

‘We Deserve to Be Here’:

The Development of Adoption Critiques by

Transnational Korean Adoptees in Denmark

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Abstract

Contrary to the dominant perception of transnational adoption as an act of goodness, an increasing number of Korean adult adoptees in Denmark have raised critical voices about the political economy of transnational adoption since the mid-2000s. They have participated in the adoption debate not just as individuals, but through collective critiques and mobilisation. This article looks at the development of political mobilisation led by Korean adoptees in Denmark, following their trajectories both in Korea and in Denmark. The article uses two binaries, which have particularly shaped the lives of transnational adoptees, in order to analyse its emergence and implications. First, there is the division between private and public and the restriction of transnational adoption within the domain of private, which naturalises the belief that transnational adoption is a form of family creation, free from the social and structural. This perception not only affects general understanding of adoptees' lives after the adoption, but it also continues to pose challenges to the adoptees' efforts to establish political subjectivity in the adoption debate. I

argue that the adoptees' negotiations with this divide illustrate the need to reconceptualise transnational adoption by uncovering the reciprocity between the private and the public in practice. Second, Korean adoptees occupy a liminal position in Danish national imaginaries that tend to erect boundaries between (white) Danes and ethnic minorities. The adoptees' political project is affected by this division, but they also strive to carve out a new space of politics and explore a radically different way of imagining belonging to Danish society.

Introduction

Transnational adoption has widely been depicted in the mainstream media as a progressive way of creating a family and as a humanitarian act, which benefits both the world's neediest children and childless couples (Altstein and Simon 1991; Hübinette 2014; Kim 2010). In Denmark, the practices of transnational adoption began after WWII, and the initiation of adoption programmes from South Korea (hereafter 'Korea') in the late 1960s greatly contributed to the expansion and normalisation of these practices. In total, there are some 23,000 transnational adoptees in Denmark and of those, nearly 9,000 are from Korea, constituting the single largest origin country (Danmarks Statistik 2007; Justitsministeriets adoptionsudvalg 1985). The fact that Denmark has one of the highest transnational adoption rates per capita among all receiving countries has been read as a sign of success of the practice by policy makers and in news reporting in the country.

However, since the early 2000s, people in Denmark who were adopted from Korea as children have increasingly critiqued transnational adoption. Their activities have become particularly visible in the Danish media during the 2010s. For instance, in January 2014, the left-liberal newspaper, *Information*, featured an article by Lene Myong, a member of a political adoptee organisation, Tænketanken Adoption (Think Tank Adoption), who argued for the need to reconsider the altruistic understanding of transnational adoption and the global structures that sustain the practice (Myong 2014). In October 2014, the chairperson of another political organisation, Adoptionspolitisk Forum (Forum for Adoption Politics, APF), went on *Radio24syv* to discuss the problem in the then recently

amended Adoption Act (Radio24syv 2014). The act prescribed the main legal basis for adoption and its revision process started in 2013. APF argued that the revised law was fundamentally flawed since its main aim was to maintain the status quo of the 50-year-old adoption system and enable Danes to have continuous 'access to children' abroad. This view was shared by Tænketanken Adoption, who launched a campaign in April 2015 called 'Is our criticism invisible? An initiative for and by transnational adoptees'.¹ They called for other transnational adoptees in Denmark to send their statements and photos to collectively express their disappointment with the Act, which they claimed did not incorporate their criticism. Like these, throughout the 2010s, adoptees actively expressed their political views on transnational adoption on several media platforms, from *Kristeligt Dagblad* and *Copenhagen Post* to *Information* and *Politiken*. Their critiques now move beyond the field of adoption and extend to the national and racial imaginaries of Danish society. This article examines the emergence and implications of this political mobilisation led by Korean adoptees in Denmark.²

Korean adoptees' adoption critiques came as a surprise to many Danes, as the practice has been considered largely unproblematic and most adoptees were believed to have been successfully 'integrated' into their (white) Danish families (Elmelund 2012). The common reaction to and consideration of adoption critiques as an indication of failure in the adoptive home is a good example of the existing narrow, binary thinking that has dictated general understandings of transnational adoption: placement of foreign children is a *private* reproductive matter that needs to be understood in 'personal, psychological terms', not in relation with the *public* or social spheres (De Graeve 2015: 72). That is, transnational adoption has primarily been perceived as a means of family formation and this has limited the conceptualisation of transnational adoption to the realm of private. Subsequently, scholarly and public discussions of transnational adoption have also

¹ The original title is 'Er vores kritik usynlig? Et initiativ for og af transnationalt adopterede'. Available at: <http://www.taenketankenadoption.dk/2015/04/er-vores-kritik-usynlig/> (accessed 11 February 2019).

² This mobilisation includes transnational adoptees who are not originally from Korea but the great majority of them are from Korea. Those adopted from Korea and involved in social and political activities tend to hold strong identity as Korean adoptees. Hence, in this article, I use the term 'Korean adoptees' to refer to those who were relocated from Korea to Denmark for adoption.

predominantly focused on issues related to child development, kinship, and family (De Graeve 2015; Hübinette 2005; Weil 1984). Approximately one million children have crossed national borders for adoption since 1955 and permanently settled in countries whose dominant culture and ethnicity often differ radically from those of their birth countries. Yet, transnational adoption has seldom been treated as a form of migration and the impact of relocation on adoptees beyond their adoptive homes has rarely been discussed (Hübinette 2015).³

In recent years, there has been a growing literature that looks into the situations of adult adoptees rather than into those of adopted children and their adoptive parents. However, the primary topics have continuously been of familial and private natures, such as reunion with the birth family or individual identity construction through literature and visual art (for a notable exception, see Kim 2010). Attention is rarely given to the collective and/or political voices of adoptees and the significance of social and public spheres in the lives of adoptees, even though many receiving societies including the US, Denmark, and Sweden have witnessed growing political activities by transnational adoptees.

