

## Decolonizing Adoption Narratives for Transnational Reproductive Justice

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**Abstract:** In their article "Decolonizing Adoption Narratives for Transnational Reproductive Justice," Sung Hee Yook and Hosu Kim examine narratives emerging from transnational adoption practices, focusing on how birth mothers' narratives—in which a victim-mother makes choices to give a child for adoption in hopes of a better life for the child, and awaits that child's return—develop alongside and deviate from the normative orders of motherhood. While birth mothers' self-transformative narrative illuminates their subjectivities—apart from victimhood, simmering in the latent form of agency—Yook and Kim argue that a compelling narrative of self-mastery produces another discursive trap which renders the numerous less-masterful birth mothers invisible or unworthy of recognition. By attending to the strong affects resonating in birth mothers' writings, we identify "transnational adoptive kinship" as a new sociality, which emerges out of mutual recognition and acknowledgment of adoption losses. In doing so, we envision a new terrain for a transnational reproductive justice framework.

**Sung Hee YOOK and Hosu KIM**

### **Decolonizing Adoption Narratives for Transnational Reproductive Justice**

The silence of birth mothers has long been embedded in transnational adoption practice. This silence is often interpreted as an inability or unwillingness to speak, or as a tacit testament to their failure in motherhood. Despite - or because of - the few accounts available from them, the figure of the birth mother is firmly constructed as uneducated, a helpless victim of poverty, sexual and domestic violence, and the further social stigma of single motherhood, all trapped in a Third World (and disproportionately Asian) problem. Not coincidentally, this narrative of their silence obliterates their full stories. This imagined figure of the mother-victim in transnational adoption discourse faithfully follows a colonial order of knowledge production, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty observes in her groundbreaking essay, "Under Western Eyes": the homogenization of Third World women obscures "the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives" (19). It also obscures the lasting legacy of transnational adoption through "an imperialist process, born of military, cultural, and economic domination" over sending regions (Nelson 5). Standing with Mohanty's postcolonial feminist critique, we seek to counter the imagery of birth mothers as silent victims in transnational adoption discourse, and to construct more complex visions of birth mothers' lives, thus moving towards meaningful transnational reproductive justice.

Rendering birth mothers as silent victims is as necessary a condition for transnational adoption practices as their present absence. This conceptualization buttresses the humanitarian salvation narrative, in which "white savior" adoptive parents rescue the orphaned child "over there." The distant orphan—the innocent victim of foreign war, natural disaster, and other crises—is refigured as a symbol, through which transnational adoption practices can be couched in terms of humanitarian aid, displacing its (considerable) market aspects. Jenny Hejin Wills describes the politics of piety and pity as taking on the guise of these orphans' imagined plight; its sense of urgency is key to the mechanism of transnational adoption practice (Wills), providing the impetus for what is now the global market of family reproduction. Essential to this politics of pity is that the child be seen as parentless: by presenting all transnationally adopted children as orphans—although an overwhelming number were born to unwed mothers—transnational adoption discourse effectively renders the figure of the birth mother invisible or dead. We thus contend that transnational adoption discourse achieves its humanitarian facade through a narrative in which birth mothers are only legible as victim-mothers, perpetuating a colonial narrative in which they are backwards, unliberated, unenlightened, and economically dependent, and thus ineligible to perform motherhood. This victimology justifies a transnational adoption practice in which one person's reproductive access and privileges are inevitably intertwined with another's reproductive dispossession (J. Kim 819).

In establishing a critical terrain for alternative visions and politics of transnational and transgenerational reproductive justice, we find Fu-jen Chen's call for radicalizing adoption discourse apt:

Adoption should not be relegated as a group-specific narrative of suffering or bliss, victimization or salvation, but as one that can articulate *a universal complaint and launch a global assault on systems of oppression*. Politically speaking, what we need is not a politics of pity, but rather a politics of justice: to disrupt the underlying fantasy and traverse the elementary coordinates of unjust power structures rather than offering assistance out of pity at the spectacle of individual suffering. (164, emphasis added)

Chen's critique of adoption narratives establishes a radical politics for transnational adoption by reminding us that the practice relies on a pervasive and persistent system of multiple, interlocking oppressions, and the subordination of non-White, working-class women and children. His claim should not be interpreted as meaning that birth mothers' sufferings and adoption losses are insignificant and that public recognition is unnecessary; instead, it is a warning that the discursive limitations of the common adoption narrative—in which the figure of the birth mother is only legible as a victim—lock transnational adoption politics into a politics of pity, not of justice.

