Introduction

Understanding Transnational Korean Adoption

In May 2006, coinciding with South Korea's second annual "Adoption Day," the National Assembly member Ko Kyung Hwa unveiled a proposal for the reform of adoption legislation. Her proposal's main item was a plan to discontinue the nation's overseas adoption program, a fifty-three-year-old social welfare policy that spanned nearly the entire history of the Republic of Korea. A few months later the government announced major expenditures for a range of adoption-related projects, all of which were directed toward promoting domestic adoption, such as monthly subsidies for parents who adopted children, state coverage of adoption fees, a loosening of eligibility requirements so as to include older parents and single individuals, and the implementation of "adoption leave" (*ibyang hyuga*)—the adoption equivalent of maternity leave. In addition, to encourage "domestic adoption first" and provide an opportunity for domestic adopters to be located, children would be deemed ineligible for overseas adoption for a period of five months (with exceptions made for children with congenital disabilities) (C. Park 2006).

This announcement received plenty of media coverage in the South Korean press, but its repercussions were felt well beyond the nation's borders. In the United States and Europe, expectant parents who were waiting for their referrals—assignments of a child by a Korean adoption agency—were informed by their local adoption agencies that they might experience further delays in placements, and, in anticipation of the imminent end to the program, some Western agencies refused to accept any more

applications for Korean adoptions. On electronic discussion boards, parents spoke of "switching programs," meaning that they would seek to adopt from another country such as China. This transnational ripple effect was not without precedence, and some social workers reportedly believed that it was just another predictable installment in a long series of aborted plans by the South Korean state to end overseas adoption, which has been a continual source of shame and embarrassment for the nation (Lewin 1990; Chira 1988b).

In fact, a similar constellation of events took shape in the 1970s when South Korea announced the suspension of foreign adoptions due to censure by the North Korean government, which vilified South Korea's commodification of children as the logical end point of capitalism. As a consequence, adoptions to Scandinavian countries were disrupted between 1970 and 1975 and only resumed following "intense lobbying" by European governments (Hübinette 2004). American agencies and adoptive parents also reportedly lobbied their local politicians to pressure South Korea to keep the program going, and again in the late 1980s and mid-1990s announcements of plans to end adoption to the West were typically accompanied by vocal concerns by politicians, social workers, and parents on both sides of the Pacific about child welfare and doubts about Korea's ability to provide families for its needy and abandoned children.

That one nation's domestic social welfare projects can so profoundly affect the lives of individuals in the West is characteristic of transnational adoption, which now takes place within a neoliberal global economy, a transnational public sphere, and an international human rights regime nominally held to the standards laid out in 1993 by the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.[1] These transnational intimacies and engagements now extend to children throughout the world, with parents and agencies in the global North holding nations in the global South accountable to often ethnocentric and classed notions of "family" and culturally embedded standards of the child's "best interests" (Howell 2007; Stephens 1995).

South Korea, which in 2007 ranked as the world's thirteenth largest economy in terms of GDP, represents an exception among the so-called sending countries. This exception stems from the fact that it has the longest history of overseas adoption, and its advanced medical services and streamlined process ensure healthy infants within a short period of time,

thereby earning it the reputation as the Cadillac of adoption programs. It is also exceptional in that its demographic profile shares the same highs and lows of other so-called advanced industrialized nations, which are the typical "receiving countries"; that is, it has been among the "lowest-low" fertility countries since 2001 (with the lowest birthrate in the world in 2008),[2] and it has skyrocketing rates of abortion and divorce along with rising rates of infertility. Dire economic predictions based on the shrinking workforce and the aging population mirror those of other affluent nations, yet South Korea is unique in that it sends children abroad for adoption. These paradoxes have reached new extremes—local jurisdictions have instituted monetary incentives to married women to conceive more offspring even as single mothers are provided below-subsistence-level welfare subsidies to raise their children.

