapes Mi-yeon and gets thrown into prison
for the crime. After his release, he starts a business with call girls and finds
out that one of them is the woman he once raped who now has a daughter
she is trying to get adopted overseas. Ko-min realises that it is his own
daughter, and by confessing he is able to reconcile with Mi-yeon and can-
cel the adoption. In 1995, Bae Yong-kyun made use of an American
adopted Korean in his experimental film The People in White (Kômûna
ttangê hûina paeksông), which was screened at the Venice Film Festival and
was well-received by both Korean and Western film critics.71 A Korean War
orphan in his 40s mysteriously known as H returns to Korea and arrives
in a dreamlike hotel where the past and the present coexist. Wandering
through this mystical world, H meets with various spiritual characters rep-
resenting the trials and tribulations of Korea’s tortured past, and his pil-
grimage serves as a metaphor for the Korean people’s collective mourning
and desperate search for an identity and a future. From the end of the
1990s, international adoption began featuring as a minor part in the plots
of several feature films. One example is Push! Push! (Sanbuingwa) from
1997, a comedy depicting the daily routines at a maternity ward in Seoul
made by the director of Oseam Hermitage, Park Chul-soo. The film con-
tains a scene, where a high school student delivers a child. The ward sister
calls an adoption agency and makes an agreement to give the child up for
international adoption. The student refuses to see her own child after
birth, but when parting she starts to scream that she wishes her child to be

71 Hankyoreh, December 5, 1997; Joongang Ilbo, April 7, 1995, November 21, 1997, and
Kookmin Ilbo, April 1, 1995.
adopted domestically, not to be sent abroad to a distant and foreign country. Another 1997 comedy with a feminist slant is director Kim Bon’s *Baby Sale*, which also provided a direct reference to the adoption issue with movie star Choi Jin Sil playing a middle-class career woman who does not want to stay at home with her newborn son. Therefore, she hires a false “baby thief” saying he belongs to Holt who threatens to kidnap and sell the child overseas if the father does not instead take paternity leave.

One feature film where international adoption frames the narrative is Park Jae-ho’s erotic drama *Summer Time* (2001). *Summer Time* starts with a returning male American adoptee searching for his Korean mother, and after meeting a woman who knows about his family background the story unfolds. Set at the time of the Kwangju incident in 1980, Sang-ho is a leftwing student activist on the run who ends up in a downtrodden working-class neighbourhood of an anonymous city. By accident, Sang-ho peeps at the married couple living underneath his rented room, and embarks upon a secret relationship with the woman played by Kim Ji-hyeon. The husband discovers his wife’s secret affair and kills Sang-ho, but the woman is already pregnant and delivers a son who ends up being put up for international adoption after the suicide of the mother. Another feature being framed by international adoption is Kim Seong-su’s comedy *Please Teach Me English* (*Yông’ô wanjôn chôngbok*) (2003). The film’s main character is the shoe salesman Mun-su, a Korean wannabe playboy, who is studying English and attending a private institute as his biological sister Victoria, who is adopted into an American family, is about to come to Korea. Yet another film containing references to the adoption issue is Park Chan-wook’s dark psychological thriller *Old Boy* (2003), where the lead character Mr. Oh is a victim of a cruel conspiracy. He wakes up after 15 years locked in a room to find out that his daughter has been adopted to a certain Erik von Ljungberg’s family in Stockholm, Sweden, and one wonders in which other country than Korea with its unique adoption history would international adoption turn up in the plot of such a film to underline and illustrate the sad and terrible fate of a human being.72

72 According to *Joongang Ilbo*, Park Chan-wook originally planned to use a Swiss adopted Korean in his widely seen action film *Joint Security Area* (*Kongdong kyôngbi kuyôk*) (2000), instead of a second-generation mixed race immigrant Korean, which eventually was the case.
The sentimental, but nonetheless powerful blend of endless misery, inescapable tragedy, and collective victimhood as reflected in the above mentioned works are more or less always present in Korean cultural texts, and, of course, also in Korean popular culture. All these popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans, challenging, contradicting and even defying the mainstream media’s success stories, reflect a contending image of international adoption going back to the dissident and populist and anti-Western minjung tradition of the 1970s and 80s. The collective Korean sense of a community of suffering has been epitomised and immortalised in the concept of han (Freda, 1999; Grinker, 1998: 73–98; Lee Jae Hoon, 1994). The emotion of han, perceived as a universal and intrinsic Korean psychic trait of having experienced separation and loss after a century of foreign invasions and social upheavals, and generally defined as a long accumulated, suppressed and pent-up mixture of sorrow and anger caused by the injustices and hardships of modern Korean history, is even acknowledged by Korean psychiatrists as the culture-bound diagnosis of hwabyông and is accordingly used to diagnose Korean-Americans (Somers, 1998). The feeling of han may well be compared to Freud’s notion of melancholia or unfinished mourning, and it has made Koreans identify with other ethnic groups with a battered and tormented past like the Jews and the Irish. The Korean cult of victimology inscribed in the aesthetics of han, together with this minjung-oriented counter-hegemonic discourse on and counter-narrative of international adoption, provide the backdrop to the following textual analysis of the eight cultural productions representing adopted Koreans.
Feminist scholars argue that modern nation states are profoundly gendered in the sense that the nation is embodied as a woman (Enloe, 1990; Feiler, 2004; Mayer, 2000; Ueno, 2003). Nira Yuval-Davis and...
Floya Anthias (1989: 8–10) examine how nationalism, gender and sexuality intersect, and identify five ways in which women are implicated in nationalist narratives: as biological reproducers of the nation, as boundaries of national groups, as transmitters and producers of national culture, as symbols of national difference, and as participants in nationalist struggle. The nation imagined as a female body gives rise to strong familial connotations, and it is the task of patriarchal nationalism and male power, often represented by the government and military, to rescue and defend, sacrifice and in the end die for “her”. Anti-colonialist forces in general and postcolonial nation-builders in particular seem to be especially susceptible to invoking this gendered manner of nationalism and the image of the nation as woman in their resistance to an infantilising and parentalising colonial power (Chatterjee, 1993: 116–134; Loomba, 1998: 215–231; Shetty, 1995; Sinha, 2000).

In her study of anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalism in South Africa, Anne McClintock (1995: 352–389) reminds that nationalism is from the very beginning constituted as a gendered discourse, and cannot be grasped without an understanding of gender difference. Sexuality is intimately intertwined with nationalist ideology when female bodies are fetishised as boundary markers of the nation, and male power is set to protect and recover their purity and sanctity. Because womanhood is associated with reproduction and domesticity, the nation also becomes conceptualised as a family, time is spatialised as static, and history becomes a question of lineage and genealogy. Women are signifiers and bearers of the nation, but, at the same time, the Afrikaner volksmoeder is denied any agency as women’s autonomy is contained within a cult of passive victimology. When a foreign power dominates the nation, it is the role of men to take back control of “their” women in order to be able to regain male agency and restore the honour of the nation. Even if women now and then are given a place in an anti-colonial struggle such as in the case of the ANC’s Women’s League, patriarchal practices strengthening patriarchal structures are usually invigorated, reinstated and reified in times of imperialist domination, as colonised men feel emasculated and have to compensate for their eroded power.

According to Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), one of the leading feminist scholars who studies the relationship between gender and nation and the trope of the nation as family, and who has criticised mainstream gender-
blind theorisations of nationalism as in the cases of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, Anthony Smith, Elie Kedourie and others, modern nation states have taken on three main gendered forms known as Volksnation, Kulturnation and Staatsnation. In the Volksnation, women are the biological reproducers of the nation, and the control and regulation of sexuality become crucial not only to preserve “pure” roots of a perceived common mythical origin, but also to envision and sustain a collective future. In the Kulturnation, women are the cultural bearers of the nation, the symbolic border guards and the embodiments of the collective. Finally, the Staatsnation, the third major dimension of nation-formation projects, relates to political rights, loyalty to a polity and a constitution, and who is to gain citizenship in the era of global migration and multiculturalism. Besides, Yuval-Davis also examines the migration of women and children in the forms of international marriage and adoption to illustrate how more powerful national collectivities dominate less powerful ones on a global level, and the forced adoption of native children in colonial settler societies as a way of assimilating and breaking up their communities. It is the Volksnation and Kulturnation versions of nationalism and women as reproducers and bearers of a colonised nation which concerns the Korean nation the most:

Hegemonic cultures present a specific view about the meaning of the world and the nature of social order. The relationships between women and men are crucial for such a perspective, and therefore in most societies also the control of women by men. Women are often constructed as the cultural symbols of the collectivity, of its boundaries, as carriers of the collectivity’s “honour” and as its intergenerational reproducers of culture. Specific codes and regulations are usually developed, defining who/what is a “proper man” and a “proper woman”, which are central to the identities of collectivity members. Feelings of disempowerment which result from processes of colonization and subjugation have often been interpreted by the colonized men as processes of emasculation and/or feminization. The (re)construction of men’s – and often even more importantly women’s – roles in the processes of resistance and liberation has been central in most such struggles. (Yuval-Davis, 1992: 67)

Korean nationalism is undoubtedly heavily gendered as well, even if it sometimes can be difficult to make use of and apply Western models and theories on non-Western cultures and societies (Abelmann, 2003; Jager, 2003; Kim & Choi, 1998; Kendall, 2002; Moon, 1994; Nelson, 2000). For example it was a she-bear (ungnyŏ) who mothered the nation in the form
of Tan’gun, the mythical progenitor of all Koreans, and it is no coincidence that shamanism, predominantly practised by women, is considered to be the most atavistic and authentic of all Korea’s religious traditions (Kendall, 1985; Kim Hogarth, 1999). Laurel Kendall (1998) writes that historically shamans have been doubly marginalized by being female, and by practising an outcast profession. Recently however, patriarchal nationalism has started to “speak for” the shamans, inscribing them with nationalist meanings, and thereby transforming them into mute artefacts of nationalist ideology.

In the first half of the last century, male displacement and impotence, failed manhood, impaired bodies and controlling women’s sexuality were frequent subjects in Korean literature; thus, reflecting the traumatic experience of Korean men having been colonised and dominated by Japan (Choi Kyeong-Hee, 2001; Jager, 2003: 43–56; Suh, 2002). Regarding the postcolonial period, Jongwoo Han and L.H.M. Ling (1998) categorise the Republic of Korea as a mixture of Confucian parental governance and a projection of Western liberal capitalism, resulting in a self-orientalised hypermasculinisation. The Korean developmental state was heavily hypermasculinised on the international scene while, at the same time, the domestic society was hyperfeminised in order to be able to uphold the sexual division of labour. Confucian virtues of sexual chastity, obedience to the family and modest appearance were reinvoked, and the couple cite the famous minjung poet Kim Chi Ha who analogised Korea’s transition into modernity as a woman about to enter prostitution. International adoption is, according to my interpretation, one concrete effect of this thoroughly gendered modernity discourse, as it is used to discipline women’s bodies and punish those who fail to live up to the prescribed ideals of normative femininity.

The gendered aspect of Korean nationalism is especially evident in the public debate surrounding the comfort women. Both Yang Hyunah (1998) and Park You-Me (2000) show that the discourse on the comfort women has resulted in the reinforcement of patriarchal nationalism, as the women are perceived as having soiled the dignity of the nation instead of addressing the elusive guilt and complicity coming from native Korean collaborators and men who acted as intermediaries to force, coerce and trick the women to “enlist”. Similarly, Kim Hyun Sook (1998), Bruce Fulton (1998) and Chung Hye Seung (2001) look at literary and cinematic representa-
tions of military prostitutes in the genre of kijich’ón (camp town) fiction, and find that these women are used as an allegory for a subordinated and emasculated Korean nation provoking uneasy feelings of male inferiority.

As Chunghee Sarah Soh (2004) rightly points out when commenting upon the comfort women issue, Korean women have indeed repeatedly paid the price to “save the nation” and act as “patriots” with their bodies as they have 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 to marry who were socialised into selfless wives and devoted mothers, and those women to date who were recruited and trained to entertain and offer their bodies. With a long history of being a vassal under Chinese, Japanese and American imperialism and governed by the Confucian concept of serving the great (sadaejuûi), this concerns court ladies for the Mongols, tributary women (kongnyó) for the Ming emperor, captives (hwanhyangnyô) for the Manchu dynasty, comfort women (chôngsindae or wianbu) for the Japanese, war brides and military prostitutes, derogatorily called “Western princesses” (yang’gongju), for the Americans, and kisaeng girls for Western tourists, academics, businessmen and diplomats (Ching Yoon Louie, 2000; Chun, 1968; Cumings, 1992; Kim Young-Hoon, 2003; Lie, 1995; Moon, 1997, 1998; Yuh, 2002). It is tempting to add adopted children as a continuation of this long Korean tradition of trafficking in human beings as tributary gifts, as international adoption is a good example of a practice upholding and strengthening traditional ideals of masculinity and femininity and patriarchal structures in the countries of origin. Woman as a privileged sign of the nation with the background of Yuval-Davis’s understanding of nationalism as a gendered discourse is, therefore, the perspective when reading Sinawe’s Motherland (1997) where roots are maternalised, and Chang Kil-su’s Susanne Brink’s Arirang (1991), where Korea is embodied and narrated as a female adopted child and the global, the national and the individual become intimately intertwined.

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1. Anecdotal evidence that North Korean children have been donated as gifts to Western political sympathisers overseas, and that the South Korean Unification Church is circulating “gift children” among its members are perhaps also expressions of this peculiar Korean tradition.
The maternalisation of roots

How much I try to change, I will always be different – Different eyes and hair colour, even another spirit – As I have been abandoned, I was always alone – As I have been abandoned, I am alone – I have lived like grass without roots – I know nothing of who I am, I am nobody – The sound of my mother’s voice coming from far away – Calling for me to return, to return to the motherland – Talking to the heaven that abandoned me, I miss you – As I have been abandoned, I was always alone – As I have been abandoned, I am alone – The sound of my mother’s voice coming from far away – Calling for me to return – To return to the motherland – Ah-ah-calling-ah-ah-calling – Ah-ah-ah-calling

(Sinawe, 1997)³

In 1997 Sinawe, Korea’s most famous rock band of their time, released its sixth album containing the song Motherland.⁴ Founded in 1983 and from the beginning led by guitarist, composer and producer Shin Dae Chul, son of “the founder of Korean rock-‘n’-roll” Shin Jung Hyun, Sinawe broke with the tradition of disco and pop ballads dominating Korean popular music of the 1980s, and introduced hard rock to the country with their long coloured hair and outlandish fashion style. The band took its name from the folk music genre with roots in Buddhist and shamanist traditions, meant for dancing, highly improvised, and reminiscent of modern jazz music. Throughout the years the band line-up changed several times and former members started their own solo careers, like the legendary Seo Taiji who, for a while, was the group’s bassist and Kang Ki Young, commonly acknowledged as the founder of Korean punk music. Lately, Shin Dae Chul has continued to produce albums in the name of D.O.D. (Dead or Alive), a non-commercial guitar project band.

The sad and melancholic rock song Motherland vividly depicts the inner life and feelings of an anonymous adopted Korean, whose gender is unknown, living in an unnamed Western country. The lyrics look at typical issues associated with overseas adoptions in Korean representations of adopted Koreans like physical alterity, and feelings of abandonment and loneliness, rootlessness and alienation. An interesting detail is the reference to spiritual difference, which can be linked to the metaphysical myth

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³ I would like to thank lecturer Kang Kyung-sook for her generous assistance in the translation of this and the following three songs.

of the racial soul or *Volksgeist* going back to German Romanticism and which is an important element in both ethnonationalism and National Socialism (Connor, 1994; Mosse, 1985). This implies that to be Korean is not just a biological fact but an emotional state as well, as not only physical, but also mental characteristics are believed to be inheritable and passed down through generations.

However, what is most important with *Motherland* is the blurred merging of the birth mother with Korea as roots are maternalised and the nation becomes depicted as a mother. A maternalised Korea is a powerful metaphor given the strong connotations of deep affection, over-protection, limitless endurance, and self-sacrifice invested in the subjectivity of Korean motherhood (Cho Haejoang, 1998b; Choe, 1994; Lee Kwang-kyu, 1997: 49–68). Traditionally, Korean mothers assumed total responsibility for child rearing and the socialisation of gender roles as the sexual division of labour confined the women entirely to the interior domestic world, and the men to the exterior outer domain, at least in the middle and upper classes. This Korean way of matrilocal single parenting created intimate mother-son relationships, but also complicated mother-daughter conflicts. However, Korean academics in gender studies point out that traditional Korean motherhood is today rapidly disappearing together with the patrilineal extended family as a result of the nuclearisation of Korean families (Cho Haejoang, 2002; Woo, 2003). Instead, what has emerged in its place is what Kim Yi (2001) calls a matrilateral bias, meaning that husbands nowadays in practice are closer to their wives than to their mothers.

In *Motherland*, Korea, pictured as a bifurcated mother, eagerly calls for and reclaims her lost and unhappy child living in exile in a far off and hostile Western country. Agency is here bestowed upon a rescuing Korea, not upon an infantilised and victimised adoptee who is simultaneously made motherless and nationless, and it is only by reuniting with the biological mother and returning to the Motherland that an adopted Korean can be relieved from being and feeling eternally different and lonely in a Western country.\(^1\) The lyrics are in line with the Korean media’s dominant focus on searching for roots and visiting Korea and its reluctance or even refusal to

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\(^1\) *Ibyang’a* (adopted child) is symptomatically also far more often used in the Korean media than the word *ibyang’in* (adoptee).
deal with the internal problems of Korean society that cause international adoption to continue. At the same time, the romantic and nostalgic cult of motherhood as evidenced in the Mother Korea metaphor, disregards the actual asymmetric power relations existing between men and women in contemporary Korean society. Furthermore, the paternal absence of the birth father, even if the Confucian trope of heaven that is included in the song may be interpreted as a kind of a patriarchal symbol, serves to effectively deny paternal responsibility and obscures the deep patriarchal structures at work behind international adoption. In this way Mother Korea will continue to call upon and reclaim her lost children to return instead of meeting them halfway, thereby acknowledging their in-between status and accomplishing an equal encounter. This reclaiming of adopted Koreans takes place in *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* as well, and is even executed physically through the intervention of Korean nationalism.

The suffering and shaming of Korea

The social drama of *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* is arguably the most famous Korean feature film, which depicts an adopted Korean in a Western host country. As one of the earliest popular cultural works to look at the adoption issue and definitely the most complete and classical representation of an adopted Korean that has ever been made hitherto, the influence of *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* in not only making the existence of the adopted Koreans more widely known in Korea, but also in bringing up the negative aspects of international adoption, has in all respects truly been enormous. Released in September 1991, directed by the respected Chang Kil-su, the film, his 7th feature production and based on an authentic story, depicts the life of Susanne Brink, an adopted Korean woman who was brought up in Sweden. Regarding his intentions with the film, director Chang said in an interview: “I will reveal the problems of adoption abroad and who should assume responsibility through a girl’s growth process,

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7 As an adopted Korean from Sweden, I have myself been frequently posed the question whether I have had the same adoption experience as Susanne Brink.
who has been placed in Sweden”.

As Susanne Brink’s Arirang is reminiscent of a television melodrama rather than a feature film, one suspects that director Chang produced the film with the intention that it was going to be aired on television, thereby being able to reach out to a much larger audience than the one he would get only at the movie theatre.

The narrative trajectory of the film starts with Susanne’s departure from Korea as Yu-suk at the age of three, continues through her hardships as an adoptee in Sweden with an abusive adoptive family, two suicide attempts and endless misery, and ends with the reunion with her Korean family some 20 years later. Susanne Brink’s Arirang takes place in a wholly Swedish setting except for the first and last scenes when Susanne’s Korean family appears, and almost solely with Swedish actors and in Swedish using Korean subtitles. In the film, even the title character played by the Korean actress Choi Jin Sil has learnt her Swedish lines by heart. The real Susanne Brink had appeared in a 1989 MBC Human Age documentary on adopted Koreans in Europe, through which she actually found her Korean mother, and her life was subsequently turned into a novel that became the basis of the film script. Because of the film, Susanne Brink was turned into one of Korea’s most well-known overseas adoptees, and several follow-up documentaries have been made about her, while repeat transmissions of the film are regular on Korean television channels.

The year 1991 is considered to have been a particularly gloomy year for Korean cinema, and Susanne Brink’s Arirang was among a few domestic titles to reach any commercial success or critical attention at all throughout the year. One important factor that contributed to the success of the film was the fact that Susanne was played by the renowned Choi Jin Sil who received a domestic prize for her performance, and who started to become famous from the beginning of the 1990s. Director Chang Kil-su managed to release another well-received film at the same year, Silver Stalion (Ûnmanûn oji ahnûnda), based on a novel by Ahn Junghyo, which won awards at the Montreal film festival. Just like Susanne Brink’s Arirang,
Silver Stallion is also a film about the gendering of the nation in the form of a Korean woman who is raped by American soldiers, ostracised and expelled from her village, and forced into prostitution at the time of the Korean War (Chung, 2001; Kim Kyung Hyun, 2004: 81–87). Chang has continued to work with Choi Jin Sil in other film projects as well as producing other feature films depicting ethnic Koreans overseas like America, America (1988), That which Falls has Wings (Ch’urakhanûn kösün nalgæga itta) (1990) and Western Avenue (1993). Western Avenue looks at the Los Angeles riots of 1992, commonly known as sa-i-gu by the city’s Korean community, and the film was criticised for its stereotypical portrayals of non-Koreans, whites, latinos and blacks alike. Finally, already in his second feature film Lethe’s Love Song (Lêt’eûi yôn’ga) (1987) had director Chang touched upon the subject of discrimination against orphans in Korea.

Susanne Brink’s Arirang abruptly starts as a documentary with two authentic Swedish female adopted Koreans in their teens aggressively spitting out bitter phrases of having been adopted from Korea. The first girl reveals that her adoptive parents wanted a Korean daughter as if they had “chosen among pets”, and that she knows that “she was sold cheaply as Korean children were not worth much in those days”. The second girl, with a pierced nose and a particularly provocative style, states that she despises her Korean mother for having abandoned her, and that she wants to spit in her face and exact revenge on her in the future by coming back and destroying her new family. It is easy to imagine how shocking this opening part of the film must have been to a Korean audience in the early 1990s, as the two adopted Koreans both visually and verbally by any means transgress the rigid boundaries of idealised Korean femininity, as well as violate the almost holy sacredness surrounding the Korean mother. The spectacular opening sequence is followed by one of the key scenes in the film, when Susanne and her daughter Eleonora sit in front of a Korean television team. Susanne talks about her tragic childhood and why she ended up as a single mother. With tears in her eyes and while smoking, Susanne explains that she wants to ask her Korean mother why she sent her so far away. Here again, the director has consciously chosen to present another severe violation and provocation of Korean womanhood for the already shocked spectators as “proper Korean women” are not allowed to smoke in public,

and Susanne, at least, theoretically smokes in front of the whole South Korean population.\textsuperscript{11}

When the film starts and the list of actors appears, in the background the three years old Yu-suk is being measured and examined by a physician. An adoption agency worker fills in a standard formula turning her into a case number, while her Korean mother reluctantly signs the letter of abandonment. In this way, international adoption is from the beginning depicted as a cynical business treating children like commodities who have to be quality checked before being exported. The story itself unfolds in 1966 in a poor working-class neighbourhood in Seoul, where a widow played by Kim Yun-kyeong lives a difficult life as a single mother of three children after the premature death of her husband. The mother decides to give Yu-suk, the youngest daughter, up for international adoption. She buys her a new dress and prepares one last meal. During mealtime, Yu-suk instinctively understands that something wrong is going on and starts to cry. After a final farewell to siblings and neighbours, the mother takes Yu-suk on her back for one last time just like Korean women traditionally carry their infants, and walks to Kimpo Airport.

At the airport, a female adoption agency worker and an escort woman wait impatiently with three other children, whose destinations are Belgium and Sweden. The stressful agency worker shouts at Yu-suk’s mother to hurry up. The rude and cold-blooded middle-class woman dealing in the trading of children here becomes the antithesis of a decent, simple and traditional working-class woman forced to give her daughter up for adoption. The poor mother signs the necessary documents and buys Yu-suk a female doll dressed up in \textit{hanbok} as a last memory of Korea. Suddenly the mother regrets her decision, but forces herself to physically part from Yu-suk, as the plane is about to leave. This heartbreaking scene, filled with \textit{han}, tears and crying, is prolonged in slow-motion to make the most of the voyeuristic pleasure in watching and hopefully empathising with another person’s despair, and the viewer gets a final glimpse of the devastated mother looking up at the airplane in the sky with tears rolling down her cheeks.

\textsuperscript{11} Interestingly enough, adopted Koreans participating in visiting programs are by routine actually made to promise that they will not wear “inappropriate attire” and refrain from smoking in public and in front of old people to “ensure safety”.

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At Arlanda Airport in Stockholm, the Swedish couple Rune and Inger Brink, played by the Swedish actors Lars and Pia Green, eagerly await their new child. Skilfully, the director contrasts the complete agony of Yu-suk’s Korean mother at Kimpo Airport with the naïve happiness of the waiting adoptive parents at Arlanda Airport, and the viewers are without difficulty sutured into sympathising with the former. Unsteadily waving a Swedish flag in her hand and with a bewildered look, Yu-suk is welcomed in a language she does not understand, and by people whose strange appearance apparently frightens her to death. With a mixture of an unrestrained desire for the racialised Other and a given and taken-for-granted possessiveness, her new mother openly claims Yu-suk as her own by lifting her up, and exclaiming “from now on you are Susanne Brink”, and “you belong to us now”. In response, the confused Yu-suk clings desperately to the Korean escort woman, crying that she wants to go back to her mother. The escort woman, who will be her last contact with another ethnic Korean for many years, instead gently pushes her away and tells her that these people are henceforth her new mother and father. Thereafter, a Swedish adoption agency worker turns up dressed up as a professional businesswoman just like her Korean counterpart, and gets the necessary signatures from the couple, thereby finalising their adoption of Yu-suk.

Following Marc Augé’s (1995) notion of non-places as transitional, liminal and deterritorialized public locales of transportation as well as of commerce in his theorisation of an anthropology of supermodernity, it is possible to interpret the airport as the (non-)place, where adopted children are bought and sold, and are going through their ethnic rite de passage, thus paralleling the so-called middle passage of African slaves. At the airport’s placelessness, Yu-suk is relinquished and leaves behind her Koreaness to be adopted, reborn and re-baptised as Swedish Susanne. Consequently, it is no coincidence that airport references and airplanes in the sky so often are used as a metaphor of international adoption in popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans like Susanne Brink’s Arirang, for example, in Park Kwangsoo’s comic strips and Sol Flower’s music video Kiss the Kids, and in Clon’s Abandoned Child and Sky’s Eternity.