Fundamental to the discursive shift from a politics of pity to one of justice is a thorough engagement with and analysis of the figure of the birth mother. In this essay, we examine *Dreaming a World* (henceforth *Dreaming*), edited by Sangsoon Han, a collection of 17 writings by birth mothers or single mothers related to adoption. This collection provides useful and rare insights about their lives; nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that they were written while the mothers were living at Ae Ran Won, a Christian faith-based social service agency for unwed mothers in Korea, and their voices have therefore been mediated. *Dreaming* is the end product of multiple efforts, including the process of writing by the mothers; the selection and translation of these writings by Han Sang Soon (then-director of Ae

Ran Won) and her associates; and its publication, distribution, and consumption in America. The publication includes a brief history of Ae Ran Won and an advertisement for donations, emphasizing the mediated aspect of the mothers' voices. We thus read the mothers' writings within the context of the complicated production of transnational adoption discourse, and attempt to tease out the myths surrounding these mothers.

We examine *Dreaming* through three lenses: (1) epistolary: letters as a literary form of life writing; (2) self-mastery narratives; and (3) the possibility of a new sociality via transnational adoptive kinship. Through a careful and critical examination of birth mothers' narratives—wherein they emerge as speakers entering into conversation with many (and unspecified) Korean adoptees, fellow birth mothers, and others—we provide complex visions of birth mothers that defy both the politics of victimhood and that of "free choice," which have long been foregrounded in understanding the nameless and numerous birth mothers involved in transnational adoption practice.

We consider these writings as a collective grievance against the systematic exploitation of birth or single mothers, and against the appropriation of their reproductive choices. Indeed, while our work focuses on reclaiming and reevaluating the lives of birth mothers, our modality of inquiry attends to the ways in which a group of working-class birth mothers become alienated from a quality of life that procures its own reproduction, and are thus compelled to give a child up for adoption. By highlighting and carefully analyzing self-mastery as an enduring feature of collective narratives, we hope to engage in a reading that avoids reinforcing traditional stereotypes of motherhood, thus paving a discursive ground for transgenerational and transnational reproductive justice. Walking a fine line between victims and survivors, we provide a vision of and from transnational adoptive kinship, guided by asking: In what ways does a "transnational" adoptive kinship enable us to imagine a new sociality for transnational and transgenerational reproductive justice? How does "transnational" adoptive kinship enlighten our thoughts and help to pave the way for a transnational adoption justice framework?

### **Single Mothers in the Shadow of Birth Mothers in Korea's Search and Reunion Narrative**

Beginning in the mid-1950s, transnational adoptions of South Korean children were introduced as a special measure to deal with the "problem" of mixed-race children, a population group arising from the presence of international troops during the Korean War and the perpetual war system which followed. In large part though, transnational adoption was fueled by the social stigma against and lack of support for single mothers; out of approximately 200,000 Korean children placed for adoption since the Korean War ended, almost two out of three were born to single mothers. Driven by popular myths in which single mothers are considered unfit and seen as creating potential delinquents, and promoted by newspapers and social work literature as the best solution (or punishment) for unwed mothers' illicit sexuality and reproduction, three generations of working class, single mothers have been pressured to give up their children for adoption. This legacy endures: despite a steady decline in transnational adoption from Korea since the 1990s, the proportion of Korean children put up for adoption by single mothers has increased incrementally; in 2016, 327 out of the total 334 children placed in overseas adoption were born to single mothers.

Since the mid-1990s, paralleling the cultural phenomenon of Korean-born adult adoptees returning to the motherland, the narrative of search and reunion has brought the figure of the birth mother to the South Korean public. She is presented as a middle-aged woman and a victim of poverty and misfortune, carrying pain over her decision to put her child up for adoption in hopes of a better life for them; her grief is finally overcome through successful reunion with her child. Ensuring that the forces leading to the child's adoption are seen as justified, the narrative of search and reunion highlights the adoptee's accomplishments as embodied in their social status, education, or at times, the mere fact of their return. In this way, the choice of adoption is framed not only as a loving act, but as having a successful outcome: by choosing adoption to give her child a better life, the birth mother paradoxically performing motherhood by sacrificing it. In promoting this narrative of the birth mother, adoption discourse overwrites the realities of the single mother.