Given the precipitous decline in the birthrate and the dark future it has forecast for the nation's fiscal health, it is not surprising that adoption would reemerge as a topic of some political concern. At the same time, however, with an annual average of 2,200 children adopted overseas since the 1990s, the connection between population decline and overseas adoption must be regarded as being largely symbolic. Like the heated debates between adoption advocates and adoption foes, discourses around the "adoption issue" (*ibyang munje*) in Korea have been more often marked by bald polemics rather than nuanced analysis. Over the past few decades, both in the West and in Korea, adoption has been the subject of highly polarized gazes ranging from a jaundiced perspective that views it as a neoimperialistic perpetuation of gender, race, and class-based inequalities on a global scale to a blindly sentimental perspective that sees it as an incontrovertible good or a necessary humanitarian rescue of the world's neediest orphans.

This latest elaboration of familiar debates is, however, notably different from the preceding ones in that there is now a triangulation of voices: Korean lawmakers and Western adoption agencies have been joined by adult Korean adoptees who are actively contributing their opinions on the moral and ethical value of adoption. The voices of some of these adoptees have been considered to be excessively unruly (and, it seems, quite threatening) by advocates of adoption, including agency social workers and adoptive parents. In August 2006, based on information from a retired Korean social worker who was a longtime liaison with Korean agencies,

Children's Home Society of Minnesota (CHSM) announced that a small but vocal group of "unhappy" adoptees living in Korea was influencing the government to prematurely end overseas adoption. Along with the Pennsylvania-based agency Welcome House, CHSM sent out urgent requests to adult adoptees, whom they referred to as the "silent majority," asking them to write letters to assembly member Ko in support of international adoption. Moreover, they detailed how these letters could effectively describe one's "positive experience growing up as a Korean adoptee in this country" in order to counteract the voices of adult adoptees "who have been vocal in describing their negative adoption experiences."

In the end, Ko's proposed legislation died on the table and quickly receded from public view.[3] The letter writing campaign, however, produced its own unintended outcomes and controversies. Adoptees, adoptive parents, and adoption agency social workers, some of them also adoptees, sparred and debated as well as deconstructed and supported each other's opinions in discussion boards, electronic mailing lists, and blogs. Conversations took place in person at adoption agencies, adoptee organization meetings, and among friends, in which adoptees and others deliberated over the politics of Korean adoption, the role of American agencies in the affairs of other nations, and CHSM's strategy of driving a wedge into the adoptee community by forcing adoptees into artificial oppositions of positive or negative, grateful or ungrateful, and for or against adoption.

As these events suggest, Korean adoption is a highly contested, transnational field that encompasses a range of nations, institutions, ideologies, laws, technologies, media, and social groups that hold stakes in its reputation and future. In this book I tell the story of Korean transnational, transracial adoption from the perspective of the adult adoptees who came of age in Europe and North America in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, a period commonly associated with globalization. As the pioneers of both transnational and Asian transracial adoption, these children represented a "social experiment," the outcomes of which were subject to intense scrutiny and debate since the practice began in the mid-1950s. Korean adoptions, determined to be largely successful by social workers and academic experts in the 1950s and 1960s, expanded dramatically in the 1970s and paved the way for subsequent waves of adoptions of children from the developing world into white Western homes. Transnational or intercountry adoption was regarded during the Second World War as a radical but temporary solu-

tion to child displacement wrought by war and its attendant social dislocations. By the 1970s, largely due to the success of the Korean model, transnational adoption became an institutionalized social welfare practice in many nations and a naturalized "choice" for individuals in the Euro-American West.

I began my research at a time when a significant contingent of the first waves of Korean adoptees had come of age, and when a recognizable and self-conscious community, consolidated out of disparate spaces of social activity and discourses, was beginning to give normative shape to a collective "Korean adoptee identity." I frame adoptee discourses and social practices as a "counterpublic," a form of performative "world-making," in the words of Michael Warner, in which adoptees "recognize themselves . . . as already being the persons they are addressed as being and as already belonging to the world that is condensed in their discourse" (2002: 82). The "world-making" of this counterpublic is constituted through a range of circulating discourses and a shared social imaginary and is also made manifest in particular sites of collective action. This book offers a historical and ethnographic analysis that seeks to answer the following questions: What can the emergence of the adoptee counterpublic tell us about dominant categories of belonging—kinship and citizenship—in the context of globalization? How do adoptees negotiate personhood in light of the heightened geneticization of identity and Western paradigms of the liberal individual? How have adoptee migrations and returns challenged the "nation" and its attempts to mobilize diaspora politics in the pursuit of its global aspirations?