After a car trip to Norrköping, a city south of Stockholm, Susanne enters her new home, a typical suburban upper middle-class house, and meets her Swedish relatives who have arranged a welcome dinner. Susanne
is very frightened when encountering her strange-looking aunts and
grandmas who disregard any respect for physical integrity and resolutely
hug and kiss her. Moreover, her new mother forces her to undress, take a
bath and change clothes unaware of the vital significance Susanne attaches
to the dress that was given to her by her Korean mother on the day of her
departure. The Swedish mother’s forceful act of washing and redressing
her signifies the final transformation of Korean Yu-suk into Swedish
Susanne. Susanne’s first day in her new country ends with her sitting at the
dinner table and listening to the mumblings of an incomprehensible lan-
guage until she finally falls asleep in the company of an adoptive family
filled with its own happiness and showing no interest in nor understand-
ing of the hardships she recently has gone through. In a last scene again
underlining the naïve mentality of the adoptive parents, Rune and Inger
gently put a sleeping Susanne into bed and smile at the Korean doll she
brought with her, which symbolises her last pathetic connection to Korea,
and which suddenly looks as astray and displaced as Susanne herself.

In 1967, the Norrköping-based newspaper Folkbladet Östgöten pub-
lished an article about the real couple Rune and Inger Brink, their bio-
logical son Håkan and their newly arrived adopted daughter Susanne.12
According to the article Susanne, ”purchased from Korea for 3,600 SEK”,
creates attention in Norrköping as she is “slant-eyed, dark and soft.” Inger
tells the journalist that already during the Korean War, she decided to “take
care of a Korea girl”.13 Their biological son Håkan is born the same year,
but compared to “cute and kind” Susanne, he is a “formal and dignified
Swede”. Asked about the birth mother, the adoptive parents confidently
state: ”most likely she cannot write”. In reality, Susanne’s Korean mother
earned her living as a moneylender, something, which truly demands skill
in writing and reading. Regarding Susanne’s memories from Korea, the
couple comment:

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13 This expression is certainly well in line with how the Swedish media in general use
to collectivise items coming from Korea and other “yellow” East and Southeast Asian
countries, where everything and everybody are imagined to be and look alike. The
standard word for an adopted Korean is, according to the Swedish National Encyclo-
pædia, “Koreabarn” (“Korea child”), and in Swedish newspapers and newscasts one
often comes to see and hear expressions like “Japanbil” (“Japan car”), “Thaitjej” (“Thai
girl”) and “Kinamat” (“China food”).
She has already forgotten most of her earlier life. But sometimes it comes back as an evil dream while sleeping, and then mother and father must rock her back to sleep. The doctors say that she must have been exposed to a trauma of some kind, but that it will disappear later on.

Susanne’s trauma is, of course, nothing else but the dramatic parting scene of the film, namely the sudden and abrupt departure from her family in Korea. Finally, the couple believe that Susanne will be fully accepted by Swedish society in the future: “Differences in colour and appearance will mean nothing.” Considering Susanne’s extremely negative experiences in Sweden, this prophecy must be said to be both ironic and naïve to say the least.

The film now jumps forward in time and resumes at the end of the 1970s, when Susanne, 15, is attending the senior year of the Swedish school system. More than ten years have now passed since the transformation of Korean Yu-suk into Swedish Susanne. Susanne’s adoptive father Rune is a busy and self-employed man, the adoptive mother Inger has turned into a bitter and bored housewife who drinks too much, the adoptive brother Håkan is a hot-tempered motorbike rider popular among girls, while Susanne herself is a shy and sensitive person with few friends in school. In other words, with a hardworking and absent father, a mother who perfectly embodies and epitomises the almost universal trope of the wicked and evil stepmother and a self-centred and self-assured brother who could not care less, the stage is set for an abusive adoptive family as it is soon apparent that Susanne is far from the lucky and successful adoptee her Korean mother certainly hoped her to become when deciding to give her up for international adoption.

Susanne is instead constantly subjected to psychological terror and physical mistreatment in her adoptive family. Her Swedish brother pesters her with egoistic demands and shouts at his mother: “I do not want to live with a damn Chinese! Why did you adopt her in the first place?” Her Swedish mother tells her that she is the “shame of the family” with her “mean slanted looks” which “frighten the neighbours”, nothing less than an implicit reference to the epicanthic folds of her eyes. Besides, it may be that the jealous adoptive mother suffers from a repressed erotic and incestuous fantasy played out between her husband Rune and her daughter Susanne. Susanne’s Swedish father who for a while appears to be prepared to take her side, instead tries to stay away from the family problems as much as
possible and begs her not to cause trouble for “my son and my wife”, asking her to understand his difficult situation. When the adoptive father’s business gets into financial trouble, the family situation rapidly deteriorates. Susanne is told that everything has gone wrong ever since she arrived in the family, and that she brings misfortune and bad luck to everyone around her. In an exceptionally terrible kitchen scene, Susanne is forced to listen to her Swedish parents openly arguing, as if she is not present, about who wanted to adopt her in the first place, and if it is possible to send her back to Korea, as she is not the “real daughter” of neither of them.

On Midsummer’s Eve, without doubt the most Swedish of annual festivals, Susanne meets one of her few school friends. With flowers in her hair and standing out from a crowd of Swedes dressed up in traditional costume and dancing around the maypole, this Midsummer Eve sequence is consciously inserted between the family scenes to further reinforce the message that Susanne is forever a stranger in both her adoptive family and adoptive country with a Korean appearance turned into a striking bodily lack of Whiteness. Even if she has a Swedish name and a Swedish family, even if she speaks Swedish and behaves like a middle-class Swede, which besides of course is the only thing she can do, and in spite of wearing a wreath of flowers in her hair like other Swedish girls do on Midsummer’s Eve, the obvious message of the film is that Susanne will never become a Swede. Susanne’s shortcomings of not being an ethnic Swede is from the very beginning decided by her having an anatomical and biological body, which associates her metaphorically with East Asia, fetishises her as a stranger and marks her with the sense of out-of-place-ness Sara Ahmed (2000) discusses and elaborates on in her treatise on the embodiment of Others in the era of postcoloniality. Ahmed writes that otherisation is produced at the level of the body in the dialogical encounter between stranger and community through a process of incorporation and expulsion, creating assimilable and unassimilable bodies, and by putting Susanne in relation to a Swedish crowd on Midsummer’s Eve director Chang clearly places Susanne within the last category:

An analysis of strange encounters as bodily encounters suggests that the marking out of boundary lines between bodies, through the assumption of a bodily image, involves practices and techniques of differentiation. That is, bodies become differentiated not only from each other or the other, but also through differentiating between others, who have a different function in establishing the permeability of bodi-
ily space. Here, there is no generalisable other that serves to establish the illusion of bodily integrity; rather the body becomes imagined through being related to, and separated from, particular bodily others. Difference is not simply found in the body, but is established as a relation between bodies. (Ahmed, 2000: 44)

At home Susanne is forced to do housework and other chores. A particularly studied scene is when Susanne assumes a subservient posture and with tears in her eyes gives her arrogant and mean Swedish mother a pedicure. This scene is plainly an explicit reference to slavery and colonialism. Through this sequence, which relates to the discourse going back to the time of dissident critique and the democratic struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, international adoption becomes a way of selling Korean children to abusive and racist Westerners to furnish them with domestic servants or even worse such as for sexual exploitation or as sources of organ transplants. Even more important at this critical juncture is that Susanne as an adopted Korean girl takes on the role of the enslaved, invaded and colonised subject and embodies the Korean nation at times of foreign yoke, occupation, subjugation and oppression. In her embodiment of the national collective, Korea becomes inscribed on her body, and Susanne becomes the marker of Koreanness as she assumes the burden of representing the Korean nation, and accordingly every time Susanne is victimised it is the Korean nation that is suffering.

One day, when waiting at a commuter station dressed in a mini-skirt, which is normal for teenage girls in post-1968 Sweden, a male drunkard approaches Susanne and harasses her sexually and racially. He starts by asking her if she is “from China or Japan”, compliments her on her “cute appearance”, and when the train arrives he suddenly and physically forces her to accept a sum of money in front of the curious passengers looking out of the window. This time, the orientalist sexualisation of East Asian women in Western culture and the image of them as always willing and available partners for white men or even born prostitutes is used by director Chang to get the point across that female adopted Koreans are never safe in a Western country and must be protected, whether in the private sphere of their adoptive family or in the public domain among white people. The orientalist sexualisation alluded to in the film with its colonial origins, cultural representations and political expressions, underpinned by nostalgic memories of glorious mass raping in the colonies, brutal American Cold War politics and military prostitution, and contemporary sex
tourism and trafficking, is a well documented phenomenon in contemporary Western culture and has been thoroughly dealt with in Asian American feminist studies (Cho Sumi, 1997; Espiritu, 1997; Kang, 1993; Uchida, 1998). Susanne must be saved from the disgrace of being raped, but she must also be policed from the risk of prostituting herself. Through this ambiguity, on the one hand, Susanne embodies the suffering of Korea and, on the other hand, she is the focus of the shaming of the nation, and as a result she is worth both pity and contempt. However, Susanne/Korea has to wait for many years and go through even more ordeals, hardships and miseries before Korean nationalism intervenes to change her life.

When Susanne comes home after the terrible incident, her Swedish mother has already been informed of what has happened by gossiping witnesses, who were on the train. She demands to see the money and accuses Susanne, violently slapping the notes in her face and beating her: “I knew you would end up like a prostitute! And in my house of all places!” Trapped between the inescapable roles of the obedient and grateful adopted child, the kind and cute Asian girl, the submissive and docile housemaid, and the born prostitute, Susanne now seeks solace in her diary where she writes sentences like “I hate my adoptive mother!” and “I want to stick a knife into my adoptive mother!” One day when Susanne comes back from school, she finds her adoptive mother standing in the middle of her room reading her diary. The adoptive mother starts to beat Susanne severely, even ripping her clothes apart as a final act of humiliation and perhaps underlining the repressed sexual antagonism existing between mother and daughter: “Is this how you thank me for having given you food and housing. I disliked you from the beginning, and you have always been mean and evil. You are stupid and totally worthless!” Susanne locks herself in the bathroom and tries to commit suicide, but she survives and wakes up in the hospital with her adoptive mother standing above her and scolding her for what she has done.

It must be said that the real Susanne Brink actually has been one of the first to raise the problem of the orientalist sexualisation of East Asian women in Swedish public places, as she has written articles on the subject and simultaneously demanded a stop to international adoption from Korea. See Aftonbladet, September 26, 2003, and Korea Herald, December 17, 2003.

In light of Susanne’s terrible adoption experience and her self-destructive behaviour and lifestyle, it is worth noting here that recently new adoption research has come to
One year later when entering high school at the age of 16, Susanne leaves her adoptive family and moves to a boarding house to start an independent life. Her menacing and intimidating Swedish mother takes the opportunity to tell her how “ungrateful” she is leaving her family at “this most sensitive age”. Susanne’s kind-hearted but incapable adoptive father, on the other hand, follows her to the railway station and for a last time reiterates his own self-pitying attitude by asking her for comfort instead of understanding her precarious situation: “I am sorry that I did not do my outmost to make you happy. I do not know if you understand me.” At light in Sweden based on national cohort studies of thousands of adult international adoptees. It has indicated that international adoption is not as unproblematic and idyllic as it generally is conceived to be. These new Swedish adoption studies, by far the most extensive ever conducted on international adoptees in any Western country, can also be seen as the most scientific ones up to date of assessing the outcomes of international adoption. The results show that international adoptees in Sweden compared to equivalent control groups have substantial problems establishing themselves socio-economically in terms of level of education, labour market achievement and creating a family in spite of being adopted by couples 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 (Björklund & Richardson, 2000; Lindblad, Hjern & Vinnerljung, 2003; Österberg, 2000; Rooth, 2001). To give a couple of examples, in 1996, 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. As of 1999, 60.2 percent of the international adoptees were employed compared to 77.1 percent among ethnic Swedes, and half of the former group belonged to the lowest income category compared to 28.6 percent of the latter. In 1996, 29.2 percent of the international adoptees were either married or co-habitants compared to 56.2 percent of the majority population. International adoptees have less often children, and those who are parents are more often living without their children if they are males or as single parents if they are females. Furthermore, epidemiological studies show high levels of psychiatric illness, addiction, criminality and suicide compared to the control groups (Hjern, 2004; Hjern & Allebeck, 2004; Hjern, Lindblad & Vinnerljung, 2003; Hjern, Vinnerljung & Lindblad, 2004). For the years 1986–95, 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. Moreover, the international adoptees were found to have used more violent suicide methods compared to the majority population of Sweden. 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.
the boarding house Susanne becomes close friend with Ulrika, a Swedish girl with a similar family background to that of Susanne as it turns out that Ulrika has been abused by her foster mother. With a defiant dress style being the norm among Swedish high school girls but close to unthinkable for same-aged Koreans at the beginning of the 1990s, together the two thoroughly damaged and self-destructive girls start to visit Stockholm for partying and dating. Susanne meets Christer, a young and irresponsible playboy, and starts a relationship with him. By portraying Susanne as an easy-going, somewhat vulgar and emancipated young Swedish woman, drinking alcohol, dating boys and openly talking about contraceptives, the director again simultaneously turns her both into a victim of decadent Western culture and into a perpetrator who defiles the Korean nation in her blatant and shocking violation of proper Korean womanliness, and consequently her reproductive capacity has to be controlled to safeguard the genetic pool of the Korean nation.

On examination day, the two orphans congratulate each other on the fact that none of their relatives have showed up, and their unsettled lives as adults begin. Susanne moves to Stockholm and starts to work in a shop. To her surprise she soon discovers that she is pregnant. However, Christer tells her that he is too young to become a father and, besides, he does not want to have a mixed race child, and seemingly without regret he promptly deserts her. Susanne is now left alone, and in scene after scene the viewers are painfully reminded of her exposed and vulnerable existence in a foreign and hostile country: waiting at a bus station, working in the grocery store or sitting alone in her apartment staring into space. Susanne continues to work until the very day of the delivery, and she is driven to the hospital by a male taxi driver of West Asian origin who finds her lying helplessly on the street after the amniotic fluid has been released – an event that further underscores her unprotected and victimised state. At eighteen years old, Susanne ends up as a single mother with a mixed race daughter named Eleonora. As the social condemnation of interracial relationships, mixed children and single motherhood are the main causes behind international adoption itself, naturally Susanne is again outrageously shaming the Korean nation.

16 According to Expressen, July 5, 1991, director Chang and Susanne had conflicting opinions about some of the film’s intimate scenes.
Three years later in her early 20s, Susanne resumes her acquaintance with her high school friend Ulrika. Together they get to know a charming and Don Juan-like student named Willy who takes a liking to Susanne. Susanne is invited to meet Willy’s mother, but feels ashamed of her state as a single mother. However, Willy’s mother also happens to be a single mother, and she is depicted as a typical product of the Swedish women’s rights movement and the sexual liberation of 1968. Her life as an occidentalised and emancipated Swedish woman in her mid-40s enjoying life with plenty of men around her is contrasted with Susanne’s lonely and isolated existence, while, at the same time, a special bond develops between the two women. In this way, it can be said that Sweden is equally gendered as Korea in the film, as it becomes embodied as a liberated woman. However, when Willy and Susanne are about to become a couple, her supposed girlfriend Ulrika manages to steal him away from her. Susanne asks Ulrika for an explanation, but like her Swedish father once did she, in turn, instead asks for sympathy and understanding from Susanne.

In the next scene, a completely devastated Susanne runs through crowds of Swedes on the streets of downtown Stockholm, again underlining her different appearance and her desolate situation. Now abandoned by everyone, her Korean family, her Swedish family, her daughter’s father, her boyfriend and her closest girlfriend, Susanne writes a final letter to Eleonora, telling her that “no one has ever loved me”, and that “everyone I have loved has left me”. Again, she tries to commit suicide, but survives for a second time thanks to Willy’s mother who finds her lying unconscious in her apartment. She ends up in a mental hospital, where she receives a vision from God and finds salvation. When discharged she moves to Uppsala, a town north of Stockholm where she starts to study theology at the university and continues to live alone as a single mother together with her daughter. After having gone through this purgatory-like adoption odyssey, it is now time for Korean male power to step in and enter the scene, to take back and discipline “his” woman, and, in the end, to save the honour of the Korean nation.
Korean nationalism intervenes

In the year 1989, after yet another leap forward in time, the film again returns to Susanne. Living as a student and a single mother in Uppsala and being in contact with the small immigrant Korean community of Sweden, Susanne is now 25 and her daughter Eleonora is five years old. One day, a Korean television team, led by a male journalist who is making a documentary on adopted Koreans in Europe, comes to Uppsala on the invitation of a certain reverend Chang. An ethnic Korean immigrant woman introduces the journalist to Susanne, who in the beginning is reluctant to participate for private reasons, but finally accepts as she is told that the aim of the programme is to increase the awareness of adopted Koreans in Korea. It is precisely at this very moment when the journalist enters the film narrative and Susanne’s home that Korean nationalism in the form of Korean male power at last intervenes as the nation’s saviour and liberator.

Sitting in Susanne’s small apartment, the journalist starts to ask questions about her life as an adopted Korean in Sweden. When her single parenthood is brought up, Susanne nervously begins to smoke in front of the camera. As mentioned before, for a proper Korean woman, this is an absolutely unthinkable behaviour, at least at the beginning of the 1990s, even if what is considered appropriate for a Korean woman is changing drastically at a time when appearances, features and bodies are becoming increasingly Westernised as Kim Taeyon (2003) has shown in her study of Korean womanhood. It is evident that the journalist and the television team are absolutely stunned and moved by Susanne’s unlucky fate as a single and unmarried mother in such a distant and strange country like Sweden. The journalist asks if Susanne has thought of her Korean mother, if she is disappointed at her, and what she wants to ask her if they would be able to meet again. Susanne answers that she has always longed for her Korean mother, and that if she meets her again, she wants to ask her why she sent her so far away.

Thereafter Susanne plays and sings Arirang on the piano, which she tells that reverend Chang has taught her and which she, according to herself, picked up fast and easily, almost presupposing that it is a song meant for her. Arirang, which many times functions like the unofficial national anthem of Korea and which is considered to be the most representative of
Korean folk songs, is commonly seen as expressing the spirit of the Korean nation in times of hardship and oppression (Kim Shi-op, 1988). Thus, the symbolism of an adopted Korean singing a song overloaded with nationalist ideology and which is conceived to express the unique Korean national trait of han, cannot be overestimated. With tears in her eyes and while singing Arirang, for a Korean audience Susanne fully embodies the battered and shattered Korean nation and the song’s connotation with parting and longing in an almost overly explicit way. Furthermore, if someone has accumulated too much han, the nexus of feelings, including resignation, loneliness, longing, sorrow and emptiness, it must be an adopted Korean, and if this han is going to be released (hanpuri), unpredictably it has to take place in the secure and protecting presence of Korean male power.

The film now turns to Susanne’s Korean mother sitting alone in her simple home in Seoul, watching part one of the television documentary on adopted Koreans. When the famous and terrifying January 1988 cover of The Progressive appears on the screen as an intertextual and metamedial reference, Susanne’s mother is overwhelmed with feelings of regret, despair and sorrow. After a short sequence when the Korean mother visits the market to collect the small amounts of money she lends at interest and makes her living on, she is back in her home to watch the last part of the episode. In an epilogue of the documentary, Susanne suddenly appears together with Eleonora walking around the streets of Uppsala or sitting in her apartment studying, and her adoption story is told by a voice over. When Susanne’s childhood footage is displayed on the television screen, a shocked mother immediately recognizes her daughter, and breaks down and sobs loudly.

Back in Sweden, early in the morning Susanne is woken up by a phone call from the Korean journalist who enthusiastically tells her that her Korean mother has been found thanks to the documentary and swiftly invites her to come to Korea. Once again the film moves back to Korea where Susanne’s Korean mother is dressed in hanbok, and her brother and niece eagerly wait outside the arrival exit at Kimpo Airport together with the television team. However, Susanne does not turn up at the appointed time and Susanne’s mother dejectedly assumes that she has regretted her decision to come. Nevertheless, it soon becomes apparent that the flight is delayed by six hours. Susanne’s brother wants to leave the airport and come
back again, but the mother refuses muttering: “I have waited for 22 years, so why not wait for another six hours?”

At last, Susanne and Eleonora arrive, and the reunion scene is like a reprisal of the parting scene, once again prolonged in slow motion and by the use of black-and-white flashbacks. In front of the journalist and with melodramatic film music in the background, mother and daughter embrace each other and cry together. Susanne hesitantly whispers “ ômônîm ” in broken Korean, while her mother repeatedly asks for forgiveness. Susanne’s time spent with her Korean family in Korea is depicted as an unproblematic process of re-Koreanisation and as a dreamlike experience wrapped in an ecstasy of joy. The family members eat Korean food together and compare the physical likeness of their feet, and like a child Susanne sleeps together with her Korean mother on the floor in the traditional Korean way. At the time of her departure for Sweden, it is obvious that she has been de-Westernised and re-Koreanised as she is not anymore the Swedish Susanne but once again the Korean Yu-suk. At the airport, she gives a speech directed to the Korean journalist, the spectators and, in turn, the Korean people:

I had heard that Korea nowadays is a rich country…However, I did not know that Korea today imports expensive foreign cars and goods, but still exports children to other countries. More than 110,000 children have left this very airport, but no one cares about how their lives turn out in foreign countries. Yesterday reverend Chang informed me that an adopted Korean boy in Sweden had committed suicide in the house of his adoptive parents. This must never happen again! No one should have to commit suicide out of pain and anguish.

This implicit demand that Korea must stop international adoption is followed by yet another airplane filled with adopted children lifting from Kimpo Airport towards the sky. Lastly, the airport as a transitional non-place for both de- and re-Koreanisation and an airplane in the sky as the metaphor for international adoption are used to reach a narrative equilibrium in the film, as the reunion scene is set in juxtaposition to the parting scene.

In Susanne Brink’s Arirang, the nation is heavily gendered and can also be interpreted as being infantilised as it performs and is materialised as a passive and victimised female adopted child who has to be parented and taken care of. The explicit message conveyed in this issue-oriented film is that adopted Koreans are leading miserable existences and need to be pro-
tected and rescued, and this aspect of *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* is also what reviewers and critics have focused on.¹⁷ In the film, Susanne is trapped between Western colonial racism and Korean patriarchal nationalism, as she is simultaneously portrayed as suffering from foreign oppression and putting the nation to shame. This is illustrated by her eternal suffering and humiliation at the hands of foreigners, and by her disgraceful transgressions of Korean femininity, her constant violation of prescribed modest appearance and sexual chastity, her “free” relationships with several Swedish men, and her shameless state as an unwed and single mother of a mixed race child. Furthermore, in the film Whiteness in its Swedish version is stereotyped and homogenised, and Swedes and particularly Swedish women are repeatedly occidentalised and demonised and depicted as evil with perhaps Willy’s mother as the only exception. They all treat Susanne disparagingly, torturing and harassing her, and in the end nearly killing her. In this way, both patriarchal and Korean complicity is denied, as the role of Korean patriarchy is absent and invisible in the film.

To come back to the introduction, this representation and narrativisation is well in line with several scholar’s analysis of gendered nationalism in a colonial setting and with Nira Yuval-Davis’s notions of the *Kulturnation* and the *Volksnation* with Susanne both physically embodying the Korean nation as a whole and being the biological reproducer of the same collectivity. There is not even a sharp line drawn between these two aspects of the gendered nation, given Korean nationalism’s almost complete inseparability between race, culture and language, and one could also add the *Staatsnation* concept and the question of Susanne’s belongingness and loyalty to the Korean nation state to complicate the tensions going on in the film even further. So when the Korean nation projects its fears of being dominated by a Western world, which is adopting its children, those feelings have to be compensated for by watching over and protecting particularly its female adoptees. It is only through recovering Susanne, accomplished by the resolute intervention of Korean male power that the nation can be saved. At the time when Susanne is being rescued and recovered, and de-Westernised and re-Koreanised, the hope is that Korean nationalism will be remasculinised, Korean male

agency will be regained, and the honour of the Korean nation will be re-
stored. However, as the credits roll, the film ends with anonymous child
pictures of adoptees to illustrate the mass migration of Korean children
that has been going on for such a long time and still continues. In this way
there is no real end to the film, as even if Korean nationalism has managed
to rescue and liberate Susanne, there are numerous more overseas adoptees
suffering and being oppressed by Western colonialism but also in danger
of shaming the nation, who desperately and anxiously are waiting and
hoping to be reclaimed and saved.
A recent trend in critical theory and cultural studies is to pay attention to previously uncategorisable, unrepresentable and unrecognisable

nised groups and individuals transcending dichotomous identities of white/non-white, male/female, hetero/homo and the like (Bolatagici, 2004; Brah & Coombes, 2000; Joseph & Fink, 1999; Prabhudas, 1999; Tizard & Phoenix, 1995). Cultural and social bi- and trans-misfits like bicultural and mixed race people, transracial and international adoptees, and transgenders and bisexuals all exemplify such border crossers living on the margins of and collapsing antithetical and dyadic categories. Another part of this trend is the emergence of masculinity, elite, heteronormativity and Whiteness studies focusing on the normative majorities, and there is also a crip theory critically examining who is not considered disabled even if an orphan or bastard theory as such has yet to be formulated which probably would look at what it means to have and not have a biogenetic family connection. These theoretical and methodological approaches which are often combined intersectionally, focus on how hegemonic power is formed, maintained and reproduced, but also how it can be interrupted and subverted. Another remarkably productive aspect of this research development is a growing number of comparative studies examining similarities and differences between various power matrices with regard to the performative character of identities. One such example is Vicki Bell’s (1999) comparative study between the mimic reproduction of Judaism, femininity and heterosexuality. All these aforementioned liminal existences, variously labelled as nomads, pilgrims, vagabonds, bricoleurs, Creoles, mestizas or whatever depending on scholars and theories, can be linked to the notion of hybridity.

Hybridity or hybridism is a key term in postcolonial studies, where it stands for the transcultural crossroads, and supplements and generated by the colonial encounter (Goldberg, 2000; Papastergiadis, 1997; Werbner, 1997). Robert Young (1995) traces the word hybridity and its meaning to the 19th century’s race thinking and obsession with miscegenation as well as to the emergence of pidgin languages in the American colonies, in his magisterial study of early colonial interactions and the roots of contemporary images of racial and cultural differences. According to 19th century race discourse and especially in its British Victorian version, but also in its French imperial setting where the equivalent word was métissage, a hybrid was a mixture of interbreeding between two species, whether animals or human beings, as different races often were conceptualised as different species, and the state of hybridity was strongly associated with degenera-
tion, infertility and sterility. This fear of and interest in intermixture at the time of high imperialism is for Young a reflection of an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards hybridity; on the one hand, it expresses a desire for and an attraction to the “creolised”, while, on the other hand, it articulates an aversion to and a repulsion for the “bastardised” and “mongrelised”. In one of his introductions to postcolonial theory, Young (2003: 69–79) looks at the Algerian popular music genre of *raï* as an ideal example of hybridity in practice. *Rai*, which emerged in 1970s urban and working-class Algeria, represented an amalgamation of many different cultures and traditions such as West African folk music, Arabic dance and Western rock, and can be seen as a musical crossover between binary opposites like the sacred and the secular, the classical and the popular, and the local and the global. This syncretic and hybrid character of *raï* has also made the music genre vulnerable to attacks from nationalist circles for its cultural impurity and lack of social respectability, and for destabilising Algerian society as a whole.