Aiming to fill this gap in scholarship, this paper explores the development of political mobilisation of Korean adoptees in Denmark. I focus particularly on the relationship and tensions of adoption critiques with the two binaries that I have identified as important factors shaping the lives of transnational adoptees. First, there is the aforementioned divide between 'private' and 'public' and the diminishment of transnational adoption as a private act. This division has a lasting impact not just on the understanding of adoptees' lives after the adoption has taken place, but also on their efforts to become political subjects. Second, transnational adoptees occupy a liminal space in Danish social imaginaries that tend to erect boundaries between (white) Danes and ethnic minorities. The adoptees' political mobilisation is affected by this divide, but they also strive to carve

³ During the 2000s, between 30,000 and 40,000 transnational adoptions are believed to have taken place across the world each year (Selman 2009). However, in recent years transnational adoption has seen a substantial decrease.

out a new space of politics. These two binaries have influenced transnational adoptees' lives and political activities, but they have also guided general understanding of society in the context of globalisation, mass migration, and displacement. I argue that the adoptees' negotiations with this divide illustrate the need to reconceptualise transnational adoption by uncovering the reciprocity between the private and the public in the practice. Hence, by looking at the social and public dimensions of adoptees' political project, this paper hopes to disentangle the violence embedded in these binaries and explore new ways of imagining transnational adoption and belonging.

The current political mobilisation in Denmark is largely led by Korean adoptees who arrived in Denmark during the 1970s and 1980s. I tell the story of this mobilisation from the perspective of these adoptees and base my analysis on the data I primarily gathered between March and December 2015.⁴ I conducted fieldwork in Copenhagen in March 2015 and interviewed ten key figures who led the mobilisation.⁵ Several of my informants work professionally in the field of transnational adoption as artists and researchers. Although the time I spent in Denmark was relatively short, upon my return I continued to follow their activities online and conversed with them via email and Skype. Additionally, between January and March 2018, Skype interviews were carried out with four Korean adoptees, who were not directly involved in the mobilisation but were sympathetic to it and gave important insights as observers.⁶ It is important to note that a small proportion of Korean adoptees in Denmark are currently involved in the mobilisation, and the story I present here does not represent *all* the voices of Korean adoptees.⁷

⁴ This paper is based on the master's thesis I wrote for the MSc in Migration Studies at the University of Oxford in the summer of 2015. After graduation, I continued my research on Korean adoption and revised the thesis significantly, reflecting new materials gathered between June and December 2015.

⁵ All organisations mentioned in this paper are known not just within the adoptee community but also to the wider public. Hence, I refer to them by their real names. However, I use pseudonyms for all my informants since many of their stories combined personal experiences and political activities.

⁶ This was part of my current PhD project on the historical development of Korean intercountry adoption.

⁷ It is estimated that in Denmark there are nearly 9,000 adoptees from Korea. Around 600 are active members of Korea Klubben, a social group for Korean adoptees. Of those who are active in the Korean adoptee community, a small percentage of them are politically engaged.

In her ethnography of the creation of the Korean adoptees' social community in Korea, Eleana Kim (2010) notes that her status of not being an adoptee was one of the challenges that she faced during her fieldwork, since shared storytelling created membership in the adoptee community. Despite my initial reservations concerning how I, as a Korean researcher born and raised in Korea, would be perceived, my informants welcomed my interest in their work and have helped me greatly to understand not just their political activities, but also broader issues in Danish society. This might be because my informants are more used to engaging with the public, but as I had been living in Europe for several years, our common experience of being ethnic minorities in Europe also contributed to the development of rapport as I conducted my fieldwork. The majority of Korean adoptees' political actions took place online, through email exchanges, websites and social media accounts. Offline activities like talks and meetings happened rather sporadically. Hence, a more conventional notion of 'site' did not exist in this case, and I instead focused my ethnographic attention on the main actors and written and visual materials that they produced.

This paper is divided into three main sections. First, I set the scene, discussing the unique liminal position that Korean adoptees occupy in Denmark. Doing so provides an important context in which Korean (and other transnational) adoptees experience their adoption and relocation outside their adoptive homes and struggle to make sense of their belonging to Danish society. In the second section, I examine how Korean adoptees have become critical towards the practice of transnational adoption and collectively mobilised, by following my informants' trajectories both in Korea and in Denmark. I show that the 'Western' notion of the autonomous individual, foundational in the practice of transnational adoption, is paradoxically denied to adult adoptees. At the same time, I also detail how the personal experiences of the adoptees are related to their participation in adoption politics. In the last section, I analyse specific ways in which Korean adoptees develop their political claims and mobilise their activities, negotiating the two binaries, between private and public and between natives and migrants.

Liminal position of Korean adoptees in Danish national imaginaries

The majority of adoptions crossing national borders have taken place between the Global South and the West, making trans-*national* adoption in most cases trans-*racial* adoption.⁸ This transracial aspect has provoked contrasting receptions in adoptive societies: some celebrate the adoptive family as a symbol of multiculturalism, while others condemn it as uprooting children from their birth culture.⁹ And yet, the debate has remained within the realm of the familial and has not considered more broadly what it means for adoptees to live as transnational, transracial adoptees in Western societies. The conversations I had with Korean adult adoptees in Denmark, however, made it clear that the issue of race had significantly affected their everyday lives, particularly in social settings outside their adoptive homes such as schools, workplaces, and streets. One of my informants, Thomas Lynge, related this concisely when describing his frustrating experience at Copenhagen Airport:

When I go to the airport, I feel it [my race]. How often are you being stopped at the airport? "What are you going to do in *this* country?" and I'm like "No, I'm a citizen *here*." (Emphasis added)

This type of questioning, which would not have happened were he a white Dane, makes transnational adoptees' racialised bodies a site of contestation and social stress (Ahmed 2007: 161-162). At first glance, Thomas' experience is not so different from that of migrants and typifies how a narrow, racialised imagination of national belonging excludes certain populations in society. However, transnational adoptees have a distinct positionality in Danish national imaginaries, different from that of other ethnic minorities,

⁸ Inter-country adoption from Korea started after the Korean War (1950-1953) as an emergency measure to support needy children, so the early years of Korean adoption follow the typical adoption movement between developing and developed countries. However, its continued practice in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when Korea was no longer considered a developing country, created intense criticisms both in and outside Korea. The Korean adoptees' assessment of this history will be further explored in the next section.

⁹ It is important to note that this criticism on transracial adoption tends to conflate cultural practices with perceived racial/ethnic identity.

and this creates a unique experience only shared by transnational adoptees. In order to elaborate this, it is first necessary to understand how Danish national identity is constructed.

Denmark has a strong self-perception that it is a small country that contains a culturally and ethnically homogeneous population (Hedetoft 2006; Jöhncke 2011). According to Olwig and Pærregaard (2011), Danish identity went through significant transformation and redefinition with the major loss of its territory in 1864 and the devolution of its empire. Subsequently, the nation-state building project in the twentieth century put a primary focus on internal development, best exemplified in the creation of a strong welfare state, and emphasised the 'cosiness (*hygge*)' of Danish society based on shared history, culture and blood (Hedetoft 2006; Rytter 2011).