The emergence of the birth mother figure erases not only the experience of single mothers in Korea, but elides the birth father's roles and responsibilities. This deep silence shrouding the birth father both reflects and reinforces the idea of universal motherhood. The absence of fatherhood has long been regarded as a natural and unavoidable circumstance of poverty; childcare is ultimately considered a mother's responsibility. Furthermore, the portrayal of the birth mother as a middle-aged woman, in the range of their late forties to seventies, renders the mother's sexuality invisible; together with the absence of the father from the discussion, the sexual circumstances surrounding adoption are thus

effaced in favor of a pious mother figure devoted solely to their child's welfare. This adroitly separates the figure of the 'birth mother' from the 'single mother'—a deliberate erasure necessary to the making of the birth mother.

By disengaging birth mothers from single motherhood, the narrative of search and reunion divides birth mothers into two types—the virtuous, pious, self-sacrificing victim of poverty and misfortune, and the sexually promiscuous, irresponsible, self-serving, undeserving and unfit woman. In doing so, it perpetuates secrecy and social stigma against single mothers. This dichotomous treatment provides a cultural alibi for the conflicting attitudes regarding transnational adoption post-1990s: even as adoption is acknowledged to be a deeply painful and traumatic experience for birth mothers, it continues to be the appropriately motherly choice for single mothers.

### **Birth Mothers' Dialogic Conversations with Adoptees**

Against the thick veil of silence shrouding the population of birth and/or single mothers stands *Dreaming*, a collection of their life writings. The mothers' step into a dialogue with children—their own, or unspecified adoptees—through writing letters, the literary form of life writing primarily comprising the collection. Liz Stanley states that "letters are dialogical," in that they are "a communication or exchange between one person and another or others" ("The Epistolarium" 202). Likewise, the preface of the book states that the impetus for the writings came from Korean adoptees, who sought knowledge of their origins; birth mothers responded by writing letters addressed to their children and other Korean adoptees in the hope of "any response from the book's readers" (Han 6). These birth mothers engage in a dialogue that develops around the unfolding communication between them and their addressees, taking turns and exchanging stories.

Providing rare and valuable insights, the epistolary narratives of birth mothers recount their life experiences leading up to their adoption decision. The mothers' epistolary narratives "traverse private and public, having the qualities of both and occupying a 'middle space' in which 'private' letters may be both written and read in public situations" (Stanley 209). In this "middle space," their personal letters reveal social discrimination against single mothers practiced not only in the private sphere of family or other interpersonal relationships, but also at a public and systematic level through various institutions, ranging from hospitals to adoption agencies and religious organizations. In this, their stories reveal systematic violence against women as a mundane fact of life: rape, sexual assault, beatings, family neglect, and domestic violence are an everyday part of the systemic violence against single mothers. A wide range of gender-based mistreatment and discrimination persists specifically in their relationships with the baby's father: Too often, when the woman shares the news of an unexpected pregnancy, the father does not provide support of any sort for her to exercise reproductive choice. Denial of accountability, accusations of illicit sexual behavior, pressure to abort the pregnancy, and disappearance are common trends among these men. While some fathers initially support the mother and are willing to raise a child together, joblessness and financial instability, and a lack of maturity, often force birth mothers to take sole responsibility for the child. In some circumstances, birth mothers falsely claim to have had abortions to avoid harassment from the baby's father and his family.

More significantly, recounting their stories in letters offers a chance for mothers to act as autobiographers, presenting how they came to be the person they are (Spacks 1). Unraveling these long-suppressed stories is crucial for birth mothers, allowing them to create a picture of themselves that has been privately and publicly denied, stigmatized, or sanctioned. The stories sometimes present the mothers as victims of poverty and underdevelopment; other times, they come across as self-realized survivors of gendered violence on unwed women. The tone of their writings is thus not only confessional and apologetic to the baby they sent for adoption, but also defensive, explaining their choices and criticizing the social stigma against unwed mothers. In defiance of victimhood, they frequently testify to the birth mothers' persistent fight against pressure to abort pregnancies, from the birth father, his family, and her own family. One mother states:

An issue in Korean society these days is the very low birthrate due to women's refusal to have children, and the projected decline in population in the future. Ironically, the same society despises unwed mothers who want to raise their children themselves. Moreover, Korean society is very alarmed about the fact that Korea is the world's number one exporter of babies. Then why doesn't our society give opportunities and assistance to those unwed mothers who want to raise their babies on their own? Why does society not want to take a more active role? Is being an unwed mother who refuses to abort her child such a big sin? (Han 73)

In this sense, the writings collected in *Dreaming* generate a collective voice of grievance and social criticism through autobiographical writing.