In Euro-American societies, adoption has long raised fundamental questions about the connection between procreation and reproduction, the balance of nature and nurture, genetics and environment, and the biological and the social in constructions of personhood and identity. These questions have become more pronounced in the context of biogenetic advances and assisted reproductive technologies, such that formerly naturalized associations between kinship and family and between procreation and reproduction have loosened and become decoupled. Given these developments, Marilyn Strathern proposed in 1995 that we could soon be witnessing an era of "more kinship, fewer relations" (357), in which genetic information alone, rather than actual social relations, could be the basis of self-knowledge. Adult adoptees in my study suggest otherwise. For them,

questions about kinship and identity are not limited to biogenetic information and cannot be divorced from social relations. To put it another way, biogenetic information such as knowing whether one has a predisposition for prostate cancer cannot answer the historically contingent question of why one was sent for adoption. Some adoptees may fixate on genetics due to concerns about heritable disease and mortality, but for many of them, their origins are constructed out of socially grounded notions of kinship, citizenship, and histories of connection and disconnection.

As I show in the subsequent chapters, the Korean adoptees I met made it clear to me that, for them, questions of kinship and identity are intricately connected to broader political-economic and historical processes. The adoptees in my study would not deny the significance of biological connections or genetic information to their conceptions of self, but their views on that significance have altered over time and continue to shift with the ongoing movements of the adoptee counterpublic that exist in dynamic relation to South Korean modernity and globalization. Against views that might dismiss adoptees who seek out "roots" as being overly wedded to individuated, essentializing, and biologistic modes of thinking, my research on the Korean adoptee counterpublic suggests that adoptees construct identities out of kinship knowledge that is eminently collective, contingent, and most of all, social.

ADOPTED TERRITORY

In summer 2003 I was spending my second year in Korea working as a counselor for an annual cultural tour hosted by the South Korean government. On the third day of the program I was asked to distribute meal tickets to the thirty-odd adoptee participants during the short break between afternoon events. I was hurrying down the dimly lit hallway of the hotel in Suwon where we had arrived earlier that day when I ran into Garrett, a twenty-year-old university student from the Netherlands. He was sitting on a low couch next to the elevator at the end of the hall. After only a few days, Garrett had already distinguished himself within the group with his shaved head, cheerful demeanor, slapstick humor, and well-appointed wardrobe. Just the day before he had told me that he felt 100 percent Dutch, and we had a somewhat strained conversation about the politics of assimilation and new immigrants in Europe. Now he was sitting by himself at the end of the hall and shyly asked if I had time to join him.

As I sat down he said he knew that I was researching Korean adoption, and he wondered if I could explain to him why adoption is still continuing from Korea. I told him that the majority of birth mothers today are young unmarried women and teenagers and that a lack of adequate sex education and the stigma of single motherhood are a few of the contributing factors. I became aware that in my attempt to keep my answer simple and neutral I was succeeding only in presenting it in an overly intricate fashion. Garrett, however, seemed barely to have heard my winding explication. Instead, he proceeded to tell me about his visit to his adoption agency that day with a group of other adoptees who wanted to view their adoption files. Afterward, the agency social workers invited the group to lunch nearby. Since there were too many people to fit into one car, Garrett volunteered to stay behind to be picked up on a second run. Because it was raining outside he went back into the lobby to wait, during which time he saw an infant receiving a visa to be adopted to the United States. He suddenly began to weep, saying he couldn't understand and it felt so weird to see that. He said it broke his heart to have come all the way back to Korea to see another little baby leaving.

Garrett had been adopted as an infant by well-off parents. He identified completely as a member of his Dutch family and nation, and he was cultivating an international identity—he loved to travel and his closest friends were exchange students at his university. I have no doubt that Garrett, if asked, would say that he had a "positive experience" as an adoptee. But his act of witnessing a child's preparations to leave Korea set in motion more ambivalent feelings about adoption and its necessary prequels of abandonment and relinquishment—emotions that, it should be clear, fall outside the epistemological purview of quantitative outcome studies and compilations of "positive" and "negative" experiences.