The use of kinship images, particularly the notion of 'the family of Denmark' (*familien Danmark*), has been productive in creating Danish national identity, since it has helped people to more concretely imagine how Danes are related to each other through a common ancestry, and comprehend the abstract concepts of nation and state (Rytter 2011). Yet, the idea that Danes share a common ancestry and bloodline inevitably creates a racialised conception of nationhood. This 'whiteness' in Danish national identity neglects the fact that Denmark has always included a population of different ethnic backgrounds (Hvenegård-Lassen and Maurer 2012; Loftsdóttir and Jensen 2012). Whiteness here does not simply imply a fixed category of people, but refers to the situation in which whiteness as a national image becomes normalised and naturalised (Ahmed 2007).

Anthropologist Mikkel Rytter (2011) further expands on the notion of 'the family of Denmark', and compares the position of migrants with that of natives, drawing on David Schneider's two types of family relations: *the order of nature* and *the order of law*. The order of nature refers to family relations created through shared blood and substance, such as the parent and child relationship. White Danes' belonging to the nation is seen to follow this order, as they are born in Denmark and have lived there like their parents and

grandparents. On the other hand, the order of law refers to family relations created through marriage. Migrants belong to this group as they come to the country through granted permission such as work permits and asylum. The so-called second and third generation migrants still fall into this category, as their presence in Denmark is the result of *the order of law* even though they have been born and raised in Denmark (Rytter 2011: 63). In this logic, there is an implicit, yet irrevocable, hierarchy between the two orders: white Danes who are 'real' Danes and migrants and their children who are not. Marianne Gullestad (2002) calls these boundaries within the society, which mark out those who are not 'real' Danes, 'invisible fences'.

In these two orders of kinship, transnational Korean adoptees occupy an ambivalent position. This is because transnational adoption uses *the order of law*, in such instances as the Adoption Act, to create *the order of nature*, the parent-child relationship between adoptive parents and adoptees. In other words, Korean adoptees' relationship with Denmark combines and complicates both orders: they have Danish parents and grandparents like other 'real' Danes, but their citizenship is one that is acquired through naturalisation like migrants. Therefore, the notion of liminality characterises the way in which Korean adoptees are situated in Danish society. One moment, they co-habit the same space as 'real' Danes within the 'invisible fences', but the next moment, they find themselves outside the fences.

This liminal position permeates the everyday experience of adult Korean adoptees, as seen in the airport example earlier. While it is important to note that migrants, who are perpetually marked outside 'the invisible fences', might be subject to even harsher forms of exclusion, what characterises the adoptees' experience is the co-existence of inclusion and exclusion, which creates a sense of confusion and uncertainty as to where they belong.

In elaborating their experience of exclusion, many of my informants repeatedly used the expression that 'they did not have a language' to accurately articulate how they felt. This, what I have called 'languagelessness', emanates from their liminal position in Danish

society. That is, despite their foreign origins, the Korean adoptees grew up in white Danish families where their adoptive parents raised them *as if* they were white Danes. Their upbringings represent not just their adoptive parents' effort to incorporate them into their families, but also the wider social perception, which considers turning transnational adoptees into 'real' Danes as an act of goodness. The expectation on adoptees' assimilation into (white) Danish society precisely shows an inseparable 'social' dimension of the adoption practice. However, concerns and expectations of transnational adoptees' social integration and being 'white' as the norm have not been publicly discussed since the adoption debate has been limited to the private, familial sphere.¹⁰

Within this context, the adoptees' origins and race were largely erased, at least from their perception, and instead, an implicit norm became their worldview: whiteness. Both Ahmed (2007) and Gullestad (2004), drawing on the work of Fanon, argue that white people and black people are caught up with whiteness but in different ways. While white people are blind to their own position, black people see themselves in relation to the white people; and, therefore, are constantly reminded of their difference without acknowledging their (unintended) affirmation of whiteness. In the case of Korean adoptees, whiteness did not only constitute their background but also their foreground as they were raised to see nothing but the sameness *in* them. And yet, despite their adoptive parents' claim that they are 'like any other Danes', the apparent difference in Korean adoptees' appearance, street-level racism, and whiteness in Danish national identity made them feel that 'something was not quite right'. The lived experiences of exclusion were a reminder of their differences, which the Korean adoptees did not learn to accept as part of them. Their habituated understanding of the world did not prepare them to come to terms with these experiences (Bourdieu 1990). Therefore, Korean adoptees' liminal position is a direct source of their experience of exclusion and feeling of 'languagelessness', and has been an underlying social condition under which they have lived.

¹⁰ I thank Mary-Anne Decatur for drawing my attention to the impact of limiting the adoption debate within the familial sphere on expectations surrounding transnational adoptees' social integration.

From personal to political: journeys into the politics of transnational adoption

This section examines how Korean adoptees from Denmark first became critical towards the phenomenon of transnational adoption by following trajectories of individual adoptees. It shows how the 'Western' notion of the autonomous individual, foundational in the conceptualisation and normalisation of the transnational adoption practice, was ironically denied to adult adoptees, and how their personal experiences led to the development of group consciousness as Korean adoptees and adoption activism.

When I embarked on my research, although I was aware of a return movement to Korea by Korean adoptees, I did not anticipate that this would play a critical part in understanding political mobilisation in Denmark. However, during my fieldwork in Copenhagen, it became evident that the Korean adoptees' visits to Korea and their birth family searches were inseparable from their involvement in adoption politics. Hence, I first present a vignette that depicts how my informants typically made their first journey to Korea and experienced their birth family search.

Marie's story

Marie Lindegaard is one of the main actors in the political mobilisation in Denmark. She was adopted in the mid-1980s and brought up in a small Danish town with little exposure to other cultures. Growing up, Marie did not think of herself as belonging to either the adoptee or Korean communities. In 2010, as part of her studies, Marie had an opportunity to travel to China, and there, one of her classmates, who was also a Korean adoptee, asked if she wanted to visit Korea. Having never considered that option, Marie compared her mental distance to Korea at the time to the distance between the earth and the moon. With little intention to search for her 'roots', Marie joined her friend.