Other cultural theorists like Paul Gilroy (1993) and Stuart Hall (1988) link hybridity to anti-colonial movements and non-Western migrants, and to the postcolonial condition itself, where pure, authentic and original identities no longer exist neither among coloniser nor among colonised. Furthermore, for Mary Louise Pratt (1992), hybridity or transculturation is a product of what she calls the contact zone, arguing that both the coloniser and the colonised were fundamentally implicated in and mutually transformed by the colonial experience, while James Clifford (1992) compares the colonial project to a travelling culture. Finally, in their theory of the empire and the multitude, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000) write about the postcolonial body as a corporeal mutation and valorise hybridity as a liberating state of postmodernity. However, it is the leading postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha who has developed the most influential and, at the same time, controversial theory of hybridity with his concept of the third space (Bhabha, 1994; Rutherford, 1990).

For Bhabha, inspired by Lacan, Derrida and the writings of Frantz Fanon, the relationship between the colonialist Self and the colonised 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 coloniser’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 they both end up with split and incomplete identities for having contaminated each other. It is exactly in the interspace between the coloniser and the colonised that hybridity enters and is to be found in the form of the third space. The third space is an in-between and neither-nor space characterised 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, and indistinguishable and indeterminate existence refusing to accept any binary opposites and antagonisms. The hybridised is rendered different from both the coloniser and the colonised and becomes an Other between, beside and beyond both cultures and worlds through what Bhabha calls the “intervention of the third space of enunciation”:

The non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – a third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences…What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, “opening out”, remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignations of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides, in-between – find their agency in a form of the “future” where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present. (Bhabha, 1994: 218–219)

It is important to note that Bhabha’s interpretation of hybridity is highly contested as it has been criticised by socialist and feminist writers for providing a lack of attention to materialist politics and a premature celebration of liberation in their modernist defence of classical universal categories like class and gender (Araeen, 2000; Friedman, 1997; Hutnyk, 2005; Mitchell, 1997). These critics also remind readers of the problematic origin of the term itself within 19th century race biology, and warn that it is easily appropriated by a neo-liberal and social-Darwinist global capitalism as an ideology merely for the diasporised and Westernised cosmopolitan elites.

Benita Parry (1994) chooses yet another way to question Bhabha’s third space in her Marxist critique of postcolonial theory, namely how it gener-
alises the colonial encounter, and trivialises colonialism as a role-play in language philosophy. Bhabha does not differentiate between, for example, class and gender, and very few colonial subjects had in reality any direct contact with Westerners, while the notion of hybridity itself also downplays and threatens to forget the deep antagonism existing between the coloniser and the colonised. As has been suggested by R. Radhakrishnan (2000) in his attack on postmodernism, where he calls for a third space beyond metropolitan totalising universalism and indigenous reactive fundamentalism, Bhabha may even have thought about his own situation and that of other diasporic and Western-trained postcolonial intellectuals living in the West and affiliated to elite universities in his elaboration of the third space. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2001) has scrutinised this inevitable tension between hybridity, perceived as a condition only for the native comprador elite, and authenticity, which is said to be the actual condition of the subjugated masses grounded within social and material realities. Yet Nederveen Pieterse concludes that, despite the elitism embedded in the concept, hybridity is still to culture what deconstruction is to discourse, and accordingly in the end he sees the term as a sound and healthy slaughtering of fixed boundaries and as the general condition of globalisation itself.

My use of Bhabha’s third space derives its legitimation from a cautious and critical understanding of the meaning of hybridity. This is being done by not idealising the state of hybridity, the moment of transit and the act of translation, by not disregarding the brutal violence present in the colonial encounter, by not fetishising and racialising the hybridised as a bridge between cultures and as a symbol for interethnic harmony, and by a deep understanding that a border life and a borderland existence is most often not a pleasant one. Instead, I agree with Ella Shohat’s (1992) careful note that hybridity must be understood and examined in a non-universalising and differential manner, and, above all, with regards to present day’s conditions of forced migration and assimilation, and internalised racism, self-rejection, self-denigration and self-hate as colonialism is still going strong and the anti-colonial struggle is far from over yet. I am, therefore, highly sceptical about and critical of the conception of transracial and international adoptive families as examples of post-biologist, post-nationalist, post-ethnic or even non-racial kinship, which is prevalent in several recent works by adoption researchers inspired by postmodern theory.
Beyond Koreanness and Whiteness (Haslanger, 2005; Howell, 2002, 2003b; Lal, 2001; Marinara, 2003; Watkins, 2005; Yngvesson, 2002). My view is instead that transracial and international adoptees all too often internalise and develop self-loathing tendencies caused by their more or less complete white subjectivation.

In a Korean context, one encounters the concept hybridity, when bringing up those living in interracial relationships, including their children of mixed origin, and various “odd” and marginalized groups of the Korean diaspora like North Korean refugees from South Korea who have migrated to Latin America and the United States, North Korean refugees who have fled to China, and first-generation Sakhalin Koreans who have returned to South Korea. One could also mention ethnic Koreans from Latin America and Central Asia who have remigrated to the United States and whom Park Kyeyoung (1999) calls “trimigrants”, the North Korean defectors living in South Korea, whose complicated lives are examined by Yoon In-Jin (2001), the queer Korean-Americans Lee Jee Yeun (1998) writes about, the Westernised Korean-American women who, according to Elaine Kim (2002), are trapped between Korean state nationalism and American racialisation, and ethnic third or even fourth generation Koreans in Japan, whose wrecked and fractured identities and feelings of homelessness and uprootedness Sonia Ryang (1997, 2001) has written so eloquently about. My use of hybridity is here limited to those people who are otherised by and live outside both the majority society and the minority community. Adopted Koreans as a case study of a third space existence is, therefore, the starting point, when reading Kim Ki-duk’s Wild Animals (1997) and Moon Hee Jun’s Alone (2001).

The miserable life of an adoptee

I have lost everything, regardless of my will – In my vicinity, everyone has different eyes – I would rather have preferred not to have been born – Oh – you cannot understand – As I grew up, why was everything faded with pain – I do not want to think of what I want – I want to have back everything I have been robbed of – I just walk the path that I now cannot return from – Even with irresponsible pain, with meaningless motion – I am gradually pulled by – Inevitably, not until now – Even if I now regret, it is useless – It is okay, do not worry – Do not make it more difficult for me – I lost everything, regardless of my will – In my vicinity, everyone has
different eyes – I would rather have preferred not to have been born – Oh – you cannot understand – Whether you did not want me from the beginning or you regretted my existence – I will pretend not to know anything – I do not want to listen to why you had to do that and whatever the reason was – Now what is the use of it, and why are you doing this only to me – I do not know how it was about – Everything is like this to me – Why did you have to abandon me – I lost everything, regardless of my will – In my vicinity, everyone has different eyes – I would rather have preferred not to have been born – Oh – you cannot understand – Yes, even in the moment that cannot be forever – Only if I can meet you, please – Even if I go back to the past, everything would have changed – But I do not care – If you maintain your love for me, I will understand everything

(Moon Hee Jun, 2001)

In October 2001, Moon Hee Jun released his solo debut album Alone, which just in a few days sold more than 400,000 copies and reached the number one in the Korean album charts. Moon Hee Jun comes from a family of artists and actors, and is a well educated and highly talented singer, dancer, song writer, composer and musician, and one of the most extraordinary and outstanding personalities of K-pop, the world of Korean popular music. He is a former member and leader of the extremely popular male dance group H.O.T. (High Five of Teenagers) which dominated Korean pop music and released five strong albums between 1996–2001 before they split up, and whose former members Kang Ta, Tony Ahn, Woo Hyuk and Jae Won all nowadays have their own solo projects just like Moon Hee Jun. H.O.T. brought up controversial issues like abortion in their songs, and an adoption-related song was actually included on their fifth and last album They are Nothing Different with Us (2000), Abandoned Children (Pôryôjin aidûl). The song addresses the problem of dysfunctional families with drinking and abusing parents and children who end up as orphans. After Alone, Moon Hee Jun has released two other albums characterised by his own odd fusion style of hip hop and rhythm-'n'-blues, techno and rap, and trash metal and hardcore rock. Unfortunately, his solo career has been tainted by ugly smear campaigns caused by his own controversial statements, including his self-proclamation of being Korea’s biggest rock musician, a situation, which caused him to announce his not too far off retirement from the Korean pop scene in 2004.

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The melodious title song *Alone* with its sudden changes in rhythm, beat and tempo, scratching noises, guitar effects and violin arrangements, depicts an adopted Korean in a Western country feeling alone and helpless and longing for the Korean mother.⁴ Moon Hee Jun openly stated in an interview that *Alone* is a song focusing on an overseas adoptee’s “sorrow and misfortune”.⁵ The singer continued by saying that “overseas adoptees live miserable lives”, that he wanted to express the growing wish to search for roots among adoptees, and that he received inspiration to write the lyrics while studying the contents of adopted Korean homepages on the Internet. *Alone* describes the inner feelings of meaninglessness, agony and pain for having been abandoned and for living involuntarily in a foreign country, and physical difference is again made into a central part of the state of being an adopted Korean. According to the lyrics, to have been abandoned and adopted to the West is to have lost everything, and there is a strong undertone of suicidal thoughts running throughout the song. The life of an adopted Korean is simply a rootless one filled with eternal misery. During the course of the song, the adoptee is gradually and inevitably but also unwillingly drawn to his or her Korean mother as the language of blood is claiming and calling for him or her to return. However in this dark and depressing song, not even the promise of being reunited with the Korean mother and visiting Korea guarantees a better life in the future, and it becomes clear that the adoptee struggles with ambivalent feelings of wanting to understand and to accuse the Korean mother for her decision to abandon him or her.

The album cover of *Alone* shows a photo taken by Cho Sê-hyôn of Moon Hee Jun hugging a strikingly blond-haired and blue-eyed white boy, who is asleep in his arms, and the inner convolute of the record consists of three other pictures of the singer holding and embracing the same child.⁶ Both wearing the same weird black attire, and with heavy make-up, long blue-coloured hair and an androgynous, extraterrestrial and queerish look, this photo series is a terrifying and provocative statement

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⁶ This image could well be compared to the 1989 Benetton ad showing a black woman nursing a white infant, which caused such great controversy in the USA and South Africa, where it was immediately associated with a history of slavery and “black mammy nursing”.

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on the adoption issue as Moon Hee Jun has switched the actual power structure between the West and the non-West and plays and acts as a Korean single adoptive father of a Western overseas adopted child. The image of a yellow child adopted by a white couple has together with the image of a yellow woman married to a white man developed into such a naturalised daily practice and experience in Western culture, to the extent that the very thought of the opposite scenario of a Western child being adopted by East Asians or a Western woman living with an East Asian man have become almost unthinkable and unimaginable in the popular imagery. This phenomenon of a prescribed but nonetheless completely asymmetric multiculturalism increasingly concerns an East Asian child with East Asian parents and an East Asian couple as well whose appearances have become rapidly obsolete, considering the extreme rate of out-marriage with white men among yellow women and the corresponding extreme rate of non-marriage with white women among yellow men as evidenced by reports on East Asian minorities in most of today’s Western societies.7

Moon Hee Jun’s album cover can also be interpreted as an example of Bhabha’s (1994) concept of mimicry. Inspired by Derrida’s notion of iterability or repetition as the very condition for any signifying practice to take place and exist, which also constitutes its fragility, as failure is inherent in communication and there is always a moment of change when acts

7 According to US census statistics, the still relatively small Asian American minority, comprising 12 million or 4 percent of the American population, accounts for the largest majority of out-marriages in the country. This out-marriage rate is extremely unevenly distributed between the sexes. Depending on which country of origin, between one third to over half of Asian American women are married outside their community and most often to a white man, while the equivalent rate for Asian American men is much less pronounced (Fong & Yung, 1995; Kibria, 1997). The demographic unbalance, resulting in numerous interracial relationships and mixed race children for every generation of Asian American women and numerous bachelors for every generation of Asian American men of whom some chose to marry a woman from their country of origin or an Asian American woman from another country of origin, has lead to deep internal and almost irreconcilable divisions and conflicts within the Asian American community, and can well be compared to the situation of the African American community, whose out-marriage pattern is reversed as many African American men marry white women and many African American women end up as singles. Swedish adoption studies have also shown that even among East Asian adoptees, the same tendency prevails with most females being married to white Swedish men, while males are much more often living alone (Lindblad, Hjern & Vinnerljung, 2003; Rooth, 2001).
Beyond Koreanness and Whiteness

and words are repeated and contexts alter, mimicry or mimesis is when the colonised mimics the Master as a result of forced domestication, civilisation and assimilation or because of an internalised desire for Whiteness. What appears to be the most blatant complicity with the coloniser and a deferent obedience to colonial power is instead for Bhabha many times also a subversive act and can be used as a kind of camouflage for anti-colonial resistance, even if the copy always risks ending up as the original as Daniel Boyarin (2000) warns of in his theorisation of Zionism as a form of colonial mimicry. This performative aspect of Whiteness, which makes it possible for the colonised to copy and imitate the Master more or less to perfection, results in an uncanny feeling for the coloniser of immediate resemblance and menace, and of having been doubled, satirised and plagiarised, and parodied and mocked. Mimicry violently disturbs and disrupts the boundary between the Western Self and the colonised Other and reveals the impossibilities of and cracks within the colonial project itself in, on the one hand, wanting to uplift, enlighten and Westernise its colonial subjects and, on the other hand, to uphold, maintain and preserve their alterity, authenticity and inferiority. Bhabha (1994: 86) calls this contradiction a “desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite”.

In this way, by replicating a Western transracial adoptive family, one could say that Moon Hee Jun merely reifies the existence of the global phenomenon of international adoption, namely that it nowadays is possible to adopt children across nations, ethnicities and cultures. On the other hand, in light of the practical non-existence of East Asians adopting Western children, by recasting and reversing the roles of who is the adoptive parent and who is the adopted child, he can be said to have consciously misread, misinterpreted and misrepresented the dominant understanding of what international adoption means, something, which serves to visualise and highlight its giveness and taken-for-grantedness as a white Western privilege and monopoly in a most subversive and undermining way. Moreover, Moon Hee Jun does not appear to be the normative adoptive parent, but rather a deviant one belonging to some kind of a non-heterosexual minority, a suspicion that may result in a reluctant feeling of wanting to rescue and defend the child from the singer. Moon Hee Jun’s completely inappropriate act of forgery by pretending to be an adoptive parent can, in other words, function as a powerful critique of the hegemonic
narrative of international adoption. However, it is important to remember that this does not alter the actual power asymmetry between the West and the non-West in any way, so Moon Hee Jun’s album cover remains a phantasmatic promise and vision of another world and, in the worst case, it may even idealise, celebrate and romanticise a false and colour-blind Western multiculturalism.

The perilous act of passing

Kim Ki-duk, Korean cinema’s enfant terrible, is notorious for his uncomfortable and brutal depictions of the repressed and dark flipside of modern Korean society with controversial but nonetheless internationally acclaimed titles like The Isle (Sôm) (1999), Address Unknown (Such’wiin pulmyông) (2001), Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter…and Spring (Pom, yôrûm, kaül kûrigo pom) (2003), and Samaritan Girl (Samaria) (2004). Director Kim has a bad reputation for a violent and many times cruel use of women not to mention of animals in his works and Wild Animals with its strong misogynist undertone is no exception, even if it may be possible to interpret Kim’s grotesque female portraits as a subtle criticism of the ugly treatment of women as second-class citizens in contemporary Korea (Kim Kyung Hyun, 2004: 8–10; Totaro, 2004). Former factory worker and marine soldier Kim Ki-duk comes from a poor family background and lacks a formal education unlike many of his film directing colleagues, and this social positioning has enabled him to tell the stories of the most marginalized people of the Korean success story. Debuting in 1996 at the age of 36, self-trained as a film director, and firmly distancing himself from what he calls the mainstream intellectual and aesthetic trend of Korean cinema, he is renowned for his low-budget films, produced with an incredible speed and sometimes even without any celebrity actors or actresses at all in the roles. This fact has resulted in comparisons with fellow Korean director Kim Ki-young, another legendary autodidact and outsider in the history of Korean film.

Kim has taken on forbidden and forgotten social problems such as teenage and military prostitution, incest, and mixed race children and orphans, and it is no surprise that his second feature film Wild Animals from
1997 dealt with the adoption issue.\(^8\) Besides, after having received an award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2004, Kim announced that he has plans for a new film about the life of a female adopted Korean in Europe.\(^9\) Kim Ki-duk has never been a commercial success in his own country even if he has acquired a certain cult status, while, on the other hand, he has been well received by Western film critics and won several prestigious prizes at international film festivals like those held in Venice, Toronto, Rotterdam and San Francisco. Not surprisingly the drama thriller *Wild Animals*, which also screened at the Vancouver International Film Festival, did not even reach the 1997 top ten list of the most seen domestic films at the Korean box office.\(^10\)

Based on his own experiences in Paris between 1990–92 as a wandering street performer selling his paintings, *Wild Animals*, like all of his cinematic productions, depicts the cruel nature of life seen through the lives of young and alienated people who live under utmost degradation and despair. The feature film can be seen as a parable of the divided Korean nation as a tragic triangle drama unfolds between three ethnic Koreans whose lives happen to become intertwined in a colourful and thoroughly romanticised French capital; South Korean Ch’ông-hae (literally Blue ocean), played by Cho Chae-hyŏn, a star who also figures in other works by Kim Ki-duk, North Korean Hong–san (Red mountain) who is played by Chang Tong-jik, and adopted Korean Laura, performed by previously unknown actress Chang Ryun. The quite well-known French actors Richard Bohringer and Denis Lavant play leading roles as a mafia boss and Laura’s boyfriend Emil respectively, and the rest of the cast is also filled with French actors like Sasha Lukavina who is Ch’ông-hae’s Hungarian girlfriend Corinne in the film.

Fundamentally, *Wild Animals* deals with the relationship between Koreanness and Whiteness told through the perspectives of North Korean Hong-san and South Korean Ch’ông-hae. The film concentrates upon their respective relations to Laura and Corinne, and the development of their fraternal friendship and how they are able to acknowledge

each other's versions of North and South Korean masculinities in a dangerous and hostile Western setting. The hybridised adopted Korean woman Laura is, however, unable to take part in Hong-san's and Ch'ŏng-hae's pan-Korean alliance and homoerotic gaiety, and in the final spectacular scene, she destroys their on-going reunification dream by killing her South and North Korean compatriots. *Wild Animals* is a film replete and overloaded with vain dreams of a better life, misdirected desires to fit in, and fatal misunderstandings played out on the very level of the body, and leading up to the tragic but inevitable denouement.

The plot of *Wild Animals* unfolds on a Budapest-Paris train where deserter and defector Hong-san, a former soldier and martial arts expert in the North Korean army who can only speak Korean, sits alone in a compartment. As the representative of North Koreanness in the film, Hong-san is a tough and silent but gullible young man who dresses in combat-style paramilitary clothes, and harbours a boyish dream of going to Paris and signing up as a soldier of fortune in the French Foreign Legion. Laura, an adopted Korean girl in her late teens with coloured hair, heavy make-up, and a provocative and defiant body language, boards the train and takes a seat in the same compartment. The naïve and kind-hearted Laura, who represents yet another type of Koreanness in the film, has been persuaded by her boyfriend Emil to resume her peepshow at his club in the red light district of Pigalle in Paris. Laura's dream is to quit her dubious profession, and live a normal family life together with Emil. Laura's arrival in the compartment is a moment deeply fraught with ambiguity: she could be anything from a French woman of Asian origin of some sorts to a second generation Asian immigrant, or a visiting Asian or Korean student or tourist. As a North Korean with an assumed lack of knowledge about the existence of adopted Koreans in Western countries, Hong-san first, therefore, mistakes her for a (North) Korean woman, but soon realises his error, when he sees her behaving in ways that are characteristically associated with the French.

Laura, in turn, does not seem to respond to his (North) Koreanness at all, and she acts as mannish and bold as any other young French woman of her age. She coughs when he starts to smoke, which makes him stop, and he helps her to open a bottle of soft drink, which she empties in one gulp. Hong-san is utterly puzzled and fascinated by her un-Korean style, and he falls helplessly in love with her. When two French gendarmes enter
the compartment to check their passports, Laura is immediately addressed as a French woman, gives them her name card and jokes with the policemen in her fluent and native French, saying that they must come and see her show. At the same time, she saves the non-Francophone Hong-san from uncomfortable questions by pretending to be his companion, something which the gendarmes easily accept as the two travellers are both ethnic Koreans. However, when the train arrives at the terminus in Paris and Hong-san sees her being met by Emil at the platform, he is utterly disappointed.

The audience is also introduced to Ch’ông-hae, the third Korean character, who represents South Koreanness in the film. Ch’ông-hae is a rude and mischievous small-time crook, petty criminal, hoodlum and rascal, who dreams of becoming a painter and part of mainstream French society. He hangs around a studio for Korean artists in Paris, where he harasses his countrymen, steals their paintings and sells them on the street. At the same street corner, where Ch’ông-hae sells his stolen goods, Corinne, an illegal immigrant of Hungarian origin who earns money by performing as one of August Rodin’s marble busts of Camille Claudel, stands still, nude and totally covered in white paint. Ch’ông-hae takes a liking to Corinne, and when two men throw water on her to destroy her body painting, Ch’ông-hae resolutely chases them away. Together they visit the Jardins du Luxembourg, and Corinne shows Ch’ông-hae the marble statue of Rodin, which she is obsessed with and wants to own. Ch’ông-hae tries to steal the bust for her, and after being hunted by the French police, they end up in bed in Corinne’s apartment. Laura and Emil have, at the same time, arrived at his apartment, where they too end up in bed. Laura tells Emil that she loves him, and begs him to agree that she would never have to perform at his club again. The self-centred Emil exploits Laura’s feelings for him, openly treats her like a child and an exotic toy, and makes use of her naïve personality and vulnerability as an abused adoptee in order to extract money, and he answers by just laughing.

Ch’ông-hae is discovered by the Korean artists to be the person stealing their paintings, and gets physically thrown out of the Korean artisan community in Paris. Instead he finds a new way of making a living: pretending to be a kind stranger who shows newcomers how the lockers at the railway station work, and then steals their luggage. Korean tourists are not exempt from Ch’ông-hae’s scam; director Kim quickly dispels any rosy
notions of solidarity and loyalty between Ch’ông-hae and fellow Koreans, which the viewers may have. Not surprisingly, when Hong-san turns up at the lockers, Ch’ông-hae immediately mistakes Hong-san for a fellow national and addresses him as a South Korean. The travel weary Hong-san is happy to have received help from two ethnic Koreans on the same day, and he accepts Ch’ông-hae’s assistance and walks away to do some brief sightseeing. By chance and unknowingly, he happens to pass by the sex club where Laura works and, upon returning, finds the locker empty and realises that he has been deceived. Two Frenchmen who have also been duped by Ch’ông-hae suddenly turn up, and together, they chase after him. The Frenchmen take the lead, manage to capture Ch’ông-hae, and start to punch him. When Hong-san catches up, he unexpectedly changes sides, driven by some kind of ethnic solidarity, and helps Ch’ông-hae out of the precarious situation by chasing away the Frenchmen. Ch’ông-hae thanks Hong-san by pretending to provoke Hong-san into attacking him, thus making the police detain him before he helps him out, a scene, which again is inserted to underscore his unreliable style and disloyal mentality.

The audience has by now been introduced to Wild Animals’ three principal characters, and it is obvious that director Kim juxtaposes and looks upon their fates equally. They all have in common that they are displaced and misplaced Koreans who have ended up in Paris, but the reasons behind their outcast experiences must be said to differ widely. While Hong-san surely has voluntarily deserted from the Korean People’s Army, and Ch’ông-hae, at least, must be credited for his own excommunication from the South Korean community of Paris, Laura’s life as an adopted Korean completely cut off from both Koreas as well as from other diasporised Koreans is in no way neither self-chosen nor self-inflicted. It is also a fact that the male characters, Hong-san and Ch’ông-hae, actively desire and seek out Laura and Corinne, while Laura, in particular, is portrayed as passive, victimised and subordinated. Hong-san is attracted by Laura’s queer state as a translated Frenchwoman, and Ch’ông-hae is fascinated by the literal physical Whiteness of the Hungarian refugee Corinne. The two women can be seen as signifiers and bearers of Whiteness, even if they are not French in a classical meaning and evidently inhabit the margins of French society. As both Hong-san and Ch’ông-hae dream so passionately of entering French society, they misdirect and project their desperate desire for Whiteness on a hybridised Korean and a whitened Hungarian.
This reading is inspired by Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks (2000) who goes against the idea that Whiteness is primarily a bodily and material property, something, which is still the general assumption despite the fact that most people today would agree that race is a social, cultural and historical construct. In her study of Whiteness, Seshadri-Crooks reviews the works of leading scholars in race studies like David Goldberg and Étienne Balibar, and argues that they presuppose race in the same way as sex, namely as a biological certainty of human embodiment. Inspired by a Lacanian understanding of the production of sexual difference, Seshadri-Crooks instead deciphers Whiteness as the unconscious master signifier that makes race thinking possible in the first place, ordering and organising the structure of racial difference not just between whites and non-whites but also between all kinds of people of colour, and which always attempts to disavow its own historicity and cultural grounding in order to be able to transmute race into biological necessity. Racial difference is sustained through a regime of visibility, bodies are raced and ethnified just like bodies are sexed, gendered and materialised by compulsory heterosexuality and the heterosexual matrix, according to Seshadri-Crooks:

Race is a regime of visibility that secures our investment in racial identity. We make such an investment because the unconscious signifier Whiteness, which founds the logic of racial difference, promises wholeness. (This is what it means to desire Whiteness: not a desire to become Caucasian [!] but, to put it redundantly, it is an “insatiable desire” on the part of all raced subjects to overcome difference.). Whiteness attempts to signify being, or that aspect of the subject which escapes language. Obviously, such a project is impossible because Whiteness is a historical and cultural invention. However, what guarantees Whiteness its place as a master signifier is visual difference. The phenotype secures our belief in racial difference, thereby perpetuating our desire for Whiteness. (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000: 21)

This also makes it possible for Seshadri-Crooks to call for a politics of discoloration instead of an identity politics that only reinforces the privileged and hegemonic place of Whiteness. By creating disarray and discontinuity in the system, Whiteness can be dismantled. Richard Dyer (1997: 19) points out in his study of the unmarkedness and neutrality of Whiteness in Western visual culture that Eastern Europeans and Ugrians like Finns and Hungarians are not considered as fully white as Germanic Northwestern Europeans and Scandinavians. Thus, by painting herself white, the Hungarian woman Corinne both expresses her own desire for Whiteness and subverts the logic of racial difference by making Ch’ông-
hae desire her. The same transcending of a visible phenotype is even more evident for Laura who acts like a white French woman and makes Hong-san desire her.