Compounding the complexity of these feelings were the seeming contradictions between Korea's rapid ascent toward advanced nation status and its continuing reliance on international adoption. Many adoptees like Garrett grew up imagining Korea as a third world country in which "underdevelopment" made their adoptions necessary interventions, without which they might not have survived and for which they should be grateful. When they arrive in Seoul and witness the modernization miracle of shiny, high-tech South Korea firsthand, however, the discrepancy between the ongoing practice of overseas adoption and Korea's globalized modernity

can be striking and unnerving. For Garrett, his adoption made sense in a setting where third world deprivation was answered by first world charity. When this equation fails to add up, dominant logics of adoption as necessarily in a child's best interests also seem to break down. Garrett was not alone in struggling with the question of why adoption from Korea continues after more than fifty years, as well as with the question of how to understand his life in relation to postmodern Korea and the phenomenon of transnational adoption. In fact, a growing number of adult adoptees are confronting the political and social realities that structured their lives, which have been largely obscured by hegemonic narratives of rescue and opportunity.

Transnational, transracial adoption is often invoked as the actualization of ideals of humanitarianism and the promises of multiculturalism, and adoptees are regarded as potential representatives of postnational cosmopolitanism. Yet adoptee narratives and social practices point toward the limits of these discourses in a world in which categories of race, nation, and family and their frequent conflations continue to structure the lives of individuals in powerful ways. Adoptees embody and expose the contradictions of the global. They are like holographs—turned one way, they appear to be among the most privileged of cosmopolitans, turned the other, they are the ultimate subalterns as "orphaned" and "abandoned" children. For anthropologists, adoptees are "good to think" because of the complex ways in which their lives blur naturalized categories of biology, society, nature, nurture, and native and alien. They are also, however, important to listen to for what they have to say about adoption as a global system embedded in market rationalities and as a transnational system of child welfare.

This book is an ethnography that stays close to the words and performances of its interlocutors. In it I do not pretend to offer prescriptions about the best practices in adoption, and I do not intend it to be read as a guide for adopting parents. I argue for the importance of understanding adult adoptee narratives and articulations of personhood as socially and historically specific responses to common experiences of displacement and disidentification. In contrast to the majority of existing studies on Korean adoption, which are concentrated in fields of psychology and social work and which take an individuated view of adoptees, this ethnography applies the tools of the anthropological trade to offer an examination of "adopted territories"—networks of adoptees and their activities, situated

in a range of virtual and actual locations, that comprise the transnational Korean adoptee counterpublic.

FROM INTERNATIONAL ADOPTEE OUTCOMES TO TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION STUDIES

Through the attempted reduction of an adoptee's life to positive and negative experiences, the CHSM letter-writing campaign noted above revealed the tendentiousness of the moral debates that typically circulate around adoption as a form of child rescue or as a form of exploitation. Moreover, the enlistment of adoptees with "positive" experiences to fight the moral battles of agencies against an imagined "unhappy" minority of adoptee foes reinforces the dominant constructions of adoptees as either well adjusted or maladjusted, happy or angry, and, consequently, assumed to be correspondingly for adoption or against adoption.

This binary logic mirrors that of the majority of psychology and social work outcome studies, which have thus far dominated transnational adoption as a field. These studies attempted to measure the mental health or "adjustment" of children and adolescents adopted transracially and transnationally, and they are limited by their tendency to disembed the phenomenon of transnational adoption from its relevant historical, social, and political contexts. Moreover, these studies' findings rely upon a developmentalist framework that understands adoptee adjustment and acculturation to be part of an individualized process of moving from "preadoption" traumas of loss and biological rupture into the "postadoption" phase of adjusting to normative kinship structures (middle class, heterosexual, and nuclear). The majority of these studies, for the most part based on samples of one hundred or fewer, determined that transnational adoptees are no different from and sometimes are better adjusted than domestic adoptees, as well as in comparison to nonadopted siblings (for an overview of these studies, see Altstein and Simon 2000).