Assuming the positions of both author and participant in an ongoing dialogue also foregrounds how these birth mothers have started to develop accountability for their heretofore hidden life and choices, and responsibility for the adoptees, any one of whom stands in for their child. This life writing becomes a process of "sharing and healing" the "wounded past" of birth mothers (Han 2). Writing letters enable a mother "to express her feelings" and be relieved from the loss and grief of giving up a child (Dorow 2). In addition, the conversation formed through reciprocal correspondence develops into a virtual relationship between the mothers and adoptees, enabling the mother to perform motherhood by easing "the pain and curiosity of adoptees who are longing to understand why some birth mothers had to choose adoption" (Han 2). With this authorship of their life through writing, single-birth mothers have found a way into the discursive site of transnational adoption.

### **Mastering the Self / a Narrative of Self-Mastery**

In each writing, the birth mother establishes her own narrative of adoption. Combing through her life experiences, and providing detailed accounts of what led to the pregnancy, delivery, her adoption decisions, and its aftermath, the mother testifies to the obstacles she has faced and overcomes them through hope of reunion with the child. As she tells and retells her adoption story, she is no longer powerless or trapped in domestic violence, sexual crimes, or family abuse. Her story should therefore be read as the testimonies of a survivor. These testimonies constitute the subjectivities of birth mothers.

What organizes and drives this life writing is a firm belief in continual self-development and a narrative of self-mastery, overwriting the harassment, disdain, and coercion many birth mothers experience regarding their pregnancy. One birth mother writes that her boyfriend wanted her to abort the pregnancy, and his sister took her to an obstetrician-gynecologist (OB-GYN) who also pushed for the procedure; having been admitted to the operating room, she refused at the last minute to take anesthesia. As she left the clinic, she realized that "the only person who could take responsibility for you [the baby] was me, myself" (Han 26). This is one of the most common experiences through which birth mothers' self-mastery narrative affirms their maternal subjectivity.

Following a decision to take the pregnancy to full term, birth mothers undergo another momentous decision, no less serious and difficult: whether to keep the child once it is born or give it up for adoption. As noted—and as popularly reinforced—the mother often chooses adoption out of a strong desire to give the child a better life. Yet the ways in which this better life is narrated, we argue, stem from comparative and insubstantial optimism. What makes a mother imagine that her child will have a better life anywhere but where she is, is a combination of anticipated social stigma and discrimination that her child will encounter, and her evaluation of her own quality of life: "My decision for overseas adoption was made so she could grow up in a better environment, free from prejudice and discrimination" (Han 50); "I made up my mind firmly because I had lived a difficult life and I could not bear the thought of my baby living as an illegitimate child, as I had" (71); "once I realized how much discrimination and pain she would have to endure, I just couldn't. Instead, I wanted her to go live in a country that values human rights, like the United States." (105). Rather than a vision based on concrete information about prospective adoptive parents and their philosophy of child rearing, birth mothers' notion of a better life is constructed as a last resort against discrimination, pain, economic struggles, and the associated limitation of opportunities in life. Already besieged by social disenfranchisement, birth mothers feel compelled to invest their child in an unknown future.

Often, birth mothers express their decision as grounded in selflessness: "I could not sacrifice my child's future just because of my selfishness" (Han 72); "If I had to give up everything I own to be with my child, I said I could, that I would. But in the end, I didn't want to ruin my child's future because of my selfish desire. I didn't want my child to be branded as a 'child of a single mother' in Korea, a place still overflowing with conservative and judgmental eyes" (128-29). In equating her wish to keep her child with selfishness, a birth mother presents adoption as an act of motherly love, a sacrifice which hollows her out and leaves her bruised. By controlling this perceived selfishness, she then performs more normative mothering, single mothering having been stigmatized.

Within this context, the search-and-reunion narrative serves as a master narrative not only for a public memory of adoption, but for the mother-subject, and adoptee-subject. As it unfolds, a victim-mother overcomes her victimhood by "choosing" adoption for her child, and thus masters her peril and plights through her own actions; this self-mastery then gets rewarded with the returning adoptee's success in life, often signaled by educational and professional achievements, and English language

ability. Through a cosmopolitan sense of success—status-conferring education, multilingual fluency, position as a fully integrated member of mainstream society—the giving up of mothering is transformed, as Eleana Kim eloquently puts it, into “transnational gain” (“Human” 304). For birth mothers, it is another moment through which to master the lost experience of mothering.