It was a typical tourist trip in which they visited museums and beaches and enjoyed parties around Hongdae, an area where young people hang out. On one night in

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Hongdae, Marie met someone who told her about KoRoot, a guesthouse for Korean adoptees that offered affordable accommodation. While she was not particularly interested in its focus on adoption, Marie moved into the place to save money. There, she met several Korean adoptees from different parts of the world with different stories. Marie recalled:

There was, for example, an American adoptee with her son. She had decided to move to Korea to work and learn Korean. When I heard her plan, I was very surprised that it was a possibility.

After her first visit, Marie made several trips back to Korea. She later got a job at a social enterprise and joined a network of Korean adoptees in Seoul. She also decided to launch her birth family search; a process that she did not expect to be so frustrating. When she visited the adoption agency to initiate the search, she was told that she could not directly look at her adoption file, but only be told what was in it by the agency staff. The explanation was that such procedures were meant to ‘protect other birth family members’ who might not like to be contacted. Describing this situation, Marie stated:

There was my information that I was not allowed to come closer. It was part of my life that was in the folder, right there in front of me. It was the most insane and surreal situation I have ever been in. My birth family search was launched, and I could just sit idly. The feeling of losing control and leaving it up to them gave me many sleepless nights.

Marie’s family search experience was far from exceptional. The stories I encountered during my research were remarkably similar. While I will return to Marie’s story again, here, I will first look at two aspects in the birth family search, particularly relevant in understanding informants’ involvement in adoption politics: the search process itself and the discoveries from the search.

According to adoption scholar and anthropologist Signe Howell (2007, 2009), what has made transnational adoption in Western societies conceptually conceivable and morally acceptable is the notion of the 'freestanding child': the central figure in the narrative of transnational adoption or what Barbara Yngvesson (2003: 7) calls 'a story of abandonment'. In this story, a child is relinquished by their mother or found on a street corner and, after going through the hands of relevant officials, the child is declared *free* for adoption. These procedures, which pave the way for the child to make a 'new start', have also guided the broader understanding of adoptees' lives. That is, the abandoned child in this narrative is considered 'socially naked' since it is de-coupled from its biological parents (both physically and legally). Howell (2007: 4) argues that this complete separation makes the child 'the example *par excellence* of the autonomous individual', the central notion in Western traditions of identity and personhood. In other words, the de-kinning status of the child gives moral justification to the relocation and adoption of foreign children by families in Western societies. Their nakedness makes the practice highly successful as the child can be fully accepted by its adoptive parents as their own.

This understanding formed the foundation for the unprecedented expansion of transnational adoption in the 1970s and 1980s. Reflecting this, Korean adoptees who moved to Denmark were expected to leave their past behind and become fully Danish. Most of my informants indeed told me that, growing up, they knew very little about their background in Korea, and their adoptive parents did not have much information on their life before the adoption. Regarding this lack of information, one of my informants told me that, at the time of adoption, her adoptive parents had been told by a social worker in Denmark to treat the child as a 'clean slate'.

However, the notion of 'clean-break' that makes the adopted child the autonomous individual ironically strips the adult adoptees of this Kantian subjectivity, as their past is erased by *others* such as child welfare officials, adoption agencies, and the family courts involved in the adoption process. In this regard, return and the birth family search could be seen as *their* attempt to reconstruct their pasts and identities (Carsten 2000). However, as already noted in Marie's story, this effort to rebuild a sense of agency was undermined

by adoption agencies that took over the adoptees' family search. The absence of control over their search process, including direct access to their adoption files, was a source of anger and frustration for most of my informants.

Secondly, the discoveries during the search process also had a profound impact on adoptees. In the last two decades, with the rising number of adoptees returning to their countries of origin, reunion with the birth family has provided ample inspiration for the mainstream media in both countries of origin and adoptive countries. For instance, TV programmes *Ach'im Madang- Kŭ Sarami Pogosip'ta* (Morning Forum: I Want to Meet This Person) in Korea and *Sporløst* (Traceless) in Denmark follow emotional journeys of adoptees' search and reunion: from their longing for the unknown past and the birth family and desperate search processes to dramatic and eventual reunion and discovery of their 'true' self. These programmes have attracted huge audiences and contributed to the belief that one's identity is in fact rooted in their 'origin' and, therefore, adoptees can connect with their 'genuine' identity and become 'complete' through the family search (Yngvesson 2003).

However, most of my informants denounced these popular expectations. They claimed that far from finding the last piece of the puzzle that would complete their lives, what they discovered was more unsettling. The 'simple' story of poverty and abandonment, told to my informants throughout their lives, was disrupted by the multi-layered stories that they learned in Korea. Many of my informants found out that, while poverty was one of the reasons, there were other complex factors, such as social stigma against unwed mothers and family crises like divorce or death, which affected their adoption and blurred the boundary between voluntary and involuntary relinquishment.¹¹ Some of my informants also told me that they discovered misinformation in their adoption files, which seemed to have been deliberate in order to facilitate their adoption. For instance, one of my informants thought she was abandoned and institutionalised outside Seoul prior to the

¹¹ It is important to recognise that the stories given to my informants are constructed from the point of view of their birth families, which require further examination. However, these stories commonly revealed the devastating impact that Korea's highly gendered industrialisation and modernisation had on some of the most marginalised people in Korea.

adoption according to her adoption records. However, during the search process, which she initiated in her mid-20s, she learnt that she was in fact directly relinquished by her unwed mother to the adoption agency right after her birth in Seoul.

These discoveries and discrepancies they found had profound impacts on their identities as well as pushing them to re-evaluate their adoption. Yuval-Davis (2011: 14) argues that identities are stories that 'people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)'. This means that identities help people to make sense of themselves and the world around them (Hall 1992). In this construction, time becomes an essential element: identity narratives draw on the past as a point of reference; they aim to explain the present; and they project future trajectories based on individuals' hopes and concerns (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). For instance, my informant mentioned above built her identity based on the little information she had from her adoption documents and formed a special attachment to the city in which she thought she had been found, which turned out to be irrelevant to her life after some twenty years of adoption. Hence, the discrepancy that the adoptees found from the family search destabilised their existing narratives, rather than giving them a sense of completeness. The frustration over the myth of becoming complete as a result of the family search is well-described by another informant:

I would say I never found my roots in Korea, I found a hole full of garbage. It's not like my family [in Korea] is harmonious. They have a lot of issues. So does my family in Denmark. It doesn't make me complete. It's going to be a lifelong personal trip for me to connect with my siblings and my father. (Thomas Lynge)

Adoptee community in Korea

The birth family search had a profound impact on my informants' assessments of their adoptions. But, despite their significance, it is important to note that the searches did not *automatically* make them look at the global inequalities behind transnational adoption or

become critical towards the practice more generally. Instead, they could have interpreted their cases as an unfortunate exception rather than part of the broader social issue.