The power of these findings as "expert knowledge" is often mobilized to support the so-called positive view of transracial adoption, despite problematic assumptions, methods, and measures. Most of the studies conducted throughout in the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, were based on reports about the children by their adoptive parents and focused on "adjustment" and "self-esteem" while studiously avoiding issues of racialization. Dong Soo Kim's study from 1978 was the first to suggest contradic-

tions between the "positive outcomes" of adolescent adopted Koreans and the fact that they "were extremely concerned with their physical appearance," and tended to "reject their own racial background" (482). As Kim provisionally concluded, "The so-called good adjustment of these children is being accomplished at the cost of their unique ethnic cultural heritage and identity, partially reinforced by parents' innocent, yet inapt, expectations" (485). These concerns, however, were not raised again until the 1990s when a new crop of studies turned attention to "ethnicity" and "race" but tended to essentialize or conflate them, sometimes collapsing them with uninterrogated notions of "culture" (R. Lee 2003).

By the mid-2000s, a growing number of anthropologists, sociologists, and humanities scholars began examining the social, cultural, and historical implications of transnational adoption. Drawn to the ways in which these migrations pull into proximity far-reaching political-economic forces with the intimate realms of kinship, this work has come to constitute a distinct subfield (e.g., see Volkman 2005b; Dorow 2006; Howell 2001, 2007; Yngvesson 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005; Anagnost 2000; Eng 2003; Gailey 2000; Park Nelson, Kim, and Peterson 2007; Riley 1997; Bowie 2004). This qualitative and ethnographic work attends to the ambiguities and ambivalences of transnational adoption and offers interpretive models of adoptee subjectivity that are more multiple and complex than might be suggested by the previously existing studies.

In addition, these scholars are attuned to the global circulations engendered by adoption as a form of child migration and therefore refer to these adoptions as "transnational" rather than "international" or "intercountry" adoptions. These adoptions are transnational in that, as Toby Alice Volkman notes, they "entail ongoing, crisscrossing flows in multiple directions, in space that is both real and virtual" (2005a: 2). And although children are adopted overwhelmingly from poorer countries to wealthier ones, suggesting a unilinear movement and assimilation process, like other migrants (see Basch, Glick-Schiller, Blanc 1994), they have instigated a range of subsequent mobilities—of information, people, goods, and services—from and to the so-called sending and receiving nations that are shaped by (and, in turn, shape) new globalizing trends and transnational processes.

Most of the studies to date have privileged the perspectives of adoptive parents to examine how racial difference is negotiated and conflated with "cultural" difference within the family and how parents rewrite family

scripts to naturalize the "artificial kinship" of adoption (Modell 1994; Howell 2007). Anthropologists in particular have been interested in how the "biological" and the "social" are negotiated against the backdrop of multiculturalism and globalization, especially when the child's foreign origins are racially marked.

Another line of inquiry examines the processes through which the child in transnational adoption is constructed as an object of desire and exchange. Sara Dorow and Barbara Yngvesson both deconstruct the stark separation of the adoptee's life into "pre" and "post" adoption phases, from the "birth country" to the "adoptive country." In their accounts the transnationally adopted child must be viewed as being fully embedded in and embodying cultural worlds and social relations, with values and meanings attaching to her as she passes across borders of nation and family. Otherwise, those prior histories and relationships risk being marginalized, erased, or devalued in her radical transformation from needy third world orphan to privileged first world citizen. My analysis draws particular attention to the symbolic power of the figure of the orphan and the material effects it has had on the lives of adult adoptees.

In the practical and legal procedures of adoption, much bureaucratic and emotional labor is directed toward the severing of networks and connections in order to produce an "eligible orphan," who then is free to be exchanged and transformed through Euro-American models of kinship into someone's as-if genealogical child. American and international legal paradigms reinforce this notion that adopted children are orphans through the privileging of plenary, or "hard," adoptions that wholly replace and erase original parents with adoptive ones. In American immigration law, children must be "eligible orphans" to enter the United States as "immediate relatives" of the adopting parents under the family reunification provision.[4] This legal fiction protects the custody rights of the adoptive parents and ensures that the natal parents hold no legally valid claims to the child upon which to base their own family reunification petitions. Symbolically and legally, then, the erasure of the natal parents and the cutting of prior social relations have long been prerequisites to rendering a child adoptable. This severing and erasing process not only produces a child who is legally and socially "free" to be incorporated into another kin network but also reduces the child's complex origins—social, political, and cultural—to generic categories.