Adoptees, too, are realized through a narrative in which their humble beginnings are overcome by the perseverance and self-mastery endowed in their Korean character. Combined with adoptive parents’ offering of better life opportunities, Korean transnational adoptee subjects may master their life by reclaiming or revisiting the most difficult part of it—Korea and their life before adoption. The successful search and reunion are the culmination of their masterful endeavors.

The birth mother’s mastery of motherhood culminates in a (collective) wish for reunion with her adopted child. As one said, “I would like to be a proud mother, rather than an ashamed one” (Han 52). For many, overcoming shame entails self-indoctrination of hard work ethics, education, perseverance, financial stability, and ultimately marriage, and becoming a (legitimate) mother. A birth mother who now is married with four children prepares for reunion—and the adoptee’s reintegration into her family—by “sav[ing] a part of my salary for her in a savings account” (52-53). Echoing a neoliberal human subjectivity through self-improvement and expanding human capital, birth mothers overcome their old selves to fulfill a narrative of self-mastery symptomatic of contemporary global, neoliberal capitalism (Singh 18).

While this narrative brings a sense of empowerment and defies the victimhood trope of ‘humanitarian’ transnational adoption discourse, it also tends to maintain the normative orders of a deserving and good motherhood, and therefore the status quo of transnational adoption. As the mothers strive to become “a mother who a child would not feel ashamed of,” they follow a normative set of beliefs about good motherhood, an exclusionary practice that confirms single motherhood as immoral and inadequate. They also thus reinforce a blind belief in the association of a better life with the Western world; the tautological order of the belief in a better life elsewhere affirms the humanitarian order of global geopolitics. Furthermore, because adoption choices are often due to the social stigma against single motherhood in Korea, the self-mastery narrative inadvertently replaces poverty as a driver of adoption decisions with single motherhood, perpetuating the assumption of the Others’ cultural backwardness.

Not only does this self-mastery perpetuate an exclusionary logic of motherhood—as well as a salvation narrative via transnational adoption—it tends to obviate the sense of urgency and understanding of transnational adoption practice in terms of transgenerational and transnational reproductive injustice. The single mothers in *Dreaming* testify to a wide range of interpersonal and institutional violence over their “improper” sexuality and reproduction. As illustrated in the essay title “Worse than Criminal,” it is not uncommon for single mothers to experience the deception and disappearance of the baby’s father, insults from coworkers, unresponsive and uncooperative attitudes from medical staff regarding delivery, and the adoption agency’s indifference to requests for information about the child put up for adoption. In the face of “injustices, especially toward unwed mothers... I came to a realization that we, the unwed mothers, must change our attitude before we can expect Korean society to change” (Han 73). Thus, while self-actualization for birth mothers can be social transformation—“rather than waiting for Korean society to change, I must change first, before I can ask the world to accept me” (185)—this emphasis on the narrative of self-mastery obscures the necessity of a thorough investigation into the interpersonal and institutional abuses forcing single mothers into and pervading their experiences.

Likewise, another feature of the self-mastery narrative seen in the collection is the progressive logic of single mothers’ reproductive choices, from standard adoption to adoption with more options, such as transnational adoption placement after a visit to agencies and meeting with adoptive family in the U.S., to domestic adoption, and family preservation. This may partially reflect a gradual shift in the environments—familial, economic, cultural, and legal—in which childrearing can be considered a viable option; however, without nuanced commentary, it might just as well solidify a colonial narrative of time and progress in light of women’s reproductive rights. Furthermore - or, therefore - this newly emerging modality of family preservation might discipline and normalize women’s reproductive choices following pronatalist policy.

### **Beyond Blood: Transnational Adoptive Kinship, a New Sociality Towards Transgenerational and Transnational Reproductive Justice**

Throughout the collection, birth mothers acknowledge the pains and plights of their fellow birth mothers, sharing a sense of togetherness and solidarity with one another. They see their individual stories as speaking to a collective experience: “By reading this story,” writes a birth mother, “it is my humble wish for adoptees to understand where the mothers come from and why they needed to send their children

to other countries for adoption" (Han 55). Through writing, at times in detail too painful to remember, birth mothers provide explanations and seek "forgiveness" for one another: "I hope Korean adoptees will be able to understand and forgive their birth mothers through my story" (57).