An important factor that helped my informants to situate their personal cases in the wider social context was the presence of the large adoptee community in Seoul. As indicated in Marie's story, Seoul has become a point of return and a meeting point for Korean adoptees. Korean adoptee communities first emerged in their respective adoptive countries in the late 1980s and early 1990s. For instance, in Denmark, Korea Klubben (Korea Club) was formed in 1990 and similar local groups were created in countries like Sweden, the Netherlands and the US. These groups arranged trips to Korea, and adoptee organisations such as GOA'L (Global Overseas Adoptees' Link) were established in Seoul to support returned adoptees. ICAA (The International Korean Adoptee Association), an umbrella organisation that includes over 10 Korean adoptee groups across the world, was created as a result of the growing sense of a global Korean adoptee community in 2004 (Kim 2010). As a result, it is estimated that every year, around three to five thousand adoptees visit Korea, and additional hundreds of adoptees live there on a long-term basis. The existence of this large adoptee community in Korea meant that when they faced troubles with the search, Korean adoptees had more opportunities to share their experiences with each other, assess their personal situations collectively and place them onto the broader historical and social context.

Transnational adoption from Korea first started after the Korean War (1950-1953) as an emergency measure to help children in distress, but, of the total 200,000 Korean overseas adoptions, less than 10 percent were arranged during the post-war and reconstruction period. Instead, the practice expanded and experienced its heyday during the 1970s and 1980s, when the country experienced rapid economic development. The majority of transnational adoptions after 1970 were due to out-of-marriage births. Many of returned adoptees learnt this history through their own personal search and was greatly troubled to find out that the continued demand for adoptable children from Western countries including Denmark induced what they considered unnecessary separation of vulnerable

families, dubious conduct by relevant agencies and the underdevelopment of domestic solutions to support needy children and families in Korea.

This collective reading of their personal stories enabled a strong group consciousness among Korean adoptees, which is considered an important explanatory factor in understanding individuals' political participation (Conover 1984; Miller, Gurin, Gurin and Malanchuk 1981). When individuals understand their social situation (such as in adoptees' adoption and birth family search) as resulting from their (or their families) belonging to a particular group that is systematically discriminated against in society, this group consciousness can have a significant impact on their political participation. It is therefore not surprising that the first adoptee activist groups were formed *in* Korea in the early 2000s. Groups like ASK (Adoptee Solidarity Korea) and TRACK (Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea) were created to demand easier access to information about their adoption and to challenge the continued practice of overseas adoption to the Korean government. Marie told me that she also joined ASK after her lengthy birth family search and eventual reunion with her birth family, in order to translate her complex feelings into political actions. In fact, many of my informants became (and some still are) part of these activist groups in Korea before they returned to Denmark.

The implication of their involvement in adoption politics regarding the concepts of agency and identity will be further explored in the next part, but here, I revisit the notion of 'languagelessness' and racism discussed in the first section and look at how they can be read in conjunction with the adoptees' critical view of transnational adoption. It was mentioned in the introduction that transnational adoption has largely been considered unproblematic in Denmark and even celebrated for providing loving homes to the world's neediest children. As Katrien De Graeve (2015: 78) aptly points out, the saviour narrative in the adoption field has its footing on the sharp division between enriching home environments and damaging institutional settings. This is another example that limits our understanding of transnational adoption to the realm of private and familial. From the point of the individual adoptive family, transnational adoption is an act of goodness that saves needy children. However, the picture of transnational adoption becomes much

more complicated when its social, structural and global dimensions are included, as described above.

I argue that adoptees, who felt that something was not quite right in Denmark despite the claim of full inclusion in the adoptive family, have been given a better framework to understand their feelings of marginalisation and exclusion through their return trips and structural understanding of transnational adoption. Yet, this does *not* mean that transnational adoption *caused* racist experiences of adoptees or adoptees attribute their feeling of exclusion entirely onto their adoption. Rather, through their experiences in Korea, the adoptees learnt that transnational adoption is sustained through socio-economic inequalities between countries, and that their racialised bodies in Western societies are the very embodiment of this uneven power structure. Furthermore, their experiences of racism and exclusion in Danish society pose a serious question to the adoption narrative of a 'clean break' and full inclusion. Rather, they direct attention to the hierarchies and inequalities that distinguish and privilege (white) Danes from ethnic minorities. Overall, the adoptees' return journey and critical understanding of transnational adoption gave them a lens to better comprehend the colour-blind approach embedded in both the saviour narrative of transnational adoption and the Danish national imaginaries. Further to this, the development in Denmark in the adoption field provided an important impetus to the creation of political mobilisation by the Korean adoptees, which will be discussed in what follows.

Political mobilisation in Denmark

As mentioned briefly above, Denmark was one of the first adoptive countries that saw the creation of adoptee organisations. Korea Klubben was established in 1990 to provide a social platform for adult Korean adoptees, and today it has about 600 active members. As its aim is to foster social exchanges among Korean adoptees in Denmark, political

activities have not been a core part of the group.¹² It was in 2004 that the first public critique of transnational adoption appeared in Denmark, and the timing reflects the return movement of Korean adoptees to Korea in the late 1990s (Myong and Kaisen 2015). An adoptee artist group called UFOlab (Unidentified Foreign Object Laboratory) was formed and organised art projects that challenged the adoption discourses and practices. While an increasing number of Korean adoptees raised critical voices in the realms of art and academia throughout the 2000s, these critiques were made predominantly on an individual basis and were highly sporadic.

The main argument made by these adoptees is well depicted in the work of Korean adoptee artist Jane Jin Kaisen, who was a member of UFOlab. In a mockumentary, *Adopting Belinda* (2006, See Figure 1), a Danish TV host visits an Asian-American couple, Mr and Mrs Anderson, in Minneapolis, who adopted a white baby girl named Belinda from Denmark. In the film, the couple explain why they adopted a child and during the discussion on Belinda's birth mother, Mr Anderson explains:

There's also this issue with... well, in Denmark... you know that... I mean, they drink a lot... especially young people... and... it's a country where even women smoke a lot. So, it's not only that we're helping Belinda. In a way we're also helping the Danish people because she'll...I mean, her chances of getting a good life... You cannot compare with if she would have stayed in Denmark, it's impossible, [...]