However, there are even other important bodily misunderstandings taking place in the film. While Laura and Corinne are also able to pass as French women, Laura, Hong-san and Ch’ông-hae are able to pass as different kinds of Koreans. Confused by each other’s different Koreanness, and disoriented in a Western surrounding, first Hong-san misreads Laura for a North Korean woman, and Ch’ông-hae initially misreads Hong-san for a South Korean man. Yet another misrecognition takes place when Ch’ông-hae wants to exact revenge on the Korean artists, and dupes Hong-san into believing that they are going to beat up a gang of Japanese. Hong-san agrees, but during the brawl, to his dismay, he hears one of the victims speaking Korean. As Hong-san and Ch’ông-hae soon learn about each other’s backgrounds, the one who transgresses most boundaries is again Laura, who passes as a French woman and a Korean woman, as well as is treated like a living oriental fantasy. 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, who is suffering from a compulsory psychic crisis, and who constantly fears being revealed and exposed as not being completely white. To a lesser extent, the same is true also for Asian American literature with its tragic Amerasian and Eurasian or Blasian (Black Asian) syndrome, often a product of trafficking, rape or military prostitution (Dariotis, 2005). However, as Giulia Fabi (2001) argues in relation to the Harlem renaissance of the first half of the 20th century, the tragic mulatto motif was also used in a subversive way and turned into a powerful critique of the myth of the American colour line.

Probably the most heavily critiqued and commented literary text from the period of the Harlem renaissance dealing with the issue of passing is the novel *Passing* from 1929, written by Nella Larsen who herself was of mixed origin as her father was Caribbean and her mother Danish (Ahmed, 1999; Blackmer, 1998; Butler, 1993: 167–185; Rottenberg, 2003). In *Passing*, a mixed race woman named Clare passes as white and lives together with Bellew, a white man who detests black people. At the same time she is desired by Irene, another mixed race woman who generally does not pass and tries to conceal her homo- or bisexual 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, and through her death Bellew secures his Whiteness and Irene regains her heterosexuality.

Another work of the Harlem renaissance analysed by Cynthia Callahan (2002) is Charles Chesnutt’s novel *The Quarry*, which was submitted to but rejected by the publishing house in 1928 and instead published posthumously in 1999, and which deals explicitly with the relationship between passing and transracial adoption. In *The Quarry* a boy named Donald is a domestic adoptee of a white couple known as the Seatons. However, when Donald grows up rumours start to spread in the neighbourhood that he has a mixed race background, and the Seatons visit the adoption agency and discover that this is correct; Donald’s birth 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 successively rejects them all. Years later, the Seatons are notified by the agency that they had mixed up the records, and that Donald is not mixed but of full Anglo-American descent. The Seatons offer Donald the opportunity to come back to them, telling him that they will give him all the opportunities a white middle-class man can have, but Donald refuses, preferring to remain with his adopted community. Finally, the subject of passing has also appeared in a Korean-American context, where it is linked to the practice of eating with chopsticks, of having a full-Korean name, and of speaking English with an accent as evidenced by papers on passing as and being a second generation Korean-American, which has parallels to the conditions of adopted Koreans (Chang, 1994; Lee Wendy Ann, 2002; Park Shinhee Susan, 2000; Yang, 1998).

So in *Wild Animals*, Laura’s ability to pass is once again not a voluntary one. Instead, it has been enforced on her as she was born in Korea, adopted to France, and acculturated and socialised as French. Laura is not even always conscious of the fact that she is able to pass, even if she uses this ability in the train compartment, where she, on the one hand, communicates like a French woman with the French gendarmes, and, on the other hand, makes them believe that she is the girlfriend of Hong-san. Laura’s self-image is clearly that of a white French woman, and her identification
is certainly with Whiteness, but she is also aware that she can be identified with East Asia and Korea in certain situations. However, as the queer theorist Judith Butler always reminds in her poststructuralist theory of performativity, the borders between different categories and subjectivities 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 marginalisation or even death, as in the case of Clare. It may be that Laura is an uncontrollable and disembedded free floating signifier who disturbs and disquiets the boundaries of race, culture and nationality, but just like Clare in *Passing*, she will also end up being severely punished for her transgression. Moreover, like Donald in *The Quarry*, she will also choose to stay with the community that fostered her, even if she is abused in it.

Ch’ông-hae is impressed by Hong-san’s fierce fighting spirit and excellent knowledge of martial arts, and he hatches a new way to make money by arranging a spectacular martial arts and knife-throwing show on the street. Ch’ông-hae also teaches Hong-san how to eat with a knife and fork, and how to drink wine and behave like a Frenchman, as they both have been excluded from their respective communities, and he desperately wants to enter French society and is prepared to make use of Hong-san’s skills to reach his goal. As a result of the success and popularity of their street performances, they are recruited by and taken under the wing of Richard Bohringer’s French mafia leader, an intelligent and philosophically minded boss, who is in need of fresh henchmen. Ch’ông-hae, who persuades Hong-san that this is a good job and that they now have the chance to fulfil their dreams, somewhat pathetically believes that he has now succeeded in reaching his goal of entering French society, while, in reality, they have ended up on the fringes, living on a worn-out boat on the Seine.

Together the South and North Korean now become embroiled in the criminal underworld of Paris, and develop a deep brotherly friendship, which is easily read as an allegory for a separated and divided Korea that is about to become reunified. While Hong-san, of course, is the more physically able of the two and has to save his buddy from time to time, Ch’ông-hae is obviously the cleverer one, and it is he who comes up with their intriguing schemes. Their relationship is clearly based on sympathy for each other’s outcast experiences, and their macho-style male bonding is
filled with violent beatings and hugs of reconciliation. As part of Ch’ông-hae’s and Hong-san’s intimate and homoerotic brotherhood, unsurprisingly they also visit prostitutes together. In line with the dominant discourse of Korean reunification, which states that there is no real discernable difference between North and South Koreans in spite of half a century of separation, their respective Southern and Northern backgrounds are never really made into an issue, and they, therefore, manage to create a new kind of pan-Koreanness to unite the pair. This pan-Koreanness is in *Wild Animals* primarily articulated and performed as a pan-Korean masculinity, which seems to be based on a childish and boyish macho attitude and fraternal mateship and “buddy style”, the presupposed norm among Korean men. However, a third party is suspiciously missing from this joyous and utopian reunification fantasy, namely the hybridised, but nevertheless ethnic Korean woman Laura.

A third space existence

Hong-san cannot forget Laura, and one day he visits Laura’s peepshow. The club has made a big thing of Laura’s Korean features and Asian background. She performs her routine as a vulgar Egyptian belly dancer, stripping to Arabic dance music, a practice that further takes this visual orientalist drag spectacle to the extreme. In his (North) Korean innocence and *juche* prudishness, Hong-san has most probably never in his life seen something like this before, and he marvels at and is absolutely stunned and taken by Laura’s shocking but exciting behaviour as an ethnic Korean woman. Hong-san returns time and again to the club, and tries to communicate with Laura by addressing her in Korean and showing her notes written in Korean, encouraging her to perform even more outspokenly and undress even faster. When Laura comes back to Emil’s apartment, her adoptive father suddenly knocks on the door and asks her for money. It turns out that Laura’s adoptive father has abused her and threw her out at the age of 14, and Emil screams at him, informing him that he is no longer her father, that he cannot beg her for money and that he must know what kind of job Laura has. After Laura’s adoptive father leaves, the unscrupulous Emil comforts her but asks her to perform for him at the
At this moment it becomes clear that with Laura's state as an ethnic chameleon, she is able to cross and transgress both worlds and pass as both a Korean and a French woman, but she is also subjected to a double otherisation of what can be called a self-otherisation of Us and an otherisation of Them. In her liberated Western femininity and in her embodiment of the orientalist phantasmagoria, she is otherised by the occidentalising gaze of the North Korean man and by the orientalising wishes of the French boyfriend. Occidentalist as well as orientalist racialisation and fetishisation are articulated and projected onto Laura's body, and in this way *Wild Animals* is not just a classical example of a colonial production of alterity, but it also becomes a case study of how Us are deemed as Others. This is in line with what Dafna Lemish (2000) shows in her paper on dominant media images of female immigrants from the former USSR in Israel, whose bodies, despite them being of Jewish descent, are loaded with occidentalising fantasies. Occidentalised and orientalised, Laura is entrapped in a third space in-between Koreanness and Whiteness, even if she, in the end, reverses the gaze of Hong-san by killing him.

Ch’ông-hae, in turn, cannot forget Corinne and tries to get in contact with her again, but it appears that just like Laura, she is also living with an oppressive and woman-hating Frenchman. Corinne’s boyfriend is a sexist bigot and an extremely jealous man who beats her up with a frozen mackerel every time he suspects her of cheating on him. When Corinne protests, he threatens to go to the police and hand her in as an illegal immigrant. However, Ch’ông-hae continues to meet with Corinne and eventually her French “benefactor” barges with her by offering Ch’ông-hae to buy her in exchange for a large sum of money. Hong-san continues to visit Laura at the club. He also continues to communicate with her in Korean, and once he shows her a drawing of himself made by Ch’ông-hae to identify himself. It is evident that Laura is slowly but steadily getting thrilled and fascinated by her frequent Korean customer, who gives Laura a sort of connection to Korea. Hong-san carves a small wooden doll, paints it as a Korean woman wearing a *hanbok*, and leaves it as a gift for Laura. Hong-san’s act can be interpreted simply as a token of love, but also as a way of addressing her as and racialising her into a Korean woman. To understand this, it may be productive to make use of the Marxist Louis Althusser’s

For Althusser and Lacan, the subject originates from and comes into being by entering the social order rather than a psychic interior, which instead becomes an effect of outside acculturation and socialisation. We may believe in an innate, coherent, independent and stable core identity, but, in reality, it is imposed on our bodies and incorporated within our minds, governed by cultural traditions and social conventions, and maintained and reproduced with the help of constant re-enactment, recitation and reiteration. In his famous essay “Ideology and ideological state apparatuses” from 1969–70, Althusser tried to understand why the Revolt of May 1968 had failed beyond classical Marxist materialist explanations by analysing how ideology is produced and reproduced on an individual level, similar to what Gramsci tried to do after the Biennio Rosso of 1919–20 in Italy when he wrote about and elaborated on the concept of hegemony. Althusser argues that subject formation takes place by way of a societal intervention known as interpellation. Interpellation is when power addresses the individual by naming, and the subject comes into being by recognizing its authority and answering its call. Althusser’s most cited example of interpellation is when a police officer hails and shouts to an individual, and the individual turns around and answers, making ideology and the system able to reproduce itself. To respond to an interpellation is, in other words, both to acquire subjectivity and thus be able to exist as a recognisable subject, and to subject oneself to power at the same time.

According to Lacan’s reworking of Freud’s concept of narcissism, formulated in the essay “The mirror phase as formative of the function of the I” in 1949, subject formation takes place in the mirror stage, a psychic process whereby the subject enters the social realm by a process of identification with what is known as the imago or a mirror image. Lacan’s foremost example is when the infant recognises its own reflection in the mirror or in the eyes of others, identifies with it and becomes aware of itself as separate from its mother. To identify with and reflect oneself in a mirror image is a constantly on-going and lifelong process, and is absolutely crucial for the subject to recognize itself and to be recognizable to others, and, in the end, to exist as a social being. Identity is in Lacan’s version thus from the very beginning split and illusory, driven by a desire to return to the
wholeness with the mother and depending on something or someone outside itself whom the subject takes as a model for identification. So, to employ Althusser's framework, Hong-san interpellates Laura as a Korean woman and she answers by accepting the gift, and, to use a Lacanian-inspired interpretation, Hong-san offers Laura a physical mirror image, and she answers by reflecting herself in the doll. This interpretation implies that Laura has only had experiences of having been taken for an “oriental” of some sort and has never before been interpellated by another Korean as a Korean woman, and that she has fully acquired a self-image as a white French woman and never before had a “Korean” mirror image at hand when growing up; a presupposition, which may seem plausible given the way international adoption usually works as a white elite phenomenon taking place in a monocultural milieu totally detached from any non-Western and non-white minorities. However, Hong-san’s interpellating act will not save him from being killed by Laura.

Conflicts soon start to arise within the mafia gang. Hong-san is ridiculed and laughed at by Carl, one of the members, for his lack of manners. When Ch’ông-hae rushes to his help, the two Koreans acquire a deadly enemy. Furthermore, Ch’ông-hae discovers that the boss’s girlfriend Hanie is cheating on him with Paré, one of his closest aides, who will also turn out to be a fatal enemy for the couple. Ch’ông-hae starts to steal money from the gang in order to be able to “buy” Corinne, but the gangsters soon realise that Ch’ông-hae is stealing from them, and he is beaten up and banished as a punishment. However, Ch’ông-hae manages to re-enter the gang by cutting his own hand with a knife as proof of his manliness and loyalty. Ch’ông-hae and Corinne meet up again in the Luxembourg gardens, and when she comes home, her boyfriend wants to beat her as usual. Instead, she stabs the mackerel into his stomach and kills him, and together Ch’ông-hae and Corinne throw the body into the Seine.

One day the boss wants to kill the owner of a certain sex club, and in secret Ch’ông-hae agrees to perform the contract killing to save his honour and regain the trust of the gang. It turns out that the target is no other than Laura’s boyfriend Emil. Ch’ông-hae tells Hong-san that they are going to beat him up, but after the beating, Ch’ông-hae sneaks back into Emil’s apartment, overpowers and ties Laura up, and kills Emil with a knife. Before he departs, he also steals Emil’s gold watch. In the next scene, Laura is lying on the dead body of Emil, crying through blindfolded eyes.
and with Emil’s blood pouring down on her face while Hong-san’s interpellating imago, the Korean doll, stares vacantly into space. Ch’ông-hae and Hong-san may have accidentally rescued Laura from her French exploiter, but rather than feeling liberated, she feels abandoned once more.

From now on, the events leading up to the film’s dramatic end quickly and unavoidably escalates. Ch’ông-hae gives Emil’s watch to Hong-san as a gift, a fatal act that will lead both of them directly to their deaths. When Paré returns from a failed mission Hong-san, who has become the boss’s new favourite, is ordered to carry out the punishment. The antagonism between Paré and Carl and the Koreans is now firmly established. Paré and Carl visit Ch’ông-hae and give him one million francs to kill Hong-san. At night when drinking, Ch’ông-hae overwhelms Hong-san, binds him with a chain and lowers him into the Seine, but almost immediately he regrets his treacherous act and pulls him out again. Ch’ông-hae informs the boss that Hanie is cheating on him with Paré, and he orders Hong-san to kill her for one and a half million francs. Hong-san kills Hanie, and he also manages to steal the Rodin bust for Ch’ông-hae to give to Corinne. Hong-san visits Laura for the last time, but this time she cannot perform and falls to the floor crying, devastated by and upset about the murder of Emil. Suddenly, she recognises Emil’s watch on Hong-san’s wrist, while Hong-san misunderstands her reaction and thinks that she has finally answered his advances.

Hong-san buys an apartment for him and Ch’ông-hae with the money he received for the killing of Hanie. Paré is naturally furious after the death of his loved one, and in response he kills his own boss, and with the help of Carl he kidnaps Ch’ông-hae and Hong-san, and drives them to a cliff by the sea, where he puts them in a sack and throws it into the ocean. However, the Korean men manage to crawl out of the bag and survive. In the next scene, Corinne stands at the street corner holding Rodin’s head of Claudel in her hands, crying because she believes that Ch’ông-hae has been killed, and painted all in grey as if her Whiteness has somewhat darkened or even disappeared. In the next scene, Ch’ông-hae and Hong-san walk side by side in a back-alley, cheerfully chatting about future plans and happy to have survived the murder plot. Without warning, Laura emerges out of the shadows with a pistol in her hand. Hong-san, on being recognised, first smiles at her, but she replies by promptly shooting them both, and Ch’ông-hae and Hong-san lie dying on the street. Hong-san picks out
a picture of his family in North Korea from his pocket to look at for one last time, while Ch’ông-hae dies with the key to their new apartment in his hands. Rain starts to pour down, and like blood brothers Ch’ông-hae and Hong-san die together on the street, their blood mixed together as it streams down into a well. It is thus in death that their reunification fantasy is at last turned into a physical reality.

In this way *Wild Animals* ends with Laura left alone, trapped in an inescapable limbo beyond Koreanness and Whiteness. In the film, Laura has constantly threatened Hong-san’s and Ch’ông-hae’s pan-Korean brotherhood, and when she disrupts and destroys their supposedly unified Korean Self by killing them both, one easily gets the impression that *Wild Animals* wants to say that international adoption is by all means a danger to national unity and homogeneity and must be stopped. An alternative interpretation could be that Laura’s act is an expression of the politics of discolouration and translation whereby she as a hybrid subject who has been objectified, otherised and interpellated by everyone regains her agency and puts an end to Ch’ông-hae’s and Hong-san’s essentialist project. Given director Kim’s background, this message may well have been his intention to convey, but such a subversive meaning is most probably easily ignored in a native Korean reception context imbued with nationalist rhetoric.

The introduction demonstrated that hybridity is most closely associated with the study of colonised subjects and postcolonial diasporas in Homi Bhabha’s theory of the third space. However, to my mind it is adopted Koreans who best represent a third space existence, being as they are completely severed, estranged and isolated from both the North and South Korean national communities and other diasporised Korean minorities, as well as being marginalized and otherised in their Western host countries by racism, anti-immigrantism and orientalism. *Wild Animals* also reminds its viewers that despite the general championing of the concept in post-modern theory, hybridity seldom offers any liberating potential, at least not on an individual level, and a third space existence is most often neither a self-chosen nor a pleasant state. However, there is a strong tendency in post-modern academia to theorise about and valorise hybrid existences, which are difficult, if not impossible, to categorise and define, which constantly challenge and transgress otherwise secure identities, and which are frequently conceptualised as being ideal people belonging to a utopian and post-identitarian future. Yet, at the same time, very few peo-
ple actually know what it means to be hybrid and live in the third space.

It is on this basis that Laura provides a good example of the fatal consequences such an existence can lead to. During the course of the film, we see Laura constantly mistaken and misunderstood for being something other than a French adopted Korean woman. Laura created a desire for Whiteness in the North Korean man Hong-san, who, at the same time, never ceased to interpellate her into a Korean subject position, and she was forced to act as an orientalist fantasy by her French boyfriend Emil, while passing as a French woman and as an East Asian immigrant on other occasions. It was clear that Laura had problems to control or even understand all these passing acts that were going on and which she was subjected and forced into staging and performing. Finally, Laura was also severely punished for her transgressions of the boundaries between Koreanness and Whiteness, and her refusals to respond to Hong-San’s essentialising calls. The end result was that she ended up being otherised by Koreans and Westerners alike and found herself left alone in the third space as an Other among the Others. Laura’s fate in Kim Ki-duk’s Wild Animals can, in other words, be seen as a lucid and dramatic illustration of a third space existence and, at the same time, it can offer a cautious warning to those who would romanticise hybrid existences.
The causes of international adoption from Korea can be linked to the disappearance of traditional Korean society, the mass dispersal of people of Korean descent and, above all, the break-up and separation of numerous Korean families, which started with the collapse of the Chosôn dynasty in the second half of the 19th century, escalated

during the colonial era, reached its peak with national division and civil war, and was finally accomplished with post-war migration and modernisation. All these dramatic and, in many respects, tragic events leading up to the often cited notion of ten million divided families (ilch'onman isan kajok) in Korean reunification discourse, struck with brutal and terrible force and took place within an astonishingly short period, affecting every Korean individual struggling to stay alive and causing an extreme strain upon every Korean family trying to keep together in the chaos. Even if international adoption from Korea originated as a consequence of interracial relationships at the time of the Korean War, it would most probably never have taken on such huge proportions as it did without the preceding and following internal and external mass movements and displacements of people.

Modern emigration from Korea began in earnest in the second half of the 19th century and continued up until the last years of the Chosôn dynasty. The colonial period that followed, and whose extreme migration patterns have been dealt with in detail by Kim Dae Young and John Sloboda (1981), changed Korean society once and for all as the country and its people were ruthlessly exploited by imperial Japan. Hundreds of thousands of young Korean men were mobilised for labour service (kyosei renko) in Japan, and drafted as military personnel and stationed within the vast Japanese Empire of whom a total of 70,000 died from hardships, during war operations or as innocent victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Chung, 2005; Ryang, 1998; Yoneyama, 1995). In addition, tens of thousands of young Korean girls had been forced to serve as comfort women in the Japanese army, of whom probably a minority survived and returned to Korea after the war (Kim Hyun Sook, 1997; Yoshiaki, 1995). At the time of the Japanese surrender, altogether 5 million Koreans or an astonishing 20 percent of the entire population were to be found outside the peninsula, while a total of 40 percent of the adult population had been uprooted and dislocated during the four decades of the colonial period (Chang, 2005; Eckert et al., 1990: 322).

For the Koreans, the year 1945 meant liberation from Japanese rule, occupation by American and Russian troops, the partition along the 38th parallel, the repatriation and the resettlement of countrymen from the collapsing Japanese Empire, and the beginning of massive internal migra-
tion movements. In 1948, the division was formalised by the establishment of two rival dictatorial regimes, which both systematically and ruthlessly purged its ideological opponents, causing further mass killings and floods of refugees. The following civil war, transformed into an international conflict between the super powers, resulted in something close to genocide with 3.5–4 million Korean soldiers and civilians being killed on both sides and representing between 10–15 percent of the entire ethnic Korean population at that time (Halliday & Cumings, 1988: 200–201).

The various ways of calculating the magnitude of these movements of people between 1945–53 have been examined by Shin Eui Hang (2001). Quoting Korea’s leading demographer Kwon Tai Hwan as the most reliable source, Shin assumes that as many as 2.6 million people went to South Korea during those years, eventually constituting 14 percent of the population. Of these, 1.4 million had been relocated and repatriated from every corner of the Japanese Empire, and 1.2 million were refugees coming from North Korea (wŏlnamin), while 300,000 headed in the other direction, northwards, either voluntarily as political leftist activists or involuntarily as kidnapped and abducted prisoners (wŏlbokin). Finally, during the post-war period and, above all, at the time of the authoritarian regimes between 1961–87, over a million Koreans emigrated overseas, while a new wave of massive internal migration caused by an urbanisation and industrialisation process which took barely three decades in Korea to accomplish wrecked complete havoc on what was left of pre-war Korea. Lee Hyo-Jae (1985) and Hong Sung-Won (2000) also mention other catastrophic effects of these events on the social structures of the Korean society like widespread poverty and unemployment, mass prostitution and criminality, the militarisation and corruption of state and civil society, and cultural imperialism and neo-colonialism. Finally, they both look at the war orphans and mixed race children and their ensuing adoption to Western countries, as one of the most compelling and gripping results of division and war.

The subject of the divided families is considered to be the most important and urgent human aspect of the Korean reunification issue, and is examined in detail by Kim Choong Soon (1988), James Foley (2002) and Roy Richard Grinker (1998: 99–126). In his ethnographic study of dis-

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2 For example, the slaughtering of “communists” on Cheju Island in 1948–49 resulted in 80,000 people, one third of the population, being killed or fleeing to Japan.
persed families, Kim chronicles the Korean media’s tradition of assisting in the search for separated relatives. From the 1960s onwards, Korean newspapers and broadcasting channels have conducted regular campaigns and aired several radio and television programmes with the goal of helping to reunite separated families. Between 1974–76, Hankook Ilbo carried out a campaign containing advertisements by 3,510 people searching for 8,348 lost persons of whom some turned out to have been adopted abroad, and in 1983 the national television broadcaster KBS launched a televised campaign lasting for a year where, in total, 100,952 applicants participated, resulting in as many as 10,189 reunited relatives of whom again some were international adoptees. Today, there are also several national registries and DNA databases like the one administrated by the Korea Welfare Foundation, which divides the families between those separated because of division and war, those separated because of internal social upheavals during the modernisation process, and finally those separated because of international migration and adoption. Foley writes on the nature and scale of Korea’s divided families, and points out the uniqueness of the situation as the populations of other divided countries like Germany, Ireland and China did not experience the same complete severance of ties as the Koreans are still doing, and even, to the extent, that it is virtually impossible to find out whether one’s relatives are alive at all. He scrutinises the widely accepted number of between 7.5 to 10 million separated families in Korea and the various ways of estimating the internal movements of people before and during the Korean War, and finds that it is difficult to calculate the exact amount given the sheer chaos that ruled on the Korean peninsula between 1945–53. Foley instead assesses the number of still surviving first-generation divided family members in Korea to be 750,000.

The issue of separated families was raised for the first time on an inter-Korean level during the first round of the Red Cross talks in 1971–72, but not until 1985 did the first reunion of North and South Korean relatives take place. After that, it took another 15 years until a second reunion was organised in connection with President Kim Dae Jung’s “sunshine policy” and his meeting with Kim Jong Il at the historic inter-Korean summit in Pyongyang in June 2000. Ever since then such reunions are arranged regularly. President Kim also eased the possibility for pro-North Korea Koreans living in Japan to visit relatives in the country, and he repatriated captured North Korean spies to North Korea, even if the northern neighbour
has not yet responded and repatriated an estimated number of around 1,000 South Korean POWs and abductees who are still presumed to be held within the borders of the isolated country.

Foley criticises the way in which the family reunions are conducted, namely they last only for a brief period of time and take place under heavy media attention and constant scrutiny of security personnel and state officials, and with no respect for the integrity of the persons involved. Even more, the lucky ones in South Korea are selected by a computer lottery from the 180,000 who have applied for family reunions, and, as just a couple of hundred are involved every time and the median age of the applicants must be close to 80, the pace of the reunions is clearly inadequate. Instead, Foley proposes the re-establishment of communication links between the two Koreas, the setting up of routines to trace and verify the status of lost family members and the construction of a more permanent reunion meeting place somewhere along the border. Lastly, Foley also mentions the 100,000 Koreans who emigrated from Japan to North Korea between 1959–84 as yet another group of separated families of the Korean diaspora that is seldom heard of.

In his study of the South Korean reunification discourse, Grinker looks at the cultural dimension of Korea’s divided families by highlighting the ambiguous attitude towards North Koreans in South Korea as the North Korean state is considered as fundamentally evil, while the North Korean people and citizens are considered as natural brethren. In cultural texts, schoolbooks and everyday conversation, the division is often symbolised as a dissected body, a fractured mind or a separated couple or family, and articulated through a special version of han, the han of separation (pyŏlhan). Reunification is represented as the reunion of families, but as the North Korean ideology is said to have substituted the state for the family, as has been witnessed and reported by many defectors, North Korea has become a place without families in the South Korean imagery. As a result, there is a growing fear among South Koreans that their North Korean relatives will not want to acknowledge them. For Grinker, using Freud’s notion of melancholia as a permanent and chronic grief that can-

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3 In August 2005, on National Liberation Day, a total of 226 people reunited virtually for the first time, by the way of video conferencing technique, and the reunions were simultaneously broadcasted live on television.
not be resolved, this central paradox results in an inability for the South Koreans to mourn their lost ones in the North. Grinker also looks at the younger generations of South Koreans who seem to have a much less stronger concern for their relatives across the border than the middle-aged and the elders.

The concept of all ethnic Koreans seen as one dispersed family has also become a powerful metaphor for the Korean nation itself. This view is, for example, acknowledged by the Korean Red Cross (1977) in its enquiry on the problem of separated families, which starts by accounting displacements under Japanese rule, continues with population movements before, during and after the Korean War, and ends with post-war migration and international adoption. Grinker writes:

Koreans often construe division not only as the separation of the nation but also as the separation of families, and as a result unification is construed as the reunion of separated family members. The nation is the family writ large. Thus, although Korean division is sometimes represented in terms of land, or more literally the ancestor’s land (pundandoen choguk), the more conventional and primary representation is the division of people. (Grinker, 1998: 102–103)

With these interrelated issues of national division, political reunification and family separation in mind, this reading looks at the adopted Koreans as symbols of a fractured and fragmented nation in Park Kwang-su’s Berlin Report (1991) and in Clon’s Abandoned Child (1999).