These writings are connected by their desire to offer comfort to adoptees, but also, in turn, comfort and console fellow birth mothers. The sense of togetherness and solidarity in *Dreaming* is built upon the women's experiences living at Ae Ran Won, a maternity home. When family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors turned their backs on the birth mothers, they took refuge in Ae Ran Won, where they found "we" and "consolation" (Han 26). A birth mother recounts a Christmas she spent at the home: "As we prepared for the play [as part of a Christmas party], we became one with each other. Each of us talked about our stories: why we were there, how we were feeling, and our plans after sending the babies away. Through the play, we were able to see ourselves in an objective way. We cried and laughed together. We were happy because we understood one another" (62).

By telling and listening to each other's stories of the past, present, and future, the mothers develop a mutual understanding of one another, empathy for others' sufferings, and a sense of togetherness. Though not connected by blood, "We became very close as we shared our thoughts and feelings about pregnancy, delivery, and our babies' futures as if we were an extended family" (Han 70); "Although the people at Ae Ran Won and Seumter [its associated shelter] and I don't come from the same blood, they are a family that I love and they have helped me to become mature. I wish I'd met them earlier instead of having wasted my time" (Han 185). Ae Ran Won thus serves as a place of love and comfort for birth mothers, a family newly-made even as the mothers face painful choices about their children's futures.

This sense of familial intimacy and solidarity provides an instructive lens through which to rethink the term "kinship" in transnational adoption practice. Typically delimited as adoptive family/adopting nations and birth family/sending nations, "kinship" in adoption discourse has long entailed a complete severance of biological kinship. However, careful observation and analysis of the letters collected in *Dreaming* suggest a radical politics of transnational adoptive kinship transcending biological contexts, moving toward real transnational and transgenerational reproductive justice. Transnational adoptive kinship in birth countries may not just refer to recovered or restituted kinship between blood relations, the birth mother and her adopted child; rather, as seen in the collection, it reverberates as powerful, public feelings of mutual concern and consideration for others caught up in the adoption experience. This corresponds to Eleana Kim's description of adoptee kinship as a framework in which adoptees conspire, through various sites of counter-public discourses and practices, in a form of public intimacy and solidarity beyond the assumption of "naturalized solidarity of blood, ethnicity, or territorial belonging" (*Adopted* 87). Transnational adoptive kinship thereby transcends blood relations, or any pre-existing and unified identity.

In the same vein, a feeling of empathy and support for various women's reproductive choices thus extends to, for instance, single mothers who decide to raise their own children and adoptive mothers in the letters (and corresponding commentary) of *Dreaming*. A single mother confesses that she is not able to understand a mother choosing adoption, believing that all mothers should strive to keep their children; yet through her ongoing friendship with a birth mother, she realizes that her fear that "no one would love me" informs her own choice, as does the knowledge that she has support to sustain that choice (Han 152). Her reflection leads her to feel sorry for mothers who has chosen adoption, in understanding that "both adoption and raising a child are the same difficult things" (153). In turn, an adoptive mother's letter illustrates empathy for a birth mothers' pain in "carving out your own flesh," and offers a sense of apology toward the birth mother (142). These accounts, filled with compassionate understanding and acknowledgment of birth mothers' experiences, illuminate a sense of sociality and interconnectedness fostered between birth mothers, single mothers, and adoptive mothers.

What grounds and fuels these forms of transnational adoptive kinship among birth mothers, we argue, is the act of writing. Through this act, transnational adoptive kinship animates multiple registers and enactments of adoption losses, and establishes deep roots in a shared sense of accountability for those losses and a desire to redress transgenerational and transnational reproductive injustice against working class women and single mothers in Korea. By writing, the birth mother travels across geographical and generational distances, reconnecting not only with her lost child, but all adoptees and the numerous, nameless birth mothers involved in transnational adoption practice. Through active engagement with adoption loss, multiple subjects constitute transnational adoptive kinship, thus challenging the rigid boundary between birth mothers who place a child for adoption and non-birth mothers, whether single mothers and adoptive mothers. Transnational adoptive kinship as a concept thus invites anyone to share in and take up a historic responsibility, without assuming a pre-existing identification or allegiance, or entailing exclusive belonging (Yoneyama 168). In this kinship, birth mothers are neither victims awaiting salvation nor purely individualistic agents justified by self-mastery;

they exist as a community-to-come together in pursuit of historical redress over 65 years of child displacement and reproductive injustice.

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