As Esben Leifsen argues, this process of making children into orphans in transnational adoption suspends "the unique value of the person, which makes her or him incomparable and not exchangeable" (2004: 193) and replaces a plurality of relationships with social discontinuities and a singular relation. In effect, a child is rendered adoptable (rescuable) and also vulnerable to commodification. But as Sara Dorow cogently notes, "Transnationally adopted children are not bought and sold, but neither are they given and received freely and altruistically; the people and institutions around them enter into social relationships of exchange, meaning, and value that are both caring and consumptive." This close imbrication of commodification and care can make it difficult to distinguish between the "caring-parent" and the "consumer-parent" or between humanitarian and egocentric motivations (2006: 17).

A key part of this dynamic is the object of desire—the third world orphan, which is a powerful symbol in global public culture that gathers together the humanitarian and commodity logics of transnational adoption. The humanitarian orphan erases and neutralizes the political-economic realities that lie at the root of abandonment and adoption (see chapter 1); it also, however, highlights the commodification of bodies and the gross inequalities that fuel the transfer of children from poor countries to families in wealthy nations. For adult adoptees, the "orphan" thereby invokes a paradoxical set of associations of adoption with opportunity and oppression, with having been saved or sold, especially as they negotiate the moral values of adoption in the context of South Korea's rapid economic development and the particular circumstances of their lives.

Working out these questions often involves a process of "return" or excavation of personal history and past lives. As Barbara Yngvesson (2002) argues, the legal fiction of the orphan demanded by plenary, or "clean break," adoption leaves behind an excess of relationships that "enchains" the child's givers and recipients and "haunts" adoptee subjectivities (see also Dorow 2006).[5] These can be thought of as the constitutive outside (Butler 1993)—comprised of obscured or excerpted social relations. In this way, adoption not only makes children into orphans, but, over time, produces missing persons,[6] and the resulting narrative discontinuities have proven to be central to the social imaginary of Korean adoptees whose expressive cultures and discursive practices often explore "loss," and the challenge of constructing identities and places of belonging out of bits and fragments.

In the second half of the book, I examine adoptee "returns" to the so-called birth country—voyages that are now considered to be an expected stage in the adoptee lifecycle. It was, in fact, adult Korean adoptees who transformed the view of international adoption as a one-way journey from "sending" to "receiving" country into a two-way transit. Many adult Korean adoptees describe how, during their childhood and adolescence, "Korea" was actively relegated to the past—within the temporality of their own biographies and also within the temporality of a modernist development teleology—as the sign and symbol of their difference and as a boundary between their unknown pasts and their present realities. The lives of adoptees coincided with Korea's emergence as one of the "Asian Tiger" economies and with intensifying flows of Korean goods, media, and people moving through the countries where the adoptees had been raised. The project of return—or, as one adoptee told me, of attempting to "fill up the hole that is Korea"—has been enabled by globalizing flows and postmodern "time-space compression" (Harvey 1990).

Rather than viewing these returns as a retrogressive turn to "biology" in an attempt to replace the "inauthentic" relations of adoptive kinship, however, my research suggests that returns are part of a range of counterpublic discourses and practices through which adoptees mediate and perform kinship. In the chapters that follow, I focus my attention as an ethnographer on the spaces and moments in which the significance of being adopted from Korea is foregrounded and heightened, and where what I call "adoptee kinship"—a form of solidarity based upon radical contingency rather than biologically rooted certitudes—is made.

"it's a network and it's not really a network": the transnational korean adoptee counterpublic

The tour on which I met Garrett was one of many sites that compose a transnational field of adoptee cultural production that has been emerging since the late 1980s. I started my preliminary research at the Gathering of the First Generation of Korean Adoptees, a conference in 1999 that is frequently referred to as the beginning of the international Korean adoptee community. Since 1999 I have been tracking adult adopted Korean social practices and cultural productions on the Internet and at conferences, local adoptee group meetings, film screenings, and other events.

When I started formally interviewing adoptees in early 2003, the major-

ity of those I met who were involved with adoptee organizing had only intermittent contact with other groups, and often had never met in person. Yet they were connected to each other through flows of information and a shared imagination of the international dimensions of the adoptee network. Some adoptees expressed politicized views on adoption and engaged in critiques of "the system," whereas others were content to meet socially and make new friends. Given the scattered locations and lack of direct communication among my interlocutors, during the course of my fieldwork I continually asked them, by phone, email