Representing family division

Who remembers me, my image forgotten – When I was abandoned on the street – Who remembers me, who grew up without even knowing my name – As I was adopted to a foreign country far from this land – I have always been crying alone – When thinking of being lonely, I have longed for my mother – I do not even know the face of my mother – As I long for and want to meet her, I have returned to this country – As a child I knew nothing – Why I was received by a family to be raised – By parents with different colours and features – Who took care of me, comforted and pampered me – As I grew up, I gradually learnt – That I was adopted from a country named Korea – From then on I started to cry alone – I think all the miseries of the world belong to me – Why was I abandoned on the street – Why have I been crying alone – Still I do not know, exhausted by longing – I only miss my mother – There is nothing more I hope for during my life – But only for once to meet my
mother – Still I am searching – I love the mother who abandoned me more than anyone else – Whatever story and circumstances – It does not matter, I just long for my mother – Compared to my pain, I know that my mother’s pain – Was much more painful than mine of the past days – Now if your situation is that you cannot stand in front of me – Please leave at least a letter to me, that is my last wish – I have lost everything – My name, my country, my language – nothing is left for me – But my heart always asks – Who are you, are you Korean? – As I want to search for my roots again – As I want to see the mother from the land where I was born – Again I went back in time – To see my mother with even one strip of hope

(Clon, 1999)

On 11 June 1999, Korea’s then leading dance pop group Clon invited all adopted Koreans who, at that time, were living in and visiting Korea to a free concert called Be Strong at Seoul Educational Culture Center. At this extraordinary event, the group performed songs from its third and newly released album Funky Together, including Abandoned Child which, according to the cover text, is explicitly dedicated to all adopted Koreans overseas. Recorded together with the female singer Kim Tae Young, the album itself produced several top hits, became a bestseller with over 800,000 sold copies, and was well received by music critics for its unique Koreanised blend of punk, funk, rap and techno. The dance duo, Clon’s two members Kang Won Rae and Ku Jun Yup, went to school together, started their careers as dancers in music videos for other groups and singers, and after winning a contest they were awarded a recording contract in 1996. Regarded as the oldies of Korean pop for already being in their late 20s when Clon was founded, Kang Won Rae and Ku Jun Yup were mainly appreciated as dancers and it is no surprise that they were elected the best male dance group in 2000. However, at the end of 2000, Kang Won Rae was severely injured in a motorcycle accident in central Seoul, resulting in the lower part of his body being paralysed, and understandably the band had to split up after a less successful fourth and last album.

According to a review in Taehan Maeil, the song Abandoned Child describes “the pain and sorrow of an adoptee”. The band members explained to the media that a concern for social issues was behind their decision to hold the concert, and the album cover tells that the inspiration to write

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4 Joongang Ilbo, June 2, 1999.
6 Taehan Maeil, May 19, 1999.
Abandoned Child came after having watched a television documentary on adopted Koreans who comes back to Korea and searches for their Korean mother: “This song’s earnest message is conveyed deeply into the heart”. The song begins with recorded sounds from an airport obviously metaphorising international adoption, and the lyrics are slowly rapped to the tones of the French pianist Richard Clayderman’s romantic piano theme *Ballade pour Adéline* creating a streak of sadness and an air of melancholy. The song portrays an adopted Korean who has been abandoned on the street and adopted to a Western country, and who, while growing up, feels different, empty and rootless, cries alone and longs for Korea as the distinction between mother and nation again becomes blurred. During the course of the song, the adoptee returns to Korea with the hope of reuniting with an unknown Korean mother, prepared for the worst kind of circumstances and wishing to receive, at least, a letter from her saying that she is alive and well. With this simple and sincere message, *Abandoned Child* is the most typical of Korean adoption songs in representing Korea’s 156,000 internationally adopted children. As one of the country’s lost “dream trees” (*kkumnamu*) as children sometimes are known as in Korea, comparable to the American Indian “lost birds” and the Australian Aboriginal “lost generations”, the adopted child in the song also comes to represent one of Korea’s numerous separated families as well as the Korean nation itself, and perhaps most of all its future and destiny.

It is important to note that just like women, children also have their special place in nationalist ideology (Castañeda, 1992; Stephens, 1997). In accordance with the reproductive associations of nationalism, in nationalist discourse children are commonly seen as the destiny of the nation. Harry Hendrick (1994) writes about Britain in the 1910s, and James Wodsworth and Tamera Marko (2001), and Alexandra Minna Stern (1999) about Brazil and Mexico one decade later, periods when modern child welfare and national education programs were established in the three countries, as their children were turned into a national issue, especially those coming from poor working-class families, and started to be depicted as vital investments and assets for the future of Britannia, *A Pátria* and *La raza cósmica* respectively, underpinned by eugenicist thinking. Veena Das (1995: 55–83) and Charli Carpenter (2000) examine two other instances of when children represent the nation, namely how children of abducted and raped women have come to symbolise national dishonour during the par-
tition of India and the Bosnian War. In the light of the strong feelings of shame invested in the Korean adoption issue, it is here worth remembering that international adoption from Korea was also initiated as a result of war, and the first children sent away were products of sexual exploitation, military prostitution and, most probably in many cases, rape.

Besides the aforementioned more obvious links to pronatalist social welfare issues, and to injustices during times of warfare, children also often come to represent the future of the nation in nation-building processes and in international relations. According to Caroline Levander’s (2004) study of the construction and building of the American nation, the image of a white Anglo-Saxon child was used to envision a racial and national identity without African-Americans in antebellum America, and Jason Hart (2002) looks at how Palestinian refugee children in Jordan play a central role in the imagining of a future for a Palestinian nation-state. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2003) shows how US-Cuban relations and nationalisms were played out in the 1999 dramatic story of the Cuban refugee child Elián González who was forcefully transported back to Cuba after a bitter battle for custody, which eventually involved the whole Cuban exile community in Florida, further underlining this connection between children and nationalism and how a child can be used to represent an ethnic collectivity and a nation state.

Returning to international adoption, Barbara Yngvesson (2003) writes about the adoption from Chile to Sweden in the 1970s and 1980s, which made it possible for the adopted children to be entered in the Chilean civil register with their Swedish surnames. This provoked strong nationalist feelings and reactions as Chilean children were turned into Swedish children even before they left their country of birth, and finally led Chile to stop adoptions to Sweden in 1991. Lastly, Karen Dubinsky (2005) argues that transracially adopted children often are used as symbolic markers of ethnic and national identity, and that social, cultural and political anxieties are projected onto and operate through the bodies of these children. Dubinsky gives several examples of how ethnic minorities and nation states apply a variety of strategies to make claims to custody over “their” children, such as in post-civil war Guatemala where strong anti-adoption sentiments have led to widespread rumours that Guatemalan children adopted abroad are exploited as sex slaves or as organ donors, and even to the lynching of Westerners suspected of child theft. In other words, inter-
nationally adopted children do not just have an exchange value for the adoption agencies or a use value for the adoptive parents, but also a symbolic value for the countries of origin.

So whether as child welfare subjects, as products of war and rape, or as symbols of nations, children are conceived as the future of the nation just like women are regarded as the origin of the nation. With this in mind, the lyrics of Abandoned Child can be seen to represent not only the fate of the adopted Koreans, but also the fate of all ethnic Koreans in North and South Korea and around the world, as the Korean nation is imagined and envisioned as, and represented by, an exiled orphan having “lost everything”, “name, country and language”, and “searching for roots” and asking “are you Korean?” Just like the adoptee in Abandoned Child, it is a fact that so many other ethnic Koreans also have experienced uprootedness and homelessness, and separation and loss, after a murderous and dizzying century of colonialism, division and war, and just like the adoptee in the song so many other ethnic Koreans also harbour a longing for a return to some kind of a lost home, a wish to reunite with lost and many times unknown family members, and a general feeling of identity confusion and wanting to be healed psychologically and spiritually. As will be shown, this projection of the life of an adopted Korean onto the fate of the Korean nation is even stronger in Berlin Report.

Korea’s abjected children

Celebrated director Park Kwang-su, born in 1955, is counted as one of the founders of the Korean independent film movement and the leading oppositional minjung director of the 1980s, with titles like Chilsu and Mansu (Ch’il-suwa Mansu) (1988) and Black Republic (Kûdûldo urich’orôm) (1990) where he portrayed the plight of the Korean working-class, frustrated and rebellious youth, and the desperate and relentless struggle for democracy (Kim Kyung Hyun, 2004). After democratisation, Park has secured his place as one of the leading directors in Korea’s politically conscious cinema by bringing up previously sensitive historical issues, such as the unhealed wounds left by the Korean War in To the Starry Island (Kû sôme kago sip’ta) (1993) and social and anti-Western unrest at the end of
the Chosôn dynasty in *Uprising (I chaesuui nan)* (1999) in his oeuvre. While studying art at Seoul National University, he started to make short-films and became involved with alternative groups like the Seoul Film Collective, which organised the Korean independent film movement by secretly circulating one another’s productions and arranging illegal screenings.

After a visit to Paris, where he attended the ESEC, École Supérieure Libre d’Études Cinématographiques, and worked as an assistant director for Yi Chang-ho, one of the few successful Korean filmmakers of the early 1980s, he came back to make *Chilsu and Mansu*, his first feature and directorial debut. The film is widely regarded as the beginning of what was then known as the “new Korean cinema”, heavily politicised and socially conscious, fiercely anti-American, and closely affiliated to the democratic struggle and the student and labour movements. From then on, Park was immediately hailed and acknowledged as the most representative of modern Korean filmmakers by the Western film world. His films started to be screened in many countries, and he was invited to numerous film festivals and awarded with prestigious prizes. This turned Park Kwang-su into one of Korea’s most internationally acclaimed directors, and his canonised works are today frequently analysed in film studies.

Kim Kyung Hyun (2002b) links and compares Park’s most famous feature film *A Single Spark (Arûmduan ch'ongnyôn Chôn T’ae-il)* (1995), depicting and honouring the life of the hero of 1970s Korean labour movement, to Chang Son-u’s *A Petal (Kkonnip)* (1996), which deals with the Kwangju uprising of 1980. Kim sees the two works as examples of the existence of a specific genre of post-traumatic historical remembrance in Korean film with the aim of reconciling with the past by narrating a tragic historical event through the lives of individuals just like the post-Nazi German, the post-Mao Chinese and the post-Franco Spanish national cinemas did. It is, therefore, not a coincidence that Park looks at the adoption issue in his third 1991 feature film *Berlin Report*, as yet another traumatic and tragic experience in modern Korean history that has to be staged and performed, and mourned, remembered and reconciled.7 By way of a psychoanalytical reading, Kim Kyung Hyun (2001) also analyses director Park’s films as a reflection of a general male crisis in Korean society caused

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by being dominated and feeling humiliated by foreign powers, and where Korea’s problematic history is told exclusively through the perspectives of male intellectual characters of leftist leanings, and *Berlin Report* falls well in keeping with this way of narrating a story.

*Berlin Report*, screened at the international film festivals in Karlovy Vary and Hong Kong, is a film set in Paris with the adoption issue as its main theme just like Kim Ki-duk’s *Wild Animals*. Compared to Chang Kil-su’s *Susanne Brink’s Arirang*, which was released the same year, this film received less attention and was a less commercial success, even if some reviewers drew parallels between the two works. *Berlin Report* is a psychological thriller with strong political undertones, making use of both the division of Korea and Germany in the plot. Director Park actually pointed out in an interview that the film might be a little bit too complicated to take in for the ordinary filmgoer because it deals with many issues at the same time, including the adoption and reunification issues, the legacy of World War II, the 1991 Gulf War and leftwing radicalism among alienated youth in Europe. Besides, in the film there are plenty of dream-like and mystical sequences and shots, different nationalities and ethnicities, Koreans and Westerners alike, come and go, the scenes alter between Paris and Berlin, and the actors switch between Korean, English, French and German. According to an interview in *Seoul Shinmun*, Park drafted the synopsis of the script already while studying in Paris in 1985:

> I will depict the Korean peninsula’s frustration, sufferings, love and what Koreans have lost... The ultimate theme is love, and this love is our emotional alternative for the unification of Korea. For unification without love signifies mutual death.

The cast and the crew of *Berlin Report* consist of some of Korean cinema’s finest and most respected actors and cinematographers. The veteran actor Ahn Sung Ki, who has participated in over 60 Korean feature films, plays the leading male character Sông-min. Kang Su-young, who has acted in more than 30 films and has received two best actress awards from major international film festivals, performs as the adopted Korean girl Marie-Hélène/Yông-hûi, and Moon Seung-keun is her biological brother Lucien/Yông-ch’ôl. Moon Seung-keun originally comes from Korea’s

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theatre world, and he is one of Park Kwang-su’s favourite actors and the one who stars as the trade union activist Chon Tae-il in *A Single Spark*. In the crew, most notable is assistant director Kim Seong-su who nowadays does his own directing with top box-office hits like *Beat* (1997) and *Musa* (2001) and who actually and interestingly enough used the adoption issue to frame his sixth production *Please Teach Me English* (*Yông’ô wanjôn chôngbok*) (2003). Finally, a couple of more or less well-known French actors are also participating in the film like Jean-Marie Fonbonne (the criminal inspector), Jacques Seiler (Marie-Hélène’s adoptive father) and Marianne Loyen (Sông-min’s girlfriend).

The film narrative of *Berlin Report* centres around Sông-min, a Korean foreign correspondent based in Paris, who covers the mysterious homicide case of a certain Monsieur Bernard, adoptive father to Marie-Hélène or Yông-hûi, a Korean girl in her early 20s. Marie-Hélène is mentally disturbed and unable to speak, but little by little the correspondent is able to unravel her background story by initiating an unusual and complicated relationship with her. Monsieur Bernard was a former Russian military intelligence officer who, during the war, had been captured and tortured by the Nazis. As a single father, he had adopted Marie-Hélène, brought her up isolated in a close and reclusive way and, damaged by his war experiences, he also sexually molested her thereby causing her mental state of aphasia. Marie-Hélène also has an older biological brother, Lucien or Yông-ch’ôl, a leftwing painter who grew up in another adoptive family in France and whom she longs for dearly. As an adult, he had tried to reconnect with Marie-Hélène several times but had been hindered by her adoptive father, and before the reunification of Germany he disappeared and defected to East Berlin. When Sông-min learns that Marie-Hélène’s greatest wish is to reunite with her lost brother, he goes to Germany to look for him. After many ups and downs, Sông-min finally manages to arrange for the two siblings to meet with each other and reunite in Berlin. In the film, Korea’s exiled and scattered children are depicted as living lonesome and dysfunctional lives, longing for human affection, and alienated from both domestic and overseas Koreans as well as from themselves, even if they undoubtedly are in desperate need of each other.

*Berlin Report* begins with authentic newsreels from the Cold War, the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the tearing down of the Berlin Wall as its *mise-en-scène* to firmly establish the political context of the film.
Sông-min is introduced as a member of the Korean expatriate community of Paris, who is having a relationship with a French woman and working from an office in his own apartment. He reads in the newspaper about the murder of Monsieur Bernard and becomes interested in the case, and after receiving permission from his boss in Korea, who well understands the spectacular and commercial potentials in the adoption issue, he starts to investigate the story. Monsieur Bernard had lived in an old manor-like house in the countryside just outside Paris, and when Sông-min visits the house for the first time a mute and hostile Marie-Hélène reluctantly opens the door. Sông-min is, from the very beginning, perplexed by her Korean appearance, tries to speak to her in Korean and reminds her that she was born in Korea. Marie-Hélène does not answer at all, and instead she resolutely chases him away by pointing a gun at him just like her asocial and unfriendly adoptive father has taught her to do. Yet, Sông-min’s visit makes Marie-Hélène remember another recent and unexpected visit by an ethnic Korean man, namely that of her biological brother Lucien, as from now on the film is interrupted with flashbacks of Marie-Hélène’s chaotic psyche and suppressed memory. It appears that Lucien had visited the house several times and tried to get in contact with her, and he had wanted to rescue her from the abusive situation but was chased away by the adoptive father’s gunshots.

Sông-min pays a visit to the criminal inspector in charge of the homicide, who gives him Marie-Hélène’s whole family story, including Monsieur Bernard’s strange background and the existence of her brother Lucien. The criminal inspector gives Sông-min access to all the information about the case, and urges him to dig deeper as he might understand what has happened better than him “because you are both Koreans”. In reality, already at this early stage the criminal inspector suspects Lucien of the murder, but he needs help to capture him so he uses and exploits Sông-min’s ethnic concern and growing affection for Marie-Hélène to make him find out where Lucien is. This French policeman will hereafter turn up over and over again in the film, secretly following and watching over Sông-min’s every action and move, almost acting as a symbol of an anti-Communist and imperialist West wanting to catch and punish North Korea (Lucien) by way of South Korea (Sông-min and/or Marie-Hélène). Encouraged by the unanticipated and enthusiastic support coming from the criminal inspector, Sông-min keeps on following Marie-Hélène at a dis-
tance and becomes increasingly fascinated by her complete silence, her sad appearance and her tragic fate as an adopted Korean, and, in the end, he is finally able to make her respond to his contact attempts. He is invited to the house, where he examines the left belongings of the adoptive father, including Japanese samurai swords, photos from the war and a Nazi German Iron Cross medal, which he takes away. Sông-min also discovers a photo of a three-year-old Yông-hûi together with her elder brother Yông-ch’ôl in Korea taken just before their adoption to France.

Marie-Hélène hangs around the leftist alternative scene of Paris and has a French boyfriend, an artist who is a former colleague and comrade of Lucien. The boyfriend treats Marie-Hélène like the child she mentally is, openly deplores the fact that Korea exports its children, says to Sông-min that “you Koreans sold Marie-Hélène”, and tells about his friend Lucien who is “neither Korean nor French”, who was never able to overcome the fact of “having a Korean body and a French mind”, and who as a result of his unsolvable identity crisis finally ended up in Communist East Germany. When he also tells Sông-min that Marie-Hélène cannot stop thinking about her brother, driven by feelings of guilt and bad consciousness for coming from a country selling and exporting its own children, Sông-min decides to go to the recently reunified Germany to find Lucien. With the help of a male Korean German-speaking colleague, Sông-min starts to search for Lucien who after the fall of Communism, lives as a leftwing political activist in the world of anti-Fascist and autonomous collectives in former East Berlin.\footnote{Actually, the Korean media has now and then reported about adopted Koreans involved in the fight against Nazis and extreme rightists. Thus, director Park may well have used an authentic person as the model for the character of Lucien. See, for example, Chosun Ilbo, November 30, 1992.}

In one of the collectives in an occupied house, Sông-min meets Lucien’s German girlfriend Nina, who is yet another adopted Korean. Just like with Marie-Hélène, Sông-min again becomes surprised by her Korean appearance and instinctively addresses her in Korean, and once again, just as with Marie-Hélène, Nina does not seem to care at all about Sông-min’s Koreanness and instead plainly tells him that yes, she is born in Korea, but she cannot speak Korean and then closes the door. This is the second time in a row that an adopted Korean refuses to answer to Sông-min’s
ethnic calls and interpellations, and by way of Marie-Hélène’s and Nina’s impolite refusals to identify themselves with Sông-min, adopted Koreans can well be likened to abjects in Julia Kristeva’s (1982) sense. In her Christian inspired and feminist theory of the maternal, where she engages with and responds to inherently patriarchal Lacanian psychoanalysis and tries to recover a lost pre-patriarchal stage, Kristeva locates the process of abjection when the child is on its way to becoming an independent Self, but still perceives its mother as being a part of oneself. This ambiguous state results in insecurity and many times also in antipathy towards the abject, the Other who or which is a part of oneself and which one wants to separate oneself from but cannot. As subject formation takes place on an everyday level and not just in infancy, abjection is for Kristeva a permanent aspect of life itself. The abject can neither fully be objectified nor incorporated, and must therefore be repressed, ignored, forgotten and over-looked to preserve the imagined wholeness of the Self, but even if it were to remain hidden and unknown outside the domain of social meaning construction and cultural signification, it still exerts its influence by continuing to disrespect boundaries and disturb systems:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior… Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge are even more so because they heighten the display of such fragility. He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you… (Kristeva, 1982: 4)

Patricia Doreen Farrar (1999, 2005) uses Kristeva’s notion of abjection in connection with adoption in a most productive way in her study of white birth mothers to domestic adopted children in pre-1968 Australia. For Farrar, abjection is the very meaning of adoption itself, and the abject are those children who were born as a result of pre- or exnuptial relations and, therefore, had to disappear and be relinquished and adopted away to preserve the society’s mores:
Kristeva describes the abject as “the jettisoned object (which) is radically excluded…(a)nd yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (Kristeva, 1982: 2). In response to this challenge, the mother has tried to preserve her inner sense of self as “mother”, while presenting a projected self an “Other” or non-mother. Abjection is the way in which a woman deals with the horror of relinquishment: by preserving her private inner self as “mother” she is able to incorporate the threat of the abject. In becoming the “other” she attempts to resist the abject’s challenge, which if she acknowledges it, may annihilate her…In this context, the adopted-away baby could be interpreted as the abject, as “something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself” (Kristeva, 1982: 4) and which is only qualified in terms of opposition to the subjective mother. (Farrar, 1999: 373–374)

As soon as Korea’s abject children, who all have been expelled and excluded, and rejected and repressed to preserve the nation’s racial purity and patriarchal culture, enter the film and become seen by Sông-min as he recognises himself in the adopted Koreans, they will always worry and question a hegemonic Koreanness where, race, language, nation and culture are more or less indivisible. Sông-min soon learns that the abject Koreans cannot simply be trusted in their disrespecting attitude towards his Koreanness, and in their state as eternal potential traitors to their nation or even possible murderers of their own kin. At the same time as abjects, they do not just pose a perpetual and everlasting threat to a supposedly homogenous Korean nation, as once they reclaim their spaces and are given meaning by being acknowledged by others, it also paves the way for new and other subjectivities and modes of being Korean. On the other hand, as soon as the abject becomes visible and intrudes upon the social and cultural order, it has to be modified and purified in some way to be endured, and Sông-min finds his solution in coping with the abject Koreans by relentlessly and desperately continuing to call upon them as Koreans with the hope that they in the end will answer to his calls and fall in line with his understanding of what it means to be Korean.

Sông-min finally finds Lucien at a pub, where he is sitting intensely discussing politics with a former East German party cadre. However, Lucien does not want to follow Sông-min back to France, and the audience is presented with a dreamlike sequence of Lucien standing in front of

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Rumours among South Korean intelligence circles of adopted Koreans having become leftwing extremists or pro-North Korean Communists are certainly expressions of this bizarre fear.
the Berlin Wall and lecturing in fluent Korean. Lucien says that the situation between Germany and Korea cannot be compared to each other, as there has been a war between North and South Korea but never between the two German states. When Sông-min returns to Paris he feels forced to tell Marie-Hélène that he did not find her brother, even if yet another dream scene is staged in his feverish mind where the two siblings and the brother’s French comrade meet together and Lucien, who apparently has learnt Korean, reaches Marie-Hélène that he is no longer Lucien, but oppa (big brother) and that she is from now on Yông-hûi, thereby Koreanising them both and making them legible and recognisable to Sông-min’s nationalistic satisfaction and pleasure. Sông-min continues to meet the disappointed Marie-Hélène, and they soon start a relationship. He also tries to comfort her when it becomes clear that she has been severely abused by her adoptive father.

Healing a fractured nation

Marie-Hélène’s flashbacks do not stop torturing her, and when she sees the German Iron Cross which Sông-min took with him from the house in his apartment, the frightening and painful memories of her being abused surface again. It appears that Monsieur Bernard had forced Marie-Hélène to perform a play overloaded with political symbolism, as she had to act as a Japanese girl dressed in kimono and wearing the Iron Cross around her neck, while he himself was dressed in a Russian officer’s uniform. After having raped her, he usually regretted what he had done by disavowing his own act and the fact that his terrible behaviour had turned her mute and made her mentally sick. As director Park is a filmmaker from the democratic movement, and the notion of the divided nation as a couple, which has been separated, was especially strong in the reunification discourse developed by the dissident and populist minjung movement, the abused Marie-Hélène can here be interpreted as representing the female half and, of course, the most victimised part of the Korean nation.

Sheila Miyoshi Jager (2003: 57–73) examines the romantic rhetoric of Korean reunification, and finds that the narrative of “the anguished, lonely
female, unduly separated from family and friends” has been a common theme in Korean literature ever since the Mongol and Japanese invasions at the time of the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties, again highlighting the intimate relationship between nationalism and sexuality, as violence against the nation often is depicted as a violation of the female body. In the 1980s’ counter-discourse of minjung, particularly the classical Korean tale of Ch’unhyang who is abused by a cruel and corrupt official but remains virtuous and loyal to her loved one, came to allegorise the female Korean devotion to family and nation, thereby linking romance to nationalism and adding a strong gender aspect to the reunification issue:

The patriotic struggle for the lost (unified) nation becomes a variation of the same romantic story of faith and loyalty in the recovery of loss. The link between conjugal romance and patriotism is thus more than a suggestive coincidence; each had a direct investment in the other. Together they mapped out the context for what constituted proper feminine behavior. The attainment of conjugal reunion, achieved by women’s “virtuous” resistance to evil governors (and foreign imperialists), thus underscores the patriotic goal, which in turn also becomes the microcosmic expression of nationhood. Thus, embedded within the narrative strategy of chuch’eron, and of dissident reunification discourse more generally, are related themes about feminine resistance and proper womanly conduct with regard to men. Conjugal reunion and, by extension, national consolidation, could be achieved only if women adhered to principles of Confucian virtue, that is, by faithfully awaiting the arrival of their (absent) husbands and resisting other (Western) men’s sexual advances…resistance to the division, and the virtuous struggle for reconciliation that it implied, took the allegorical form of resistance to the foreign male. (Jager, 2003: 67–68)

In Berlin Report, it is the adopted Korean Marie-Hélène who represents one half of the Korean nation as a violated and exiled woman who never gives up her dream of being reunited with her loved one and thereby restoring national unity, even if she probably not is going to marry her brother. If the separation of the two adopted siblings is a metonymy for the divided nation, then Marie-Hélène’s stoic longing for her brother Lucien can be interpreted as a promising possibility of and fervent wish for the reunification of the two Koreas. At the end of the film, Marie-Hélène is also rewarded for her faithfulness in believing that she will meet her brother once again.

One day, when Sông-min wakes up, Marie-Hélène has suddenly disappeared without a trace, and without leaving any message. Sông-min is absolutely devastated, and starts to drink heavily, deeply regretting that
he did not drag Lucien with him from Germany by force. He brusquely ends his relationship with his French girlfriend, ignores the calls from his boss in Korea and continues to work only sporadically by covering the Gulf War and the anti-war demonstrations in Paris. Sông-min tries to track down Marie-Hélène at the clubs in Paris’ red light districts. Disgusted by what he perceives as Western disease and decadence around him with plenty of prostitutes, drug dealers and criminal thugs, he wants to save her from this occidentalised hell and make her give up her self-destructive lifestyle. Just as the West has its stereotypes of the East, the East certainly has its myths about the West. After having thrown the Iron Cross into the Seine and almost given up all hope, Sông-min receives a phone call from a mental hospital. He visits the hospital and finds an exhausted and confused Marie-Hélène locked in a cell with oppa mysteriously scribbled on the walls in han’gûl. However, one suspects that these scribbles exist only in Sông-min’s head, as Marie-Hélène neither can speak nor write Korean, and thus rather they reflect his own relentless desire to Koreanise her.