Mr Anderson's remark reveals that in the discourses on transnational adoption, the naturalising and derogatory narrative on 'others' has been an important part in the story of saving children, who would otherwise have been (physically and socially) 'naked' in their birth countries. More importantly, by reversing the racial order and powerfully using their racialised bodies in the film, Kaisen highlights the lopsided nature of adoption flows,

¹² It is though important to note that Korea Klubben has sought to improve services and support available for transnational adoptees in Denmark, including the proposal of Post Adoption Services for adoptees back in 2003.

and the reality that transnational adoption is a practice of privilege only enjoyed by well-off individuals in Western societies.



Figure 1. Jane Jin Kaisen, *Adopting Belinda*, 2006¹³

In line with these individualised voices, during the mid-2000s there was an attempt by a small group of Korean adoptees to insert a more political side into Korea Klubben. My informant, Anne Ji Thorup, a long-time member of the group, was one of them and here she explains the need she felt for a political space:

One of the things I lacked in Korea Klubben was a political standpoint. [...] I was slowly developing a critical sense towards adoption through my own adoption search, but I lacked that part in Korea Klubben. When you went out to 'opinionate' yourself in the public, you always had to stress, 'This is my personal opinion'. And I thought that was a shame.

¹³ Reproduced with permission of the artist Jane Jin Kaisen from the website <http://janejinkaisen.com/>.

This attempt, however, sparked a heated discussion within the group, since the majority of members did not support the idea of taking an explicitly critical stance. This conflict becomes more intelligible once the general interpretation of adoption critiques by adoptees is understood. There has been a tendency, in public as well as amongst adoptees, to interpret adoptees' critiques on transnational adoption as a sign of their bad adoption experiences (Kim 2010; Myong 2013). In other words, it has often been assumed that adoptees' critiques are caused by their negative upbringings, and therefore, connote disapproval of their adoptive parents and, to a certain extent, their lives as adoptees. Many members of Korea Klubben therefore understood the inclusion of political voices as posing an existential challenge to the group, and in the end, the group decided not to take a critical stance officially. This conflict provides a prelude to the precarious position that adoptees occupy when entering the politics of transnational adoption, which will be further discussed in the next section.

The adoptees' critiques were voiced throughout the 2000s, but they were rarely covered in the media and few people were aware of them. However, the turning point came in 2012, when Danish mainstream media featured two adoption cases from Ethiopia, known as the Amy and Masho cases. The centre-left newspaper, *Politiken*, published the story of Amy in a series by journalist Dorrit Saietz in June 2012. Amy, who was then 10 years old, but appeared as six in her adoption file, was adopted with her younger sister by a Danish couple in 2009. Diagnosed with HIV, their biological mother was allegedly persuaded to give them up for a better future. In her new home in Denmark, Amy struggled to adapt, and her adoptive parents gave her up after 18 months. Amy's claim that her adoptive parents had beaten her was ignored and she was put in foster care. When the municipality was attempting to forcefully remove her to an orphanage, the media took up the case.

In November 2012, TV2 broadcast the documentary 'Mercy Mercy – A Portrait of True Adoption' by Barbara W. Kjær, which tells a remarkably similar story. The documentary follows the adoption story of a four-year old girl, Masho, and her younger brother who had living parents in Ethiopia. In Denmark, Masho experienced difficulties and developed

adjustment issues, which led her adoptive parents to eventually give her up. Both stories came as a shock to the public, who firmly believed in the benefits of transnational adoption for all parties involved. The stories exposed the business side of the adoption industry and showed that neither of these cases was in the best interests of the child. The debate grew rapidly, and politicians from across the political spectrum recognised the need to improve the adoption system, including a revision of the Adoption Act.

The Korean adoptees followed this process closely and developed several initiatives to more systematically mobilise their critiques and better engage with the public and the political system. At the general meeting of Korea Klubben, a decision was made to create a separate political platform. A small group of adoptees established Tænketanken Adoption in 2012. In parallel, another group of Korean adoptees formed an activist group on Facebook. Following the two Ethiopian cases, more people got involved and, in 2013, the group became a registered NGO called Adoptionspolitisk Forum. Both groups include adoptees not from Korea, but the majority of the board members are Korean adoptees. In addition, other smaller groups like Adoptionstrekanten (Adoption Triangle) and discussion groups have appeared on social media since 2012. These groups have organised public talks, published articles and books and engaged with the media to raise public awareness on the structural inequalities underlying transnational adoption.¹⁴

Here, returning to the notions of agency and identity discussed at the beginning of this section, how can the Korean adoptees' involvement in adoption politics and mobilisation be understood? The adoptees' search for their birth families was a personal journey that they took to create and affirm their identity narratives. The personal search does not necessarily mean that it is free from the political, as the construction of 'I' always

¹⁴ Some selected media coverage include: Elmelund (2012, August 2) Adoptionssystemet skal nytænkes [The adoption system must be reconsidered], Information; Glaffey and Landvad (2014, February 21) Kære Lars Bukdahl, du taler fra en privilegeret position, racisme og homofobi er ikke en del af din hverdag, [Dear Lars Bukdahl, you speak from a privileged position, racism and homophobia are not part of your everyday life], Information; Adoptionspolitiskforum (2015, April) Tale om adoptionssystemet i Danmark [Talk about the adoption system in Denmark], Mosaik; Sørensen, (2015, August 19) Er det etisk forsvarligt at adoptere et barn fra et fattigt land? [Is it ethical to adopt a child from a poor country?], Kristeligt Dagblad; Andersen (2015, August 26) Adopterede: Hvorfor lyttede I ikke? [Adopted: Why did not you listen?], Information; and Gaonkar (2016, May 8) Adoption er jo ren menneskehandel [Adoption is pure human trafficking], Politiken.

simultaneously creates 'non-I' and this can reveal the underlying power structure that shapes this process (Yuval-Davis 2011). However, the adoptees' political mobilisation is qualitatively different from their birth search, because, through the mobilisation, they strive to challenge the very power structure and redraw the boundaries of the field of transnational adoption. The following mission statement of Adoptionspolitisk Forum depicts this point well:

In Adoptionspolitisk Forum we aim to contribute new perspectives to the adoption debates, in order to refine the long-held perception on transnational adoption as something inherently good for the children. We [Adoptees] want to be considered as *experts* on our own experience and therefore believe that we should be consulted on the same lines as other parties. (Emphasis added, my translation)

The statement makes clear that the adoptees are arguing for their inclusion as important stakeholders in the field of transnational adoption. Through the mobilisation, the adoptees are moving beyond the individualised construction of the self, as seen in the birth family search, and enter the realm of *the politics of identity*. In other words, what they are constructing is not just autonomous subjectivity, but *political* subjectivity in the very realm that gave rise to their life as transnational adoptees. It is within this context that one of my informants described the adoptees' involvement in adoption critiques as 'a rite of passage' that one undergoes to transform into a political *being*.