Obsessed as he is with reuniting the two siblings at whatever cost, Sông-min immediately drives her to Berlin, and it is by now clear from Marie-Hélène’s flashbacks that it was Lucien who killed her adoptive father after having discovered that he abused her. Marie-Hélène even witnessed the murder, and before Lucien left the house he promised her that he would come back again as soon as possible. Together, Sông-min and Marie-Hélène visit Nina in an apartment filled with Lucien’s paintings of Marie-Hélène. Lucien has gone into hiding, and Nina scolds Sông-min and wants to know why the French police came to visit her last time after he had been there. She asks Sông-min aggressively in English if “people from his country” always behave like this, and then switches to mutterings in her first language German to underscore her obstinate non-Koreaness. However, when Sông-min begs her to help them locate her boyfriend Lucien not because she is a South Korean but because she is an adopted Korean just like Marie-Hélène, Nina finally agrees. In this way, Nina shows that, even if she does not want to subject and subordinate herself to Sông-min’s version of Koreaness, she is at least prepared to answer to his interpellation to identify with a somehow dormant and incipient adopted Korean community transgressing national borders as she herself has been adopted to Germany while Marie-Hélène and Lucien are adoptees from France.
Sông-min takes Marie-Hélène to a bar, and meets up with Lucien alone at an arranged place. Lucien turns up and jumps into Sông-min’s car, and they slowly drive back towards the bar talking to each other in Korean and unaware that they are tailed by the French police. Sông-min tells Lucien that he has brought Marie-Hélène to Berlin, as Lucien is her only known relative. He also confesses his love for Marie-Hélène, and asks him why he moved to East Germany in the first place and secondly why he killed her adoptive father. Lucien replies that he went to East Germany as a convinced socialist, but rather soon afterwards he realised that the country did not care about its citizens and instead became embittered and disillusioned. He is also disappointed at the reunification of Germany as the former West Germans dominate their eastern neighbours, and he has finally come to understand that all human beings are one. Lucien also admits that he killed Marie-Hélène’s adoptive father, and he legitimises his deed by declaring that Marie-Hélène is “a victim of Western imperialism”. Sông-min cannot accept the murder of any human being and wonders what the difference is between Lucien and Stalin, pointing out that because of him the helpless and vulnerable Marie-Hélène is now left alone in this world. As a man of deeds who despises men of words, Lucien splutters that Sông-min will never understand neither why he went to East Germany nor why he killed her adoptive father, adding that Marie-Hélène will get along well alone just like he himself has always done. He also says that he will at some stage return to Marie-Hélène, but not now as he has other things to do, and that Sông-min must return to Paris with her, and without him. He asks him to stop and turn the car around. However, Sông-min ignores Lucien’s protests and drives him to the bar, screaming that he cannot abandon her twice just like their parents and Korea, which abandoned them both.

Finally, at the moment when the two siblings are about to meet each other, the French criminal inspector suddenly turns up from nowhere in the company of a colleague to arrest Lucien. The policeman aims his gun at Lucien, but both Marie-Hélène and Sông-min stand in his way, and Lucien is able to run away. However, when Marie-Hélène cries “oppa”, her only real phrase in the film, Lucien chooses to return, and the two siblings are at last able to embrace each other in the presence of Sông-min and the Frenchman. The film ends with Sông-min leaving Marie-Hélène in the house where she sits watching Lucien’s paintings with a calm and serene
expression on her face. He has left a final letter to her saying that he is leaving now, but that he will return to Paris to be present at Lucien’s trial and meet the two siblings once again who both have been abandoned by Korea but who now at last have found peace together.

So from the beginning to the end of the film, Song-min’s unsuccessful and unpleasant encounters with the three adopted Koreans, desperately yearning for a recognition of his Korean Self, but never fully receiving it, are a remainder of the horrifying and frightening presence of 156,000 abject Korean bodies who constantly question and defy the dominant image of what it means to be Korean, and who for a long time were forgotten, marginalized and made invisible, but who nowadays increasingly make their existence and presence heard. In *Berlin Report*, the fractured and fragmented Korean nation, which Roy Richard Grinker and others analyse, is projected onto and represented by two separated adopted Koreans longing and searching for each other in the psyche of a South Korean leftist intellectual male, as the adoption issue is based upon and put into the reunification narrative, and their individual traumas allegorise the national trauma of all Koreans, who have been divided and dispersed. This projection is carried out by the South Korean Sông-min and often experienced in his own dreams and visions, which completely disavow the un-Koreaness of the adopted Koreans. Marie-Hélène’s and Lucien’s fates as abandoned children, orphans and biological siblings, split up by international adoption, are transformed into a romantic, melodramatic and powerful symbol of the divided Korean nation and a promise of its reunification. In the end, with some modifications, it appears that it is also feasible to heal the nation, even if the cautious message of Park Kwang-su’s film *Berlin Report* obviously is that reunification is imaginable and possible, but it is in no way an easy matter.
Envisioning a global Koreatown

For many years, it was more or less taken for granted that the absolute majority of diasporas had continued to harbour a hope of returning to the homeland in some distant future. Moreover, it was said that they had maintained their collective group identity and an isolated atti-

tude towards and, at best, a polite relationship with their host society. This old meaning of how a diaspora is defined and conceptualised was governed and influenced by the example of the most ancient and generic one and for many considered to be the ideal type of a diaspora, namely the Jewish diaspora before the foundation of the state of Israel. However, ever since the colonial world order of European empires imploded after World War II, and the refugee crisis that erupted after the end of the Cold War when globalisation became the talk of the town in Western academia, the field of diaspora studies has exploded with buzzwords like cosmopolitanism, sojourning, expatriation, networking, travelling, exile and migrancy, and it has now become commonplace to argue that diasporised groups with their hybrid conditions and multilocalational subjectivities pose a serious challenge to nationalist identities based on cultural cohesion and stability and territorial unity (Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Hall, 1990; Papastergiadis, 2000; Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 1986, 2003).

While many have focused on this inevitable tension between a homeland and its diaspora as well as the immensely complicated relationship between a diaspora and its host country, others have highlighted various diasporas lacking a clear definable homeland, including such classical groups like the Armenians and the descendants of African slaves in the Americas and Europe, but also Kurdish and Sikh refugees and ethnic Asians in the USA among whom a new specific Asian diasporic pan-ethnic consciousness and awareness are said to have emerged (Alinia, 2004; Axel, 2002; Björklund, 2001; Brubaker, 2005; Chow, 1993; Gilroy, 1993; Lowe, 1996; Tuan, 1998; Wahlbeck, 1999).

Not surprisingly, given the sheer number of diaspora studies and diaspora scholars, there are many different suggestions as to what a diaspora actually means. Despite an antagonism between old modernist and new postmodern conceptions of a diaspora and different ideas among researchers of what a diaspora consists of in the first place, beyond a “homing desire” and a collective identity, all would agree that in the age of the erosion of the nation state, the expansion of global capital, massive refugee movements, and transnational electronic mediation, diasporas do matter and play an important role in international relations. For example, they send remittances back to their families and extended kin (this phenomenon is often associated with “Third World” diasporas), invest in the economy of the country of origin (the Indian and the Chinese diasporas),
support various political struggles and agendas in the “old country” (the Irish diaspora), and create militant and revolutionary political networks among each other (the Islamist “fundamentalist” diaspora). Lastly, while many like to see a clearly discernable liberating potential in diasporas beyond homogenising nation states, others argue that the asymmetric power relations between a diaspora, a homeland and a host country are easily overlooked and ignored and that the concept diaspora itself instead functions to revitalise essentialist identities and cannot transcend entities like ethnicity, race, gender or class. In her examination of uncritical valorisations of the term diaspora, Floya Anthias (1998) concludes by warning:

“Diaspora” has turned the gaze to broader social relations that can encompass politics, economy and culture at the global, rather than national level. It pays attention to the dynamic nature of ethnic bonds, and to the possibilities of selective and contextual cultural translation and negotiation. However, the lack of attention to issues of gender, class and generation, and to other inter-group and intra-group divisions, is one important shortcoming. Secondly, a critique of ethnic bonds is absent within diaspora discourse, and there does not exist any account of the ways in which diaspora may indeed have a tendency to reinforce absolutist notions of “origin” and “true belonging”.

As will become apparent, I argue that Anthias’s cautious comment has a direct bearing on the Korean case, as overseas adoptees are automatically included within the Korean diaspora only on the basis of a genetic blood relationship. For Korea, the diaspora term has become a convenient way of reaching out to ethnic Koreans living outside the Korean peninsula to be able to include them in a renewed nation-building project taking place on a global level.

The specific view of a homeland’s conception of its diaspora will be the focus here, differing from the majority of works in diaspora studies as most usually look at the perspective of the diaspora and its relationship to the country of origin. Among case studies that have a homeland perspective and a relevance to this study, Hans-Åke Persson (2000), for instance, discusses the two classical examples of homelands having a conscious policy towards their diaspora, namely Germany and Israel. Both states apply *jus sanguinis*, the right of blood, as the way to define who is a German and who is a Jew and who can gain citizenship of the respective nation states. During the Nazi regime the mobilisation of the *Volksdeutschen*
(the ethnic Germans living outside the *Reich*) was a vital part of Hitler’s foreign policy, while immigration has been Israel’s *raison d’être* in the nation-building project of the Jewish state. This *Blut und Boden* ideology is also a strong component of Korean nationalism.

Bengt Kummel (1994) analyses how the pan-Swedish (*allsvensk*) movement 100 years ago tried to create a worldwide Swedish community based on a common race, culture, religion and language, and comprising ethnic Swedes in Sweden, Finland and Estonia, and émigrés in North America. The movement, which initially received a lot of attention and support from nationalist circles in Sweden, died out in the 1920s as a consequence of changed conditions in Finland and Estonia after the First World War and the rapid assimilation of Swedes in America. Such a vision of a worldwide pan-ethnic community is highly present in the Korean case as well.

Aihwa Ong (1999: 55–83) studies how globalisation is changing the concept of Chineseness among Chinese overseas communities in the USA and Southeast Asia. Ong examines China’s diaspora policy and the construction of a disembedded global Chinese public culture in cyberspace, which she interprets as being based on race as well as being principally driven by economic interests. The notion of Greater China (*Da Zhonghua*) as a global Chinese community that has evolved since the late 1980s has interestingly enough become the blueprint for the Korean diaspora policy as well.

One study of how Korea imagines a specific and usually marginalized section of its diaspora is Yuh Ji-Yeon’s (2002) treatise on Korean military brides in the US. Yuh looks at images of these wives of American servicemen in Korean television documentaries and newspaper articles. The women are simultaneously seen as victims of the American dream, suffering from acculturation problems and being isolated from the mainstream Korean-American community, and as too Westernised, having almost forgotten their first language and culture. Another related work is Arnold Barton’s (1994: 187–209) study of representations of Swedish-Americans in Swedish film, fiction and popular culture. Barton finds how the coun-
trymen in exile are portrayed as self-important and pompous which, according to his interpretation, is a reflection of a mixture of jealousy and contempt. Yet another study worth mentioning in this context is Zeynep Kilic Özgen’s (1997) work on representations of diasporic Turks in Europe in Turkish newspapers. Kilic Özgen observes how these images have changed over time, and how newspapers belonging to different interest groups in Turkish society represent the diaspora in different ways, while, at the same time, nationalism is ever-present regardless of political leanings.

Regarding the Korean nation and its diaspora, the modern exodus of Korean people began in the year 1860, when the Chosôn dynasty began to crumble, caused by the outbreak of famine and impoverished conditions in the northern provinces (Lee Kwang-kyu, 2000: 6–13). The first wave of emigrants found their way to the Russian Far East territory bordering present day North Korea, and from 1869 Koreans started to pour into Chinese Manchuria in great numbers. From the 1880s, Korean students started to go over to Japan, and in 1903 emigration to the United States began in the form of indentured labour. These four countries, Russia (later the Soviet Union and Central Asia), China, Japan and the USA, still remain the most important host countries, where 90 percent of the Korean diaspora is located (Lee Kwang-kyu, 1993). The emigration continued during the colonial period, and went on throughout the authoritarian regimes, creating a diaspora, which today numbers 4.5 million people located in 151 different countries: 2 million Chosônjok (Chaoxianzu) in China, 1.2 million Korean-Americans (chaemi kyop’o) in the US, 700,000 Zainichi Koreans in Japan, 500,000 Koryôsaram in Central Asia, almost 160,000 adopted Koreans and tens of thousands of others spread out in Canada, Russia, South America, West and Southeast Asia and Europe.2

2 However, Koreans had left their country in great numbers already before 1860, e.g., during the Mongol invasions of the 13th century, the Japanese invasions in the 1590s, and the Manchu invasions of the first half of the 17th century, when tens of thousands were taken away as captives, hostages or slaves. The number estimated for the Mongol invasions is 200,000 and between 50–60,000 for the Japanese invasions, of whom 3,000 or so were repatriated when diplomatic contacts were resumed.

3 The 2001 official Korean statistics of 5.65 million overseas Koreans overestimates the number of Korean-Americans by almost double the 2000 US census, which reports a little bit more than 1.2 million, including 9 percent adoptees, 13 percent married to non-Korean men and 12 percent of mixed race origin (Yu & Choe, 2003/2004).
Several of the various diasporic groups of Korean ethnicity like the thousands of Korean workers, who were conscripted to work in the mines of Sakhalin and the forcefully relocated Soviet Koreans, who ended up in Central Asia in 1937, may well fit into Robin Cohen’s (1997: 31–56) category of a victim diaspora, defined as an involuntary dispersal caused by catastrophic and traumatic events such as mass poverty, labour mobilisation, forced transportation, severe persecution and the movement of refugees. Cohen uses the Jewish, African, Armenian and Palestinian diasporas as case studies and ideal types of victim diasporas, and even if many Koreans unquestionably left their country voluntarily, as Song Changzoo reminds of (1999), if any part of the Korean diaspora immediately qualifies itself into the category, it must be the adopted Koreans. Finally, in an international perspective, the Korean diaspora can quantitatively and demographically well be compared to the classical Chinese, Indian, Jewish, Italian, Armenian or Irish diasporas as it accounts for 8 percent of the entire global Korean population, and it is also included in Penguin’s atlas of diasporas (Chaliand & Rageau, 1997).

According to Yi Hyông-kyu (1999) and Yoon In-Jin (2002), who both have studied the history of Korean diaspora policy, the issue of overseas Koreans was raised for the first time at a governmental level already in 1971. However, during the Cold War, the South Korean state was, if possible, even more caught up and encapsulated in a siege mentality than its northern neighbour, accusing emigrants of being unpatriotic and betraying the nation. Consequently, the North Korean diaspora policy and its vision of a Koryô federation, encompassing all ethnic Koreans worldwide who still officially, according to North Korean law, are eligible for citizenship, was much more pronounced in those years and particularly well received among ethnic Koreans in Japan, China and the Soviet Union and by exiled dissidents in North America and Western Europe. Nevertheless, after the end of the Cold War and from the mid-1990s, the huge and widely scattered Korean diaspora has come to play a part in South Korea’s

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4 It is, of course, difficult to categorise the growing number of tens of thousands of what are commonly known as kirôgi families as victims, meaning those voluntarily separated upper middle-class families, where the mother and the children go to a Western country for years in order to learn English and get an education considered to be better than a Korean one, and where the father stays alone in Korea to finance the family’s stay abroad.
globalisation drive. In 1995, President Kim Young Sam launched the country’s globalisation drive (*segyehwa*) and announced a blueprint for how it was to be achieved (Alford, 1999; Committee for Globalization Policy, 1998; Ha, 1999; Yi Jeong Duk, 2002):

Globalization must be underpinned by Koreanization. We cannot be global citizens without a good understanding of our own culture and tradition. Globalization in the proper sense of the word means that we should march out in the world on the strength of our unique culture and traditional values. Only when we maintain our national identity and uphold our intrinsic national spirit will we be able to successfully globalize.⁵

Gi-wook Shin (2003) calls this development “the paradox of Korean globalisation” as he tries to understand how globalisation is strengthening nationalism in the country. Others argue that this phenomenon is an international feature for postcolonial nation states, in particular, as a reactive politics of identity and a fundamentalist strategy of resistance against Westernisation (Hall, 1996b; Kang, 1999; Park Chan-Seung, 1999; Smith, 1995). One important aspect of this Korean version of globalisation, openly drawing on the Chinese, Indian, Jewish and Irish examples, is the formulation of a conscious diaspora policy towards ethnic Koreans overseas, who had for so many years been despised and discarded. In 1997, Overseas Koreans Foundation (*Chaeoe tongp’o chaedan*) was inaugurated as the government body dealing with the overseas brethren (*chaeoe tongp’o*), who are officially defined as human resources and national assets in the country’s globalisation plan (Cheong, 2003; Lee Jeanyoung, 2003). The holding of conferences and events like the World Ethnic Korean Festival (*Segye hanminjok ch’ukchôn*) (from 1989), the publishing of newsletters and magazines (*Chaeoe tongp’o Shinmun*), the organising of visiting and educational programs, the compilation of information databases and directories, the networking of businessmen and community leaders, artists, filmmakers and authors, the creation of a cyber community on the Internet (*Hanminjok Network*), including a dat-

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⁵ Quoted by Alford (1999: 153). However, at the time of writing there are signs that the current president, Roh Moo-hyun, is more interested in creating a Northeast Asian cultural and economic community than a pan-Korean one, comprising China, Japan and Korea (Chun, 2004). Thus, in reality, economic incentives are clearly much stronger than ethnic ones.
ing service, and the financing of immigrant Korean schools and associations are all ingredients in this recently initiated Korean community building and ethnic mobilization on an international level. As it is reasonable to assume that it is in the shadow of this recent diaspora policy that the adopted Koreans have appeared, the reading of Lee Jang-soo *Love* (1999) and Sky’s *Eternity* (1999) will, therefore, focus on the emergence of a global Korean community.

The Korean experience with globalisation

The happy and beautiful memories together with you – Are not only the time that has passed by chance – (break down) – The master of my empty place which already has widened – Was you who is the only one existing in the world – (it is you) – It was always as it has been – Just because I waited for you to approach me – In a world without you – To wake up in the morning alone is too glaring – Until now there is only one reason for me to breath – As the path that I have been walking was not easy – As my love that always has been – Only tears are left – It seems that it can only be achieved if I owe much – Now I know the way of living, what the world hopes – For me to change my life again to be able to meet you – I will not forget – I will always wait – When the sky is calling – I will take with me the memory of our eternal love – If we meet again in this world where only seduction exists – I will say that I did not know because I was born the first time – I promise

*(Sky, 1999)*

The most famous adoption song performed by a Korean music group up to date is without doubt Sky’s *Eternity* from the group’s 1999 debut album. The extremely costly film version of the song was voted Korea’s best music video of the year, and has some of Korean cinema’s most popular and talented representatives in its cast. Produced by film director Cho Seung Woo, the music video uses the form of an action film to tell the dramatic story of how two brothers are separated and adopted to two different families in Canada, and how their lives are fatally intertwined with each other some 20 years later. The famous actors Jang Dong Gun and Cha In–pyo star as the two brothers, and Kim Kyu-ri, known from several horror films, acts as an immigrant Korean woman and the girlfriend

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of one of them, while Jeong Jun Ho plays another immigrant Korean in the film. Given its extraordinary star cast, music critics had problems to categorise the genre of this blockbuster video, which was screened over and over again on Korean television at the end of 1999 when the album was released. The rock band Sky consisted of three male members of whom singer Choi Jin Young, brother of actress Choi Jin Sil who played Susanne in Susanne Brink's Arirang, was the most visible and prominent. Sky had a big hit with Eternity, and has since then produced two other less successful albums in 2001 and in 2004.

Eternity’s lyrics first appear to tell the ordinary story of a relationship that has broken up and being almost the compulsory element of any sort of popular music in general. Notwithstanding, in relation to the music video it is not difficult to grasp that this must be some kind of a final letter from the criminal brother to his girlfriend just before he dies. The rock ballad Eternity’s sad melody is beautifully introduced by an orchestra consisting of 30 musicians, and the song skilfully mixes between hardcore, heavy metal, and rap to be able to illustrate the rapidly changing events taking place during the seven dramatic minutes of the film. After a quick showing of the embarrassing and notorious 1988 cover of The Progressive to remind the Korean audience of the shameful and humiliating adoption issue, Eternity starts at Vancouver international airport with two newly arrived adopted children from Korea at the age of four or five. The biological brothers are holding Canadian flags in their hands, and are accompanied by a Korean escort woman and a Canadian female adoption agency worker affiliated to Holt. Against their will and violently resisting, the brothers are split up between two different adoptive families.

Around 20 years later as young adults, one brother has become a depressed criminal belonging to an ethnic Korean gang, and the other an aspiring police officer in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The criminal brother is implicated in a series of contract killings related to illegal arms trading, while his brother, the policeman, is investigating these events. In the beginning two other ethnic Koreans are introduced; a Korean immigrant woman working at a Korean restaurant in Vancouver’s Koreatown, and one of the gang members who is the criminal brother’s best friend. This last character is also captured at an early stage by the po-

7 Chosun Ilbo, November 9, 1999.
lice brother, and questioned about the contract killer’s whereabouts, but even though he is beaten up he remains silent and loyal to the criminal brother. Between the interrogations, the police brother sits in his office looking at the adoption photo of himself and his unknown brother, which is on his desk. He decides to try to locate him, and puts up posters on the streets. Accidentally the criminal brother passes by without taking any notice of the message on the posters.

After the criminal brother has carried out yet another contract killing, childhood flashbacks of the killing of his Canadian adoptive father during a robbery at a gas station start to recur. He has a nervous breakdown caused by the painful memories and his ruined and wrecked life, and tries to commit suicide by shooting himself in Vancouver’s Stanley Park. Suddenly the Korean immigrant woman turns up and saves him at the last minute, discovers that he is a Korean adoptee and starts to take care of him by trying to make him stop his self-destructive life style. She also finds the adoption photo of him and his brother in his wallet. At the same time, the police brother continues to put up posters on the walls searching for his lost biological brother. The criminal brother carries out yet another murder, and the police brother is closing in on him by visiting his Korean girlfriend. The criminal brother drives by, sees the police and is able to escape, and believing that he has been betrayed by his friend in the gang, he tries to exact revenge by killing him, but fails. During the course of the film, the criminal brother, with his disloyal, violent and uncontrollable behaviour, appears to be a good example of what could be called a Barthesian-like mythical narrative of the orphan, the classical trope of the destroyed and disturbed, and pathological and asocial abandoned child, illegitimate bastard, foster or adopted child spreading madness, misery and mystery around him or her, and which is so frequent in artistic works and literary texts (Novy, 2001).

When the girlfriend is under interrogation by the police brother, she sees the same adoption photo she found in the wallet on his desk and immediately realises the terrible tragedy that is about to unfold. Upon release, her boyfriend’s former friend abducts her, as it is his turn now to get revenge after the murder attempt. Together with another gang member, he demands a ransom from the criminal brother in order to get her back. They meet at an agreed place, but the meeting degenerates into a quarrel and they end up aiming their guns at each other. The police are called in,
and they arrive at the scene in full strength, including the police brother who tries to intervene in the deadlock situation. In a final dramatic shooting, the police brother unknowingly kills his own sibling, and when the girlfriend arrives at the scene and shows him the adoption photo he suddenly understands what he has done. In the next scene, the police brother and the Korean immigrant woman stand in front of the grave of the criminal brother. The video ends at the same airport, at which the siblings arrived as adoptive children, as the surviving brother is now about to leave for a visit to Korea. The very last sequence shows a small girl, coming from Korea for adoption and holding a Canadian flag, who first smiles and then starts to cry. Through this last anti-adoption shot, Sky’s music video Eternity is turned into an open political statement about the Korean adoption issue, conveying the message that more miserable fates and fatal misunderstandings await Korea’s numerous and unlucky adoptees.

The appearance of adopted Koreans in this work and in Korean popular culture in general can be interpreted as a reflection of the existence of Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) ethnoscape, one of several transcultural flows in his theory of global cultural politics in late modernity. Appadurai bases his theory on the interconnection between electronic mediation and mass migration, which produces what he calls a diasporic public sphere known as the global ethnoscape. The global ethnospace is the shifting and translocal landscape of deterritorialized diasporas and displaced migrants, who have become building blocks of imagined worlds and communities, as national identities nowadays are constructed and organised on a worldwide level. The media and popular culture are today not only used to imagine a nation but the larger space beyond its borders, and thus it has become a vehicle for global identity politics and community building projects. This especially concerns non-Western nations, which often seem to experience globalisation and the outside world through mediated images of their own diasporas.

From the 1990s, overseas as well as adopted Koreans have also appeared more frequently in Korean media and popular culture compared to earlier decades. Two concrete examples are sports icon Park Chan Ho, a Korean national who plays in the professional American baseball league, and who according to Rachel Miyoung Joo (2000), has turned into a symbol for the constitution of a Korean-American subjectivity as well as a mass mediated spectacle for imagining a diasporic Korean nation in his home-
land, and the golf star Michelle Wie, a second generation Korean-American, whose different media portrayals in Korea and in the US for Yang Young-Kyun (2004) reflect the differences between Korean ethnic nationalism and American civic nationalism. Korea’s leading playwright Oh Tae-sok’s play *Love with Foxes* (1996) is another example of this development, where Chinese, Japanese, North and South Koreans interact together and, according to feminist theatre critic Shim Jung-Soon (2002), create an imagined community of pan-Koreaness. Similarly in *Eternity*, it is not white Canada and Vancouver that is in the focus, it is Koreatown and the ethnic Koreans who inhabit it including the adoptees. Sky’s *Eternity* is, in other words, nothing but a good example of this Korean way of globalisation, experienced and imagined through mediated representations of its diaspora, a phenomenon that will be even more accentuated in *Love*.

**Visiting the overseas brethren and sistren**

The month of September 1999 began with Lee Jang-soo’s romantic melodrama *Love*, a feature film set entirely in Los Angeles’ Koreatown. The director comes from the glamorous world of Korean television dramas with productions like *Beautiful Days* (Arûmdaun naldûl) (2001), where two orphans play leading roles, *Shoot for the Stars* (Pyôrûl ssoda) (2002) and *Stairway to Heaven* (Ch’ôngugûi kyêdan) (2003). In *Love*, which is still his first and only feature film, the adoption issue frames the narrative, and scriptwriter Song Chi-na explains on the special feature section of the DVD version that she wanted to convey “a meaningful message about an urgent social problem”.

The leading character of *Love* is Myông-su, a professional Korean marathon runner and former Olympic gold medal winner performed by the tall and athletic Jung Woo-sung who comes to Los Angeles to take part in the city’s famous marathon race. Suddenly he drops out of his team and goes to Koreatown, where he has a relative named Brad, played by Park Cheol. There he meets Jenny, an adopted Korean played by the television drama actress Ko So-young, who at an early age had run away from

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her adoptive parents and has grown up as Brad’s foster child. In the end, Myông-su and Jenny become a couple, and even if Love is nothing else but an ordinary and somewhat pathetic romantic tale, the film received a lot of attention in the media before and in connection with its release for its originally composed music, unusual location and expensive budget with several high-paid Korean-Americans and Americans in the crew, and, most of all, because of the two lead actors’ enormous popularity in Korea, which, in both cases, was firmly established with them playing together in Kim Seong-su’s box-office hit Beat (1997).\(^9\) Yet beyond its simple story, in Love the boundaries between South Korean Myông-su and adopted Korean Jenny become increasingly perforated and blurred during the course of the film, turning their relationship and love between each other into an allegory for a global community of ethnic Koreans.

When Myông-su comes out of the exit gate at the airport in Los Angeles, he is met by a welcome party consisting of Korean-Americans, white Anglos, Hispanics and representatives from other ethnic groups, making him instantly confused, as he is used to the much more ethnically homogeneous Korea. This dizzying confusion will follow Myông-su during his stay in Los Angeles, probably the most “third worldised” city in the Western hemisphere after the implosion of the colonial world order and massive postcolonial migration. The Korean team members are immediately subjected to ruthless regimentation and a training program, and forced to run together with galloping horses in the deserts of California. Myông-su and his best team mate Kyông-chôl, played by Lee Beom Su, both come from poor backgrounds and they regard their careers as marathon runners as their only viable future to get a better life. They met already in middle school, and Myông-su, the more successful one of the two, acts as a role model and a big brother (hyông) to Kyông-chôl. However, in the foreign setting Myông-su starts to doubt his own capability and confidence in himself as he had actually broken a course record after 35 kilometres in the last Asian Games. Above all, he questions his choice in life as he up until now has given up everything for his sports career, including having friends and creating his own family. At night, ignoring the desperate pleas com-

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Envisioning a global Koreatown

ing from his friend, who had placed all his hopes for a better future in their comradeship, Myông-su promptly leaves the camp and defects.

Alone in the big city, Myông-su remembers that he has a distant cousin in Los Angeles, Ki-ch'ôl, and decides to call him. The cousin, who prefers to be called Brad, invites him to his house in Koreatown, and his foster daughter Jenny picks Myông-su up. On the evening, when they share “real Korean food” cooked by Brad, he is introduced to Jenny, who, says Brad mysteriously, is adopted just like himself, either alluding to his own adoption of American culture or the fact that he is an overseas adoptee as well. The director will never reveal Brad’s true background and circumstances as he acts as a kind of mystic intermediator between all the different ethnic groups in the film, Korean-Americans and other immigrants, adopted Koreans and South Koreans. In his angle-like, kind-hearted and totally altruistic personality, it is also easy to get the feeling that he is some kind of a shamanistic spirit who actually never exists at all.

From now on, the film narrative is almost over-explicitly concerned with the marking of ambiguous difference and contradictory sameness between Myông-su and Jenny, the South Korean and the adopted Korean. For example, while Jenny asks for salt on the “real Korean food”, thereby signifying her upbringing in an Anglo-American home and the practical indivisibility between Korean ethnicity and Korean food, Brad comments that Americans eat salt much more often than Koreans, and then Myông-su also wants more salt to show them that he is willing to adjust to the American way of life. At the same time, the three all speak Korean with each other, and it is, therefore, impossible to discern who is a domestic or an adopted or immigrant Korean by way of their speech. Their common physical sameness is, of course, apparent in a predominantly white American surrounding, and this obvious fact is particularly for Myông-su a confusing factor in relation to their equally obvious cultural differences in this hybrid and diasporic space of Koreatown.

The appearance of overseas and adopted Koreans in Love reflects a newly awakened interest in the Korean diaspora, which is closely connected to Korea’s way of globalisation. Terming the 21st century the “Diaspora Age”, the aforementioned Overseas Koreans Foundation also includes the adopted Koreans as a part of the Korean diaspora. From the mid-1990s, adoptees have also been increasingly perceived and treated as ethnic Koreans overseas as they are regularly mentioned and included in
works dealing with the worldwide diasporic community of Koreans, something which seldom was the case during the previous decades (Chôn, 1995: 289–302; Pak, 1995: 155–171; Research Institute for International Relations, 1996; Research Institute for National Unification, 1993; Sin, 2000: 17–20). In 1996, the Ministry of Unification published the encyclopaedic 10-volume Koreans in the World (Sêgyêûi hanminjok) as a sort of complete guide to overseas Koreans for Korean politicians, diplomats, bureaucrats and officials, and again adopted Koreans were included. Even if this new attitude sends out signals that Korea has not forgotten the group, and grants them a visible place in Korea’s modern and troublesome history it is important to point out that this way of conceptualising adopted Koreans runs counter to Western theorists who most probably would object to defining the group either as a diaspora or an ethnic group in a classical meaning, lacking everything from a myth of a return to the homeland, to a common language or any serious attempts at endogamy. Instead, in the West, international adoptees from non-Western countries are generally regarded as having left behind any traces of their cultural origin as well as being cut off from both “their” homelands and diasporas.

The Korean approach rather appears to reject the classical conception of a diaspora modelled on the Jewish example, and instead relies on the broadest and perhaps most vulgar and popular definition at hand, namely those segments of people who have ended up outside their traditional home territories, whether as individuals or as collectives, and whether voluntarily or involuntarily. With this wide and inclusive approach, for good or bad it also becomes obvious that earlier notions of an ethnic or racial minority or a group of exiles or migrants today often are summed up in and supplemented or even replaced by the notion of diaspora. Through this Korean interpretation of a diaspora, the adopted Koreans are conveniently and smoothly essentialised into overseas brethren and sistren, nevertheless, adopted Koreans had already since 1991 been included in the chapter on overseas Koreans in the moral education textbooks (Helgesen, 1998: 169). See also numerous works in Korean and English by Professor of Anthropology Lee Kwang-kyu, editor of Koreans in the World, current director of Overseas Koreans Foundation, and widely regarded to be the leading expert on overseas Koreans. He argues that the adoptive parents of adopted Koreans as well as non-Korean husbands of Korean women should be included in the global Korean community from a traditional Korean standpoint of who belongs to the extended family.
thereby disregarding the fact that they normally do not have any connection at all neither to Korea nor to things Korean, and nor to any overseas Korean community.

The transnational Korean community

Brad manages his own private laundry business, and Myông-su assists him and Jenny in the hot and steamy milieu. At the laundry, to his amazement, he finds a Latin American couple employed by Brad who speaks fluent Spanish with them, and, what is more, the customers consist of a wide variety of ethnicities. Even more puzzling for Myông-su is that Brad runs his own service for adopted Koreans trying to locate their birth parents in Korea. He does so by regularly calling police offices and adoption agencies from his office. One day at the laundry, Myông-su overhears Jenny speaking to an unknown woman in Korea and understands that she is also searching for her Korean mother. She has learnt by heart to describe her appearance, including scars and birthmarks as well as her adoption story; namely, that she was adopted at the age of four from a place called Pyonghwa orphanage, and this phrase will be repeated over and over again in the film as a kind of a mantra to remind the audience of her yearning for Korea and her Korean mother.

Myông-su is fascinated by Jenny’s enigmatic personality, and moved by her longing as he finds her crying alone at night, and soon he falls deeply in love with her. Jenny, on the other hand, simply ignores his existence and prefers to stay in her own reclusive world. Like so many other adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture, Jenny is a lonely, asocial and cold person bordering on the autistic, and seemingly unable to show affection to and empathy with other people. When Jenny and Myông-su go shopping together, and Myông-su is unable to understand what the cashier is saying and causes irritation among the other customers, Jenny does not even come to his assistance and could not care less about him. She likes to sing melancholic and sad Korean pop ballads, always looking annoyed and unreceptive and barely speaking a word, and she stays up alone at night obsessed by nurturing a small Rose of Sharon (*mugunghwa*) plant, which is planted in Korean soil and has been given to her as a gift from
Korea. As this is Korea’s official national flower, the symbolic power of an adopted Korean taking care of and cultivating a Rose of Sharon plant is enormous. The small plant signifies not only Jenny’s hope of finding her Korean mother and reconnecting to Korea, but also the development of her Koreanisation process accomplished by Brad’s gentle upbringing.

Brad takes Myông-su to a picnic in one of Los Angeles public parks, and it now turns out that Brad runs a whole network for adopted Koreans living in the city who have run away from their adoptive parents. The picnic is a social gathering for the adoptees where Brad provides Korean food, informs them about the state of their searches, and encourages and takes care of them in all possible ways. He also introduces Myông-su as his “real blood brother” and asks the adoptees to note their physical resemblance, further underscoring the adoption context. Jenny is also present at the picnic where she takes care of the younger children. Myông-su does not seem to be aware of the strange and bizarre situation as they all look Korean and have picked up Korean even if at least one of them is clearly mixed race, although he notices that there are no parents at all present, only children, teenagers and young adults. Thanks to the picnic, Jenny realises Myông-su’s genuine, innocent and naïve character and slowly starts to respond to his attempts to make contact. One afternoon, Kyông-chôl turns up at the laundry as he has managed to track down Myông-su’s location. During the evening when drinking together, Kyông-chôl tells Brad and Jenny why he came to Los Angeles in the first place. Kyông-chôl, who wants to persuade Myông-su to return, challenges him to run, and the two Korean marathon runners run together through the empty and dark streets of Los Angeles. However, Kyông-chôl has to leave for the training camp seemingly without having succeeded in bringing his friend back.

It should be noted that the Korean media now and then has reported on American adopted children from Korea who have run away from their adoptive homes and ended up in Los Angeles’ Koreatown, and sometimes also in prison as some of them are living as homeless people on the street. For example, on August 21, 1998, Korea Times claimed that around a hundred adopted children from Korea, at that time, were on the run in the country, of whom many had gone into hiding in Los Angeles’ Koreatown. There are also occasional reports of adoptees having killed their adoptive parents after having been sexually or mentally abused. In other words, this scene in Love could well be an reference to such articles.
After Kyŏng-chŏl’s visit, Jenny develops a new respect for Myŏng-su, as she now knows everything about his background and life story. On American Independence Day, Brad, who is concerned about whether Myŏng-su feels at home in Los Angeles, proposes that all three of them must go out partying, and he dresses them in the customer’s clothes from the laundry. In the end, they do not make it to the party, as Brad’s car breaks down. Instead, they have their own party out on the road; it is the middle of the night, and they are playing music from the radio. During this party all the differences between Myŏng-su and Jenny suddenly disappear when they dance and have fun together. Some days later, when the car breaks down for a second time and it starts to rain, Myŏng-su and Jenny again find each other by joyously singing Korean pop songs together, and slowly but surely she opens up her mind to him. Jenny also gives Myŏng-su back his running clothes, which he had thrown away, and she urges him to start training, and henceforth Myŏng-su starts to run again, as he has by now decided that he will participate in the Los Angeles marathon. From here on, Myŏng-su undergoes a process of Americanisation, driven by a desire for American values of individualism and self-fulfilment, and reflecting a general Korean ambivalence towards America as both an oppressor and a liberator according to those who have studied Korean images of America and the history of Korean pro- and anti-Americanism (Gweon, 2004; Joo, 2004; Lew, 2004; Shin, 1995).

One day at the laundry, Brad is finally able to announce to everybody that he has found Jenny’s Korean mother. Jenny calls the woman who confirms her motherhood and she tells Jenny that her real name is Myŏng-ja, and that she is now married and has three children, so she cannot keep in contact with her. In this way the good news turn into a disaster, and Jenny is so disappointed by Korea having rejected her for a second time that she crushes the flowerpot with the Rose of Sharon on the floor. Brad is devastated as he understands the symbolic meaning of her act, but Myŏng-su replants the flower and promises her that if it dies he will get a new seed and soil from Korea. Little by little, Jenny and Myŏng-su are getting closer to each other, and Brad feels jealous and irritated as the over-protecting (foster) father he is. Thereafter, Brad leaves for a trip to Korea and, to be on the safe side, he arranges for Myŏng-su to stay at a hotel while Jenny remains alone in the house. As a result of this brief separation, Jenny and Myŏng-su realise each other’s significance and start to call each other re-
peatedly, and Jenny becomes the training partner of Myông-su who runs even harder; she cycles alongside him and shares his efforts and burdens so that he is able to break the magic barrier of 35 kilometres. At this moment, when Jenny and Myông-su at last get together and become a real couple, Los Angeles’ Koreatown is transformed into a space for envisioning a transnational Korean community.12

A useful analytical tool when discussing the interactions between a homeland and its diaspora is transnationalism or long-distance nationalism (Hannerz, 1996; Kearney, 1995; Tölöyan, 1996; Vertovec, 1999). In their study of Caribbeans and Filipinos in America and their relationships to their respective homelands, the anthropologists Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) interpret transnationalism as a new form of deterritorialized community building, which aims at overcoming the tension between a homeland and its diaspora and is being used as a counter-hegemonic resistance strategy for postcolonial societies against globalisation and Westernisation:

Deterritorialized nation-state building is something new and significant, a form of post-colonial nationalism, that reflects and reinforces the division of the entire globe into nation-states. To conceive of a nation-state that stretches beyond its geographic boundaries involves a social fabrication different from diasporic imaginations. To see oneself in a diaspora is to imagine oneself as being outside a territory, part of a population exiled from a homeland…In counterdistinction is the deterritorialized nation-state, in which the nation’s people may live anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state. By this logic, there is no longer a diaspora because wherever its people go, their state goes too. (Basch, Glick Schiller & Szanton Blanc, 1994: 269)

A Korean transnationalism would be the vision of a global community of ethnic Koreans encompassing South and North Koreans, and overseas and adopted Koreans, and would be a way of overcoming the limitations of being a politically divided, culturally diversified and geographically dispersed nation. In this way, one could say that the Korean nation state is reterritorializing its deterritorialized compatriots. This is also what is suggested by Park Hyun Ok (1996) who characterises Korean diaspora

12 Los Angeles may also in reality be the most ideal place for developing a Korean transnational identity and community given the vast number of South Koreans, adopted Koreans, North Korean remigrants, and ethnic Korean Russian, Central Asian and Latin American “trimigrants” actually living there.
politics, fuelled by globalisation and growing anti-Western sentiments, as a new nationalism of a community of ethnic Koreans all over the world underpinned by colonial experiences and postcolonial processes. For Gabriel Sheffer (2003) in his theory of diasporism, the Korean diaspora is also a concrete example of how an *ethnie* is in the process of being transformed into an incipient diaspora using a communalist strategy to keep together and mobilise itself in the age of transnational networks and ethno-national diasporas. Furthermore, in the light of Thomas Faist’s (2000) model of three different stages of transnational social spaces divided between kinship groups (contract workers), circuits (business people) and communities (ethnic diasporas), the Korean version must definitely be said to belong to the last category.

The new transnational character of Korean nationalism is manifested in the question of citizenship and who is to be included in and excluded from the Korean *Staatsnation*. In 1999, a special so-called F-4 visa resembling a dual citizenship was introduced by the Act on the Immigration and Legal Status of Overseas Koreans. Due to a successful lobbying campaign by adopted Korean returnees in Korea, the F-4 visa came to include overseas adoptees as well. Notwithstanding, after diplomatic protests from China, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, the two main host countries for ethnic Koreans in Central Asia, the law actually had to exclude the Koreans living there as well as the pro-North Korea ethnic Koreans in Japan. Clearly reflecting the country’s weak position in the international arena, its first version only encompassed those who had left the country since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948. However, in 2001, the Korean Constitutional Court ruled the original legislation unconstitutional and the government was forced to extend the deadline to 1922, when the Korean family register of *hojuje* was established, meaning that probably the majority of the Korean diaspora nowadays at least formally is eligible for the visa. The F-4 visa practically gives its holder all the rights of a Korean citizen, except for voting in elections, while, at the same time, exempting male holders from an otherwise mandatory military service. Through the legislation, which is labelled as being “hypernationalistic” by Samuel Kim (2000: 262), the Korean nation-state has introduced a new principle of Korean citizenship based on a global *jus sanguinis*, and redemarcated its borders, turning every ethnic Korean around the world into a potential Korean national subject.
This ethnopolitical body politic of embracing overseas Koreans has also resulted in the arrival of tens of thousands of Chinese-Koreans as migrant workers or as brides, filling the shortage of women created by sex-biased abortions, economic contributions from wealthy Korean-Americans at the time of the economic crisis, improved relations with Japan partly mediated through the ethnic Koreans in the country, and the employment of overseas Koreans by transnational Korean companies, while the Korean minority in Central Asia plays an important intermediary role for Korean investment in the region (Choi Inbom, 2003; Freeman, 2005; Kim Jo H., 2004; Moon, 2000; Schlyter, 2002). At the same time, while the project of building a transnational Korean community may seem successful on the surface, there are also reports of widespread discrimination against Chinese-Koreans in Korea, reflecting the hierarchical character of the Korean diaspora: its affluent segments are much more valued than its poor ones, there are serious conflicts between Westernised Koreans and Korean nationals working together at Korean companies and embassies abroad, and there have been strong negative reactions among Koreans in Central Asia towards dispatched domestic Koreans using their dominant economic position in order to try to impose their models on their “overseas brethren”. In this way, Korea’s policy towards overseas Koreans also becomes a question of disciplining, policing and homogenising its diaspora.

Overseas Koreans Foundation and its civic counterpart the NGO Korean Sharing Movement (Uri minjok soro topki undong), are nowadays together with researchers, intellectuals and activists all engaged in trying to formulate how to achieve such a worldwide Korean community, conceptualised as a higher and broader form of national reunification (Cho Seung-bog, 1997; Chung, 2000; Jeong, 2000). All agree that there is an urgent need for reassembling the nation, and maintaining and recovering unity, continuity and homogeneity before it is too late and native Koreans have become too Westernised and individualistic, and overseas Koreans have become too assimilated and integrated into their host cultures. The last aspect especially applies to adopted Koreans, and, according to Soh Kyung-Suk (2001) of the Korean Sharing Movement, efforts must be

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13 For the Korean Sharing Movement’s vision of a worldwide Korean community, see http://www.ksm.or.kr/ (2001-10-12).
made for them to learn the Korean language and culture and reunite with their Korean families in order to be able to reincorporate them into the Korean nation. It is this utopian vision of a global ethnic community of 75 million Koreans, which the minjung ideologist Paik Nak-chung (1996) scrutinises in such a poignant way. Paik points out that this so-called homogenous community, if it is to be achieved, has to be not only transnational considering the fact that the majority of the overseas Koreans have changed their citizenship, but also multilingual as Korean is not any longer the mother tongue for so many of the exiled countrymen. Another sceptic is Kim Woong-ki (2002) who doubts that the Korean Government will ever succeed in achieving its goal given the aggressive implementation of its diaspora policy, and the hierarchical and even rude attitude towards overseas Koreans creating serious mistrust among them, even if there may be a potential on the civic level, as the Korean national team’s success in the 2002 Football World Cup showed by uniting ethnic Koreans all over the world as independent individuals, including North Koreans, who also cheered for the Southern team.14

To return to the film narrative, when Brad comes home and discovers that Jenny and Myông-su are a couple, he becomes deeply disappointed. He reveals that he went to Korea only to meet Jenny’s mother who was a “fine woman”, but “Koreans just do not understand adoption or adoptees” so he could not ask her to meet Jenny and was only able to bring back a photo of her. Brad resolutely banishes Myông-su who returns to his team. Brad, however, still has to come to terms with the fact that Jenny is now a grown-up and that she will soon leave him to start her own independent life. He continues to cook Korean food for her and a little bit later, Brad and Jenny discover that the Rose of Sharon is blossoming, thereby signifying that she has now matured and become an adult and that Brad’s project of re-Koreanising her has been accomplished to the fullest extent.

14 In 2004, the Global Association for Korean Abroad was formed at a meeting in Michigan, United States, with representatives from Japan, Russia, Germany, China and Brazil among others and under the slogan “Seven million overseas Koreans as ONE movement”. The Global Association for Korean Abroad states that overseas Koreans have historically played a major role in the anti-colonial independence movement and in the democratic struggle, and that it will now strive to overcome the disruptions of the past and function as a bridge between the two Koreas for the reconciliation and reunification of the Korean nation. See http://www.globalkorea.org/ (2004-08-22).
Logically, Brad bids farewell by telling Jenny that she had made him so happy, whilst they had been living together.

Myông-su and his friend Kyông-chôl participate in the marathon race running side by side with each other. Just before the critical 35-kilometre mark, Jenny suddenly turns up on her bicycle like during the training. Myông-su supports Kyông-chôl up until the end and deliberately lets him become the gold medal winner. Through this noble and individualistic act of Myông-su, his process of Americanisation is completed, and American culture triumphs and becomes fetishised. The film ends with Jenny picking up Myông-su after the race, and while driving she remembers how she first came to Brad and his laundry in Koreatown as a homeless runaway child around 10 years ago at the age of 9 or 10. In a flashback, Brad sits alone outside his laundry in the evening after closing time, and Jenny, who is on the run from her adoptive parents, comes up to him and asks if he is “Mr. Oh who helps adoptees to find their Korean parents”. Brad scolds her for having run away from her adoptive home, and closes the door but then comes out again and asks if she has had dinner. He tells her that he will teach her to eat Korean food, and lets her into the house. By replaying this memory in her mind, Jenny reconciles with her own past and understands that she can now leave her adopted Koreanness behind her, as she has finally become a “real Korean” and is now able to start her own independent life together with Myông-su.

In *Love*, except for the initial scenes, Jenny is no longer a problematic and threatening adoptee with different identifications and loyalties than most native Koreans. On the contrary, by having learnt to speak Korean and by eating Korean food, she has been turned into a “real Korean” and reclaimed and incorporated into the larger space of the worldwide Korean diaspora according to the wishes and dreams of the Korean Government and its diaspora policy. Furthermore, the film *Love* also forgets that Jenny once was forcefully and involuntarily uprooted and dispatched overseas by the Korean nation itself and that international adoption still continues, thereby covering up Korean responsibility. The film also refuses to acknowledge any kind of differences, be it between gender, age, class, culture, language and the like, or conflicts and hierarchies within the Korean diaspora, where adoptees like Jenny are placed on the lower rung of the ladder. This is because they usually are despised and frowned upon as so-
cial pariahs lacking proper and decent bloodlines by diasporised Koreans who feel a strong urge to distance themselves from a group, which symbolises national humiliation and also often outnumbers them.

So Floya Anthias’s warning in the introduction that the concept of diaspora often has a tendency to reinforce and reify ideas and dreams of roots and origins rather than questioning and problematising them is according to my interpretation, definitely applicable to the emergence of a Korean diasporic identity. To be Korean in *Love* is rather a static state of being and existing than a relational process of becoming and doing, ranging from a continuum from domestic over overseas to adopted Koreans. Jenny, who once was a shunned and rejected adoptee and who during the course of the film is re-Koreanised has, therefore, gained a new value, not just as a reminder of a dark and shameful past, but also as a living guarantee for a common future for a global Korean nation. In the end, the film turns the relationship between Jenny and Myông-su into an allegory for the reconciliation between Korea and its overseas adoptees and a utopian vision of a transnational community embracing all ethnic Koreans around the world.
Summary and conclusion

After having accounted for the history of international adoption from Korea and the development of the Korean adoption issue, and analysed four popular songs and four feature films, it is now time for me to sum up the findings of my study and locate these representations of adopted Koreans in a contemporary Korean context. Chapter 1 started by charting out the subject, and the scope and the aim of the study. The subject was restricted solely to post-war international adoption and adoptees placed overseas in Western countries, and the study set out to examine representations of adopted Koreans in eight selected Korean

popular cultural works, motivated by a specific interest in the popular level of the Korean adoption issue. The study applied a postcolonial perspective and a cultural studies reading with the purpose of identifying how Korean nationalism is articulated within these representations in light of the country's ethnonationalist identity and self-understanding, and colonial experiences and postcolonial developments. The research question posed was to understand the consequences for a nation, imagining itself as a family, that has adopted away so many of its children, and the responses coming from a culture obsessed by unity and homogeneity in dealing with the adopted Koreans.

By reviewing the sparse number of studies on international adoption from Korea and adopted Koreans both in Korean scholarship and in Western academia, it was established that there had been no previous study of representations of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture, which means that my study is the first of its kind. The ethnic and postcolonial character of Korean nationalism was described and related to a colonial past, the partition system, the existence of a huge diaspora, and the country's semi-colonial position in the current world order, resulting in a never-ending quest for a pivotal moment for a nation-building to take off based on a perceived common biological ancestry and comprising all ethnic Koreans in the world. The state of postcoloniality was critically scrutinised, and international adoption was conceptualised as a still existing colonial-style trade in non-Western children, and compared to the historical slave and coolie trades and the contemporary trafficking in women, apart from being intimately linked to brutal American empire building. The adopted Koreans were set in comparison with the comfort women, and regarded as subaltern subjects and products of a combination of Korean patriarchy and Western colonialism, and the adoption issue was put into the context of an ongoing Korean reconciliation process and seen as an attempt at overcoming a shameful and still unresolved problem. Finally, the field of cultural studies was introduced, and its way of reading and analysing media and popular cultural representation was linked to the study.

Chapters 2 and 3 showed that the history of international adoption from Korea and the Korean adoption issue have passed through various stages, driven by different reasons, and reflecting the dramatic turbulences of modern Korean history. The history of adoption in pre-modern Korea
was followed from mythical times up to the end of the colonial period, particularly underlining the legacy of its Confucian intra-clan, parent- and male-centred and inheritance-motivated version, which is still strongly felt today. International adoption was defined as a white Western privilege originating with the Korean War, and historical parallels were exemplified, among others, in the British child migrants, the Jewish and Finnish war children, and the stolen generations of Aboriginal Australia, and in the fates of three individual Koreans: Antonio Corea, Kim Kyu-sik and Alexandra Kim Stankevich. The plight of the Korean people during the war and particularly of its children was illustrated, and the setting up of orphanages and unofficial adoptions by Western missionaries and soldiers which altogether laid the foundation for modern Korean child welfare with its heavy foreign dependency and strong focus on private initiatives and institutions, were identified as the most important preconditions for the subsequent child migration from Korea together with the presence of mixed race children who were the products of large-scale sexual exploitation and the military prostitution system.

International adoption from Korea and the Korean adoption issue

The practice of international adoption originated as a humanitarian rescue mission immediately after the war and was organised by Western individuals and voluntary agencies to transfer Korean mixed race children fathered by American and other UN soldiers to adoptive homes in the United States and Western Europe. In 1954, it gained an official status when Korea’s first president Syngman Rhee initiated a government-sponsored program of international adoption with the purpose of cleansing the country of mixed race children, who were subjected to widespread discrimination. Two years later Harry Holt, a wealthy American farmer, established the organisation bearing his name, which not only developed into Korea’s but the world’s leading adoption agency. Since Holt in his missionary zeal believed that he played a part in a divine scheme, international adoption rapidly assumed mass proportions and at the end of the decade full Koreans eclipsed mixed race children. This first and initial
stage of international adoption from Korea was motivated by a mixture of Christian fundamentalism, a specific American need to legitimise anti-Communist military interventions in East Asia by creating family bonds with its populations, and a general feeling among the countries, which had participated on the side of South Korea in the devastating war, of having a guilty conscience.

In 1961, independent Korea’s modern adoption law was passed, laying the foundation for the most efficient institutional framework of international adoption unsurpassed in the world. Under the military regime of President Park Chung Hee, Korea was industrialised with terrible efficiency, and at a furious and horrifying speed. The tens of thousands of children of young rural migrants turned into factory workers who were abandoned because of urban poverty now replaced the war orphans. International adoption was integrated into the country’s family planning, population policy and emigration and labour export programs to decrease the numbers in an over-populated country, and utilised as a goodwill strategy to develop trade relations with, and cultural and political ties to important Western allies. As 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 urbanisation, the decade ended as the only one hitherto with more domestic placements processed than international counterparts.

From the end of the 1960s, adoptions from Korea started to rise dramatically as the domestic supply of adoptable children almost disappeared overnight in the West as a result of changing mores and ideals taking place in connection with the revolution of 1968. International adoption now came to be perceived as an anti-racist, solidarian and progressive act in the era of decolonisation, anti-racism and civil rights movements, governed by a left-liberal ideology prescribing multiculturalism, and as a liberating reproductive method by radical feminists and sexual minorities. At the beginning of the 1970s, international adoption also came to play a part in the propaganda war fought between the two Koreas as North Korea accused its southern neighbour of selling Korean children to Westerners. The accusation led to the entire adoption program being classified and transformed into something close to a state secret to avoid further embarrassment. This was the first time international adoption surfaced in the
Comforting an Orphaned Nation

political discussion, and during the 1970s the adoption issue involved the pro-North and the pro-South factions both in Korea, among Korean diaspora groups and among the political sympathisers in the adopting countries in the West. From the mid-1970s, the Korean Government also increasingly began to recognise the existence of the adopted Koreans at an official level, and individual adoptees began to appear in the Korean media. In 1976, in response to escalating international adoptions and the North Korean statements, a plan for the gradual phasing out of international adoption by 1981 was announced to curb the massive outflow of children. The number of adoption agencies was also reduced from seven to four wholly run by Korean nationals.

However, four years later, the new military strongman President Chun Doo Hwan came to power, and chose to discontinue the policy. Instead international adoption was directly linked to the expansion of the emigration program, and through a process of deregulation, the adoption agencies were allowed to become involved in profit-making businesses and openly compete with each other to track down unrestricted numbers of “adoptable” children; in all too many cases simply lost and run-away children, bought and stolen, abducted and kidnapped, or abandoned and relinquished after harsh coercion. Consequently, a thriving and profitable adoption industry was created, resulting in the largest numbers ever sent abroad in a decade with 66,511 placements, and peaking in 1985 with close to 9,000 cases or “goodwill ambassadors” as cynical government officials preferred to call them. At the end of the 1980s the country had generated a reasonable economic wealth, and from then on the children dispatched abroad were increasingly categorised as illegitimate as they were born by unwed mothers, rather than being abandoned and coming from poor backgrounds. Moreover, the dominance of girls, which accounted for around 70 percent during the previous decades, was slowly but steadily turned into a majority of boys, reflecting changes in the family structure and a decrease in the relative value of sons in Korean society.

In 1988, the Seoul Olympic Games showcased a newly democratised and industrialised Korea to the world. All of a sudden, Western radio and television broadcasters and newspapers and magazines, with the American magazine *The Progressive* taking the lead, started to write and talk 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, the Korean society was eventually forced to seriously address the problem. Ever since, the adoption issue has been a recurring subject in the Korean media and culture production, appearing over and over again in editorials and columns, and in novels, poems, art works and children’s books. Adopted Koreans themselves have simultaneously become more and more visible in Korean society as a result of coming to Korea, participating in various organised visiting programs, or even by resettling in their birth country, by reuniting with Korean family members, which has often been made possible with the help of Korean journalists and activists and which often takes place under heavy media coverage, and by being portrayed and interviewed in Korean newspaper articles and television programmes. The last aspect mainly concerns “famous” and “successful” adoptees, reflecting a predominant elitist interest in “good representatives of the Korean nation”.

In 1989, the government decided to set up a new deadline of 1996. This deadline also failed as the plan was revoked in 1994 in favour of the more distant year of 2015, but during the tenures of Presidents Roh Tae Woo and Kim Young Sam 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 care system in line with Western models. The adoption issue was particularly accentuated during Kim Dae Jung’s presidency as international adoption started to increase again in connection with the economic crisis and numerous family break-ups resulting in so-called “IMF orphans”. In 1998, President Kim Dae Jung delivered an official apology to the adopted Koreans for having sent them away for international adoption. At the same time, his wife the First Lady Lee Hee-ho designated herself as a supporter and patron of the adopted Koreans, and as a result during President Kim’s term the adoption issue was firmly put on the country’s political agenda, even if he was not able to stop the practice itself when strong voices again demanded it at the time of the 2002 World Cup, a debate which was like a repeat of the discussion at the time of the 1988 Olympic Games. Finally, Kim Dae Jung can also be said to have made use of the adopted Koreans in order to bond with their Western host countries just like his predecessors did, while the First Lady
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made explicit demands to reclaim the group by calling for them to identify themselves with, reconnect to and support their birth country.

Nevertheless, close to 2,500 Korean children are still placed for adoption in eight different Western countries every year, and all of them are, virtually without exception, mothered by teenage high school pupils and young college students at secluded maternity homes and clinics affiliated to and sponsored by the agencies in order to secure a steady supply of infants for an insatiable adoption market in the West, whether healthy or handicapped, as infertility nowadays is the prime motive on the demand side and eugenic thinking plays an important part on the supply side, and to continue to uphold a patriarchal and middle-class norm system within the country. Over half a century of international adoption from Korea has produced a population of 156,000 adopted Koreans of whom two thirds have ended up in the US, close to 25,000 in the three Scandinavian countries, around 10,000 each in France and in the Benelux region, and the rest spread out in Germany, Switzerland, Italy and England, and in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. With Korea as the uncontested number one supplier country in the field and history of international adoption, the adopted Koreans make up approximately one third of the 490,000–500,000 estimated international adoption placements that have taken place between 1948 and 2004, and the group constitutes the absolute or relative majority of all international adoptees in every country affected by Korean adoption and are also fully dominating the ethnic Korean or even East Asian presence in many receiving countries or regions.

Representations of adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture

The adoption issue burst onto the public scene in the first half of the 1970s and was firmly established as a permanent media subject from the end of the 1980s. The dominant tendency of government-oriented and mainstream media has always been to be more concerned about the negative image of Korea in the West caused by continuous international adoption rather than prioritising the well-being of vulnerable children and building a modern child welfare system sufficient to care for their needs, combating cultural and social prejudices against single mothers, or attempt-
ing to understand the actual situation of the adopted Koreans in their host countries. However, there is also a counter-hegemonic discourse on the adoption issue, which has its roots in the North Korean critique and the dissident minjung movement of the 1970s and 1980s and which is most evidently discernable in numerous popular cultural representations of adopted Koreans, where various “negative” consequences of international adoption instead are highlighted, underpinned by the ubiquitous Korean trope of han.

If, as expressed in the editorials and column inches written by mainstream media, international adoption is a debatable and deplorable but nonetheless necessary evil and most adopted Koreans are believed to have succeeded in creating happy and successful lives for themselves and besides should be thankful to their adoptive parents and adopted countries, then international adoption is, according to the popular cultural representations, an expression of Western exploitation and oppression and the adopted Koreans are all living miserable and tragic lives, while the adoptive parents are abusing their children from Korea in all possible ways and the white populations in the recipient countries are constantly torturing them with racism and discrimination, including their significant others. These representations of adopted Koreans have appeared in such diverse genres as television dramas, soap operas, musicals, plays, comics, cartoons, popular songs and feature films, and it is reasonable to assume that it is through popular culture rather than through newspaper editorials and columns that images of adopted Koreans have reached a mass audience in the country. The eight popular cultural representations (released between 1991 and 1999) examined in my study were selected only because they take place entirely in Western settings, and they were divided into four groups as determined by their common intertextual references.

Chapter 4 drew on Nira Yuval-Davis’s and other feminist scholars’ understanding of the gendered aspect of nationalism and particularly in nation states, which have experienced foreign domination and colonisation, and where the nation often comes to be represented as a woman who has to be protected and rescued from defilations by outer forces, but who also has to be policed and monitored so that she does not behave improperly and dishonour male power similar to what is perceived to have taken place in the discourse surrounding the comfort women. The adopted Korean in Sinawe’s rock song Motherland (1997) feels alone and rootless, and listens
to the voice of his Korean mother calling him or her to return to Korea. In the song, the boundary between the Korean mother and Korea becomes blurred, reflecting a romantic and nostalgic Korean cult of motherhood.

At the beginning and at the end of Chang Kil-su’s social drama *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* (1991), the airport is once and for all established as the dominant Korean metaphor of international adoption and conceptualised as an example of Marc Augé’s transitional non-place, where adopted Koreans go through their middle passage to draw a parallel to the transatlantic journey during the era of slavery, and change hands and are de-Koreanised and Westernised or the other way around. In the film, the adopted Korean Susanne embodies in her terrible adoption experience the oppressed Korean nation at the time of its colonial domination, and her Korean appearance differentiates her from the Swedish majority population, and she is forever scarred with strangeness and turned into what Sara Ahmed calls an “unassimilable body”. At the same time as Susanne is victimised by orientalist racism, she is also shaming the Korean nation by way of her emancipated Western femininity and, above all, as an unwed and single mother of a mixed race child. Therefore, *Susanne Brink’s Arirang* has to end with Korean nationalism intervening in the form of a male Korean journalist in order to help Susanne to reunite with her Korean mother and reconnect to Korea, and thereby saving and recovering her in order to be able to restore the honour of the Korean nation. However, the nationalist project of reclaiming and recovering the overseas adoptee Susanne remains unfinished and unsatisfied, as there are numerous more tragic and shameful adopted Koreans waiting to be saved and rescued.

Chapter 5 started by reviewing the recent upsurge in studies of hybridity, and chose to make use of the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s notion of third space, which is produced in the encounter between the coloniser and the colonised, and where the hybridised is characterised by a neither-nor, in-between or even beyond state and rendered different from both. In Moon Hee Jun’s fusion song *Alone* (2001), the adopted Korean lives a meaningless and suicidal life, and is inevitably pulled towards the Korean mother and Korea. The album cover with a photo of the singer holding a white boy in his arms is interpreted as an example of Homi Bhabha’s notion of mimicry, namely when the colonised mimics the coloniser either out of a desire for Whiteness or as a result of forced assimilation. By copy-cating and mimicking a white adoptive fa-
ther of an East Asian adopted child, Moon Hee Jun can easily be said to glorify the phenomenon of an international adoptive family, but also to subvert, resist and criticise the hegemonic condition of international adoption as a white supremacist privilege.

The reading of Kim Ki-duk’s drama thriller *Wild Animals* (1997) focuses on the adopted Korean Laura and how she creates a desire for Whiteness in North Korean Hong-san according to Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks’s analysis of what Whiteness consists of, and how she is able to perform and pass as a French woman, as a Korean national, as an East Asian immigrant, and as an orientalist fantasy at the same time in the light of the issue of passing in African-American literature and Judith Butler’s performativity theory. Hong-san repeatedly tries to interpellate Laura into a Korean subject position in an Althusserian way, and gives her a Lacanian imago, a Korean doll, in order to both reflect and identify herself with. In the film, Laura is severely punished for her constant transgressions of the boundaries between Koreanness and Whiteness, and her refusals to respond to Hong-san’s essentialising requests. When Laura kills Hong-san and South Korean Ch’ông–hae and thereby destroying their pan-Korean fantasy and nationalist reunification project, she ends up being otherised by Koreans and Westerners alike and is left alone in an inescapable third space beyond Koreanness and Whiteness.

Chapter 6 began by recounting the dramatic events leading up to the problem of numerous separated families in Korea, with special attention being paid to the colonial period and the years of 1945–53, when the country was partitioned and ravaged by war and what was left of pre-modern traditional Korea rapidly disintegrated. Referring particularly to James Foley’s and Roy Richard Grinker’s studies on the subject, the problem of separated families is considered to be one of the most urgent issues of the Korean reunification discourse, and as the partition of Korea is often symbolised as a family that has split up, the image of a divided Korea seen as a dispersed family has become a powerful metaphor of the Korean nation itself. The adopted Korean of Clon’s pop song *Abandoned Child* (1999), who cries alone and suffers from pain, agony and sorrow, is a good example of the metonymy of turning the experience of an orphaned child into that of a scattered nation, as children just like women also have their special place in nationalist ideology and often come to represent the destiny and future of the nation.
In Park Kwang-su’s psychological thriller *Berlin Report* (1991), it is the adopted Korean siblings Marie–Hélène and Lucien who have been separated and adopted into two different French adoptive families and who long and search for each other, who come to represent the divided Korean nation. As this longing and searching mainly concerns Marie–Hélène who has been abused by her adoptive father, her fate fits well in keeping with the classical Korean narrative, which Sheila Miyoshi Jager calls the romantic rhetoric of Korean reunification, where an exiled and lonely Korean woman is violated by foreign men, but who stoically never gives up hope of being reunited with her loved one and returning to her homeland and thereby restoring national unity. At the end of the film, Marie–Hélène is also rewarded for her stubborn loyalty, resilience and persistence, as she is able to reunite with her biological brother with the help of the South Korean man Sông–min. Finally, Song-min’s in many ways unpleasant encounters with Marie–Hélène, Lucien, and the German adopted Korean Nina in *Berlin Report* remind of the existence of tens of thousands of abjected Korean bodies, who, as inspired by Julia Kristeva, have gone completely out of place and out of control, and who constantly threaten to create confusion and crisis in a prescribed Korean subjectivity, which is taken for granted, since they, in one way, belong to the Korean nation and, in another way, they do not and thus must be seen as parts of Us, but, at the same time, as some kind of Others.

Chapter 7 looked at the recent emergence of diaspora theories, and focused on studies examining the specific view of a homeland towards its diaspora. The introduction also accounted for an overview of the Korean diaspora, citing its expert Lee Kwang-kyu, and the history of its formation starting from the end of the Chosôn dynasty and continuing through the colonial period, the partition and war, and the authoritarian regimes. It was only after the end of the Cold War, after having won the struggle of legitimacy at an economic and political level that the South Koreans could afford to acknowledge the presence of not only a second Korean state, but also the existence of these numerous other Korean communities spread out around the world. Sky’s hit song and music video *Eternity* (1999) tells the spectacular story of two Korean boys and biological siblings who are adopted into two different families in Canada, and who as young adults unknowingly have become each other’s enemies. The scenes of the music video take place in Vancouver’s Koreatown and with Korean immigrants...
Summary and conclusion

and adoptees as the principal characters, and the appearance of adopted Koreans in Korean popular cultural productions like *Eternity* is linked to Arjun Appadurai’s theory of global cultural politics, which argues that many postcolonial nation states are experiencing globalisation and the Western world primarily through and by way of mediated and popularised images of their diasporas and overseas nationals.

The analysis of Lee Jang-soo’s melodrama *Love* (1999) concentrates upon the relationship between the adopted Korean Jenny and the South Korean Myông-su, which takes place in Los Angeles’ Koreatown, an extraordinarily transnational site where the boundaries between domestic, overseas and adopted Koreans are marked with ambiguous difference and contradictory sameness. The huge differences that exist in reality between the groups are largely unnoticed and ignored as Jenny becomes fully Koreanised during the course of the film, and thereby is eventually able to respond to Myông-su’s feelings for her. Jenny’s and Myông-su’s intimate relationship is linked to the aggressive implementation of Korea’s globalisation plan and diaspora policy aiming at building a transnational Korean identity and community according to the specific model for postcolonial societies, which Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc have elaborated on, in order for Korea to be able to overcome the limitations of being a politically divided and geographically dispersed nation. Through this process, the adopted Koreans, who once were shunned and rejected as children of low-class people, or even worse of gangsters and prostitutes, and considered as stigmatised and low-class outcasts, are instead conveniently reclaimed and automatically incorporated within the larger Korean diaspora. Any differences in age, culture, language and nationality, to name but a few categories, where the group widely differs from the majority of overseas Koreans, are disregarded and it reminds of Floya Anthias’s critique of diasporism and careful recommendation regarding the term diaspora, which all too often functions to reinvoke and reify ideas of blood and genetic belonging instead of questioning them. At the end of the film, the love story between Jenny and Myông-su becomes nothing more than a joyous and utopian celebration of the reconciliation between adopted and native Koreans and a powerful symbol for the birth of a global Korean community.

Despite their many and various differences, in these popular cultural works the representations of adopted Koreans all have in common that
wherever they live and whatever their conditions are, adopted Koreans suffer from having been abandoned and exiled, and harbour agonising feelings of isolation and alienation, and loneliness and outsideness. They are also subjected to racism because of their Korean appearance, and are more or less maladjusted and ostracised and alienated from their adoptive families, their host cultures and Korean and East Asian expatriate and diasporic communities. Above all, adopted Koreans desperately yearn for being reunited with their Korean families and mothers and being reconnected with Korea, Korean culture and Korean people. They just wait passively to be helped and be taken care of by the resolute intervention of Korean nationalism, as they are completely victimised and infantilised and lack agency. In the songs and films a clear-cut binary opposition is set up, as Whiteness and the West comes to stand for disease and decadence and adoptive parents are portrayed as egoistic and abusive, and white friends and boyfriends are malicious and evil, while Koreanness and the East is made to stand for solidarity and safety, and, even more importantly, for unity and homogeneity. However, to be rescued and saved by, above all, domestic, diasporic or expatriate Korean men, the adoptees need first to be decontaminated and de-Westernised, disciplined and regulated according to Korean norms and ideals, and re-Koreanised before they are able to rejoin the Korean nation and enjoy the secure protection of Korean male power and be warmly and fully embraced by Mother Korea.

Moreover, it cannot be denied that adopted Koreans also are heavily exploited in the popular cultural works in order to project and articulate internal Korean insecurities, fears and worries, and repressed feelings and social taboos, arousing forbidden desires for Whiteness and creating numerous possibilities for scopophilic pleasures. All these representations are written and produced by and disseminated and consumed among Korean people beyond the control, without the consent and awareness and, most probably, even without the knowledge of the absolute majority of adopted Koreans, ignoring their actual situations and conditions as well as their complex loyalties and dependencies, and their real desires and dreams whatever they may be. Given the enormous power of representations, they homogenise the fate of all adopted Koreans into one stereotypical narrative, instead of acknowledging the group’s multiple and diverse experiences and subjectivities and the fact that there are numerous different ways of being an overseas Korean adoptee.
Between reconciling with the past and imagining the future

So finally, how do I understand, locate and contextualise the role and place of the adopted Koreans for the postcolonial, divided and dispersed Korean nation? To start with the process of international adoption itself, Korea’s own little peculiar institution to paraphrase the euphemistic term that was used for slavery in antebellum America, it is for me extremely important to bear in mind and point out that it still continues and does not belong to some “dark” and “primitive” past in Korean history, which is sometimes easy to get the impression of. After decades of numerous failed plans to phase out the forced mass migration of Korean children coming from Korean governments, and several unfulfilled pledges to stop the practice of child trafficking coming from Korean presidents, Korea is still today one of the top supplying countries of adopted children on a global level. As long as international adoption from Korea continues, the country will of course never be able to come to terms neither with itself nor be able to reconcile with its overseas adoptees. This highly problematic fact makes the issue of adopted Koreans different from the one of the comfort women, even if the two groups otherwise parallel each other in their fates and as products of a powerful combination of Korean patriarchy and Japanese and American colonialism respectively. The colonial complicity of recruiting and mobilising the comfort women is thus reproduced and replicated as a (post)colonial complicity of legalising and processing international adoptions. So in Korea for more than half a century, international adoption has been and is still a machine-like and economically rewarding business for the adoption agencies, an easy way out of avoiding social welfare expenditure for the Korean Government, and a brutal and ruthless self-disciplining method of upholding a rigid and morbid patriarchal, racist and heterosexist norm system for Korean society as a whole.

1 International adoption is simply a normalised everyday practice of Korean society and culture as between 6–7 children leave the country for adoption to the West on a daily basis. Just like Korean women marrying Western men, Western adoptive parents leaving Korea are, according to a special customs regulation, even exempted from paying the otherwise compulsory airport tax in spite of the Korean citizenship of their adopted children.
Besides, even if Korea would stop its international adoption program at this very moment, it will still have to cope with the fact of being the country in the world by far having exported the highest number of its own citizens in modern history. The Korean adoption issue will therefore continue to haunt Korea for many years to come, at least as long as the overseas adoptees themselves are alive, and most possibly even beyond their lifetime considering how the slave trade still makes itself heard of among both supplying and recipient countries more than a century after it finally ended. The Korean adoption issue is therefore undoubtedly a national trauma, which incessantly plagues and torments Korea in all possible ways, as it always threatens to become a manifest symbol of the country’s position as a client state in the world system seriously questioning its glorified state of post-liberationist independence and sovereignty, and as it forces the country to experience painful encounters with its troubled and tortured past. The constantly reiterated and celebrated official Korean success story of a flawless and perfect postcolonial and post-war progress and development instead becomes punctuated, interrupted and challenged by the dark flipside of modernity, in this case by the fact that international adoption still continues and by the embarrassing presence of tens of thousands of Korean adoptees in Western countries.

The unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings of guilt and culpability for having sold its own children, together with a somewhat understandable but desperate desire to disavow and cover up Korean complicity and responsibility, also create a permanent state of anxiety and uneasiness and an unfulfilled sense of incompleteness for never being able to forget that Korea is and will perhaps always be the uncontested leading global supplier of international adoptees in modern history. To be able to fully appease the guilt and overcome both a problematic past and present, again it must be reiterated that international adoption must be stopped immediately to begin with. To reach forgiveness, healing and a reconciliatory state, the goal of the postcolonial project itself, can never come about in a genuine and authentic form as long as international adoption continues. In this regard, I also conceptualise the adoption issue as part of a contemporary on-going Korean reconciliation process, which includes the shocking discovery of previously hidden and repressed moments and events of modern Korean history, like the issues of the comfort women and the adopted Koreans, whose fates for many years were cleansed from the master narra-
Summary and conclusion

tive of the Korean success story by nationalist feelings of humiliation and disgrace. The fate of the adopted Koreans, intimately linked to the social upheavals, ruptures and uprootings caused by Western imperialist projects and the modernisation and nation-building processes taking place during the authoritarian regimes, must also be counted as one of the most extreme experiences of the country’s modern history in terms of displacement and dislocation.

For me, the fact that adopted Koreans have become such a strong matter of concern in Korean public culture in recent years is understandable given that international adoption is felt to intrude upon and disrupt both the family and the nation. The Korean adoption issue therefore reflects and channels strong anxieties of disrupting the unity and continuity of a supposedly homogenous national identity together with a stubborn reluctance to acknowledge other ways of being Korean and different notions of imagining home. The Korean nation, divided and dispersed by Japanese and American colonialism, has obviously huge problems to accommodate the worrying and menacing adopted Koreans beyond the ethnonationalistic rhetoric of portraying all ethnic Koreans as one big family. The Korean nation is instead disgraced and torn apart by Westernised adoptees, whether represented as victimised women and orphaned children, or in the role of hybridised and exiled subjects, who cannot behave properly and who most often refuse to reconnect to their birth country and countrymen in a satisfactory way. At the same time, exiled and expelled as they are, and putting the nation to shame through their very existences, epitomising suffering and pain, they are also promising and guaranteeing reconciliation, reunification and transnational solidarity by way of the love between the adoptees and their birth parents, and the love between adopted and diasporic or native Koreans. This is because given Korea’s modern history and the Korean reunification discourse, most Koreans can most probably easily recognise and mirror themselves in the experiences of the adopted Koreans. In this way, the adopted Koreans are subjected to an ambivalent and contradictory position, as both tragic and shameful symbols of the nation’s historical sufferings and humiliations, and as overseas compatriots turned into valuable assets to the nation’s globalisation drive and the construction of a global Korean community.

The frequent appearance of adopted Koreans in Korean media and popular culture coming back as uncanny ghosts in a most disturbing and
unsettling way and reminding of the dark underside of Korea’s path to modernity can, in other words, both be seen as a struggle to cope with and transcend a difficult past and as a way of envisioning a new and better future for the battered and suffering Korean nation. The image of all ethnic Koreans seen as one extended family, which has been involuntarily divided and scattered after a brutal century of colonialism and neo-colonialism, partition and war, industrialisation and modernisation, and Westernisation and globalisation, and whose members are united in bittersweet *han*, the shared fate of having experienced separation and loss, has thus become a hope for the collective foundation of a postcolonial reconciliation process, the reunification of the nation and a transnational community building project. It is precisely in the interstitial space, oscillating between this still unfinished reconciliation with the past and still on-going imagining of the future, that the adopted Koreans are appearing as comfort children in order to ease and console the homeless and orphaned Korean nation.


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Appendix

Table 1. Number of international adoptions from Korea, 1953–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>1970</td>
<td>1,932</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4,144</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>2,962</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,360</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>1967</td>
<td>626</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>6,159</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>7,947</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2,057</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,899</td>
<td>6,166</td>
<td>46,035</td>
<td>66,511</td>
<td>22,925</td>
<td>156,242</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare

Table 2. Destination by country of adopted Koreans, 1953–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main countries 1953–2004</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Other countries 1960–84</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States 1953–2004</td>
<td>104,319</td>
<td>New Zealand 1964–84</td>
<td>559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark 1965–2004</td>
<td>8,571</td>
<td>Buland 1970</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway 1955–2004</td>
<td>6,080</td>
<td>Ireland 1968–75</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium 1969–95</td>
<td>3,697</td>
<td>Spain 1968</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany 1965–96</td>
<td>2,352</td>
<td>Guam 1971–72</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada 1967–2004</td>
<td>1,841</td>
<td>India 1960–64</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland 1968–97</td>
<td>1,111</td>
<td>Paraguay 1969</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg 1984–2004</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>Ethiopia 1961</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy 1965–81</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>Finland 1984</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England 1958–81</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>Hong Kong 1973</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries 1956–95</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Tunisia 1969</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey 1969</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>156,272</td>
<td></td>
<td>967</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare

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Table 3. Family background of adopted Koreans, 1958–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Abandoned</th>
<th>Family problem</th>
<th>Unwed mother</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958–60</td>
<td>1,675</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>2,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–70</td>
<td>4,013</td>
<td>1,958</td>
<td>1,304</td>
<td>7,275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–80</td>
<td>17,260</td>
<td>13,360</td>
<td>17,627</td>
<td>48,247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–90</td>
<td>6,769</td>
<td>11,399</td>
<td>47,153</td>
<td>65,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>1,444</td>
<td>20,460</td>
<td>22,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,434</td>
<td>2,436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2,364</td>
<td>2,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>2,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2,257</td>
<td>2,258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29,946</td>
<td>28,795</td>
<td>96,109</td>
<td>154,850</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare

Table 4. Category of adopted Koreans, 1958–2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Handicapped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1958–60</td>
<td>734</td>
<td>1,159</td>
<td>1,588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961–70</td>
<td>2,254</td>
<td>2,659</td>
<td>2,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971–80</td>
<td>17,320</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>4,598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–90</td>
<td>30,460</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>16,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991–2000</td>
<td>12,009</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>8,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>1,364</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,379</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1,385</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68,272</td>
<td>3,818</td>
<td>36,539</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Health and Welfare