Walking the line: negotiating two binaries in mobilisation

The last section looks at specific ways in which the adoptees develop their political claims and mobilise their activities in Denmark. The two binaries – the divide between private and public and the distinction between natives and migrants – continuously affect their political project. I focus my analysis on the ways in which the adoptees negotiate these tensions in their mobilisation.

Personal 'or' political

For most adoptees, asserting themselves as political subjects in the field of transnational adoption has not been straightforward, as briefly indicated in the dispute caused by the group of adoptees who tried to incorporate political voices into Korea Klubben. It was mentioned that there is a common perception to treat adoptees' critiques on transnational adoption as deriving from their negative, unhappy adoption experiences. The limitation of transnational adoption to the domains of the private and the familial leads to this narrow interpretation that everything adoptees do and say (about adoption) is caused by their personal adoption experiences. And within this purview, the adoption experiences only refer to adoptees' upbringing in the adoptive home and their relationship with the adoptive parents, not to broader experiences in diverse social settings. This interpretation feeds the general tendency of disregarding adoptees as 'professional' actors in the adoption debate, since their views are seen to have been affected by their personal experiences, and therefore inevitably biased. The adoptees' demand to be treated as 'experts' and qualifying actors in the field of transnational adoption, written in the above mission statement of Adoptionspolitisk Forum, could be understood within this context.

Against the collapse of adoptees' political activities with personal experiences, the Korean adoptees developed a distinct strategy of engaging with the wider public. The adoptees erected a solid boundary between the personal and the political, and disengaged themselves from the former in order to claim their space in the latter. This means, when they make political messages on adoption on their social media platforms or through interviews with the mainstream media, the adoptees refrain from sharing their own personal stories.

It was clear from my interviews that the tactic of not using personal stories in adoption critiques was something they pondered upon for a long time. The following conversation with members of Adoptionspolitisk Forum describes this issue:

Anne Ji Thorup: We try to avoid it [using personal stories] and there are so many documentary cases that tell individual stories, so it's easy now to make a reference to Masho or Amy...you know? Because the stories are told. And it's not our job as an organisation to provide even more stories; it is our job to take these stories and raise them to a political level. So we're very aware of this when we are interviewed ourselves.

Author: Okay. Then has it been easy to talk about more structural issues with the media and other stakeholders?

Sophie Thomsen: They listen. They rarely show it in the media.

Marie Lindegaard: Because it's not interesting, because what they want is...they want the poor adoptees to sit and cry...when they're meeting their first family for the first time or how hard they struggled their whole life. So there's no willingness to show the structure.

As bitterly noted in Marie's account on 'the crying adoptees', the combination of the familial, private understanding of transnational adoption with the media's capitalisation on trauma and strong emotions resulted in this pathologizing representation of adoptees, as someone suffering especially from psychological issues stemming from their adoption (Kim 2010). In the predominant adoption narratives, adoptees' agency is hardly recognised: they are either *saved* from degenerating into a naked body in their birth country through adoption or *damaged* by their own adoption experiences. Hence, my informants understood that using personal stories would make them an *object* of discussion, not the very *subject* who leads the adoption debate.

It is against this backdrop that adoptees have focused their discussions entirely on the structural side of transnational adoption. As discussed in the previous section, after all, the adoptees' main argument is of a structural nature: they want to highlight that transnational is 'a form of power', which has been sustained through global socio-

economic inequalities (Myong 2013). In conveying this unavoidably difficult message to the public, the adoptees have kept their argument highly abstract at the macro level, without actively deploying more personal, concrete examples. My informants added that this strategy was also to avoid situations in which personal cases are interpreted as a result of unfortunate adoption placements and 'exceptions' rather than an inherent part of the uneven global power relations that the adoption field relies upon. Reflecting this, the websites of the political groups primarily contained heavy textual content like policy briefings and consultation reports on issues regarding the Adoption Act or the adoption industry and had few case studies or images (particularly of children or adoptive families).

Adoptees' political mobilisation holds significant implications in the field of transnational adoption as they brought the social and public dimensions to the fore where private and familial issues have dominated for decades. Yet, as it stands now, it is arguable if this distinctive style of mobilisation, which denounces personal stories and champions structural discussions, can open up a new space for reconceptualising transnational adoption. As seen so far, the adoptees developed their political, structural debate in direct opposition to the existing private, familial debate. As a result, these two currently stand in parallel to each other, rather than suggesting a new way of imagining transnational adoption beyond the divide between private and public. It is of course important to recognise that this was a rational and tactical decision that the adoptees have taken to establish their political subjectivity. Nevertheless, by limiting their focus to the structural side, the adoptees' mobilisation risks further consolidating the existing attitude that treats the problems and sufferings of those adopted as private issues, not something that should be solved through social and public interventions.

It is also rather paradoxical that, in the first place, their lived experience as adoptees and personal search for their birth families have enabled the adoptees to look at the structural side of transnational adoption and become political. However, as soon as they enter the realm of adoption politics, they divorce themselves from these personal experiences in order to claim their stake in the political space and make their claims heard. Furthermore, another irony is that the current level of public support on the structural discussion of

transnational adoption in Denmark is largely indebted to the two very 'personal' stories of Amy and Masho. These examples show that the division between private and public continuously pose challenges to Korean adoptees who move into the politics of transnational adoption.

Radical belonging

In the first section of this paper, I discussed Korean adoptees' experiences of racism and exclusion and related them to their liminal position in Danish national imaginaries that draw boundaries between (white) Danes and migrants. Korean adoptees' political activities first emerged in Denmark in the mid-2000s and the timing requires more attention with this regard. The mid-2000s was the period when the Danish government was implementing some of the most restrictive immigration policies in Europe and hostile attitudes towards migrants were gaining momentum (Olwig 2011; Rytter 2018). Previous research and several of my informants reported that, in the last two decades, transnational adoptees have faced increasing racism and confrontations in Denmark. They have been pushed to re-evaluate their belonging to Danish society, and many related this to the growing public acceptance of discriminatory treatments of migrants (Elmelund 2012). This indicates that anti-immigration sentiment and the proliferating public debates on migrants seem to have opened up 'a problematic space' for adoptees. This space is problematic in that adoptees have become subject to more frequent and harsher exclusion and racism, but it also created a social condition in which adoptees could more seriously explore their individualised feelings of exclusion. Hence, it was not only the development in the adoption field that impacted the adoptees' mobilisation, but the broader social discussions on immigration also continuously affected it.

Earlier, I argued that the adoptees' involvement in adoption politics should be understood as their efforts to construct political subjectivity. With regard to their liminal position in Danish society, I would add that the mobilisation also creates an 'internal' space for the adoptees where they can share their experiences and comprehend their

‘WE DESERVE TO BE HERE’

feelings of ‘languagelessness’ together. In describing what roles his organisation plays for other transnational adoptees, Thomas explains succinctly:

They [transnational adoptees] have felt isolated, as they are surrounded by [white] Danes all the time, so it’s very difficult to talk about these things [the feelings of alienation]. They might have thought about it, felt it, but you don’t have anyone to talk with, you don’t know anyone else [who] thinks like that...then you think “maybe it’s just me.” And I think that’s what makes many adoptees come to our group. You are able to speak out and find people to whom you can actually feel safe to talk about these things.

In other words, through the mobilisation, the adoptees carve out their own space of politics, moving beyond the in-between position imposed by the majority society.

In addition to this internal space building, what caught my attention from the adoptee political groups was their desire and efforts to develop alliances with migrant groups in Denmark. As an example, for one of my interviews, I visited a cultural centre in Copenhagen where my informants were about to sign a contract with the centre to hire a workspace. They explained that they would soon launch a new project, *Projekt Adoptionshuset* (Project Adoption House), and the space would be used to build networks with other minority groups who share similar interests in the issue of race and transnational adoption. Similarly, other informants told me that they had been reaching out to ethnic minority and migrant groups to organise public events and demonstrations against the rise of far-right groups in Denmark.

Although the results of these efforts are yet to be seen, this move has particular significance for the current divide between the Danish majority and migrants. As several scholars on Danish society have noted, since the early 2000s, the Muslim population has become the centre of the migratory debate, and the public anxiety over their potential risk to both the security and culture of Danish society due to their assumed ‘difference’

(racial, cultural, religious) resulted in the ever-widening gap between (white) Danes and migrants (Olwig 2011; Rytter & Pedersen 2014; Rytter 2018). As I described earlier, in this divide, transnational adoptees partially belong to the majority group due to their Danish parents and fluency in Danish culture. However, instead of attempting to move more fully into the majority, the adoptee political groups have decided to claim their own space and link with migrant groups. This move is based on their recognition that their partial belonging to the majority is the very mechanism that simultaneously pushes them outside 'the invisible fences' and permanently mark migrants out. Therefore, through mobilisation, the adoptees are striving to unsettle this segregating and racially biased way of belonging, and instead exploring a radically different way of imagining belonging to Danish society.

Conclusion

As a practice that crosses national and racial boundaries, transnational adoption rests on and complicates several divides that have shaped our understanding of society: the order of nature and the order of law; natives and migrants; the private sphere (of reproduction) and the public sphere (of state intervention); biological kinship and social kinship. This paper has explored the development of adoption critiques and collective mobilisation by Korean adoptees in Denmark, focusing on their negotiations with the two divisions, between private and public and between natives and migrants, which have particularly affected their lives as transnational adoptees. I have shown the violence embedded in these divisions and explored new ways of conceptualising transnational adoption and belonging.

The restriction of transnational adoption within the domain of 'the private' naturalises the belief that transnational adoption, as a form of family creation, is free from the social and the structural. This paper has primarily focused on adult adoptees' lives in Denmark and their political project in order to highlight the significance of the social and public spheres

in the discussion of transnational adoption. Yet, not only does this perception limit the understanding of adoptees' lives *after* adoption, but it also overshadows meso- and macro-level involvement in the initiation and continuation of transnational adoption. Namely, the preoccupation with the (adoptive) family formation conceals that state and institutional actors and their 'coordination of a range of technologies' (Kim 2010: 71) have profoundly influenced every step of the adoption arrangement: the child's separation from its birth family; confirmation of its orphan status and adoptability; placement of the child to a suitable applicant; creation of necessary travel documents; and transportation of the child. Hence, instead of simply adding a parallel discussion on the public dimension of transnational adoption, it seems more helpful to create a new space of discussion that looks at the reciprocity of the private and the public: for instance, how transnational adoption, as a form of family formation, is directly enabled by the state's welfare policy, and how individual transnational adoptions (silently) assist the state's population management. The rapid decrease in transnational adoptions in the last ten years gives an impression that the era of transnational adoption has ended. However, the adoptees' emerging political activities show on-going legacies of the practice and the need to strengthen and broaden the adoption debate.

In addition, the adoptees' mobilisation highlights the violence in dominant ideologies of national belonging and the intertwined nature of identity and belonging. In Korea, when the adoptees' attempts to reconstruct their identities were forfeited, new forms of belonging amongst Korean adoptees, created through transnational practices, helped them to translate their individual experiences into political actions. On the other hand, in Denmark, the intensification of the circuits of inclusion and exclusion along particular racial and cultural lines widens the disjuncture between legal citizenship, social belonging and one's identification with majority society. The liminal position of Korean adoptees in Danish society raises the question of where they belong as well as who they are.

Through the mobilisation, Korean adoptees are carving out their own space of politics and striving to develop alliances with other ethnic minority groups. While they refuse to conform to the existing order of national belonging, the adoptees are not seeking a

space *outside* Danish society but arguing for new forms of belonging to and *within* Danish society. This is powerfully articulated by my informant, Marie, and it seems fitting to end this paper with her account:

We [the politically active adoptees] have resources, knowledge, plus we also have that extra something that I would call strength and courage. [...] We are not afraid of sharing our visions and dreams. "Like hey, we can do so much more and we deserve to be here. And we want to take territory, we want to win territory, we want to win respect, we want to win this and this and this and this." And I think it's really positive that we transform our own anger into something positive for the community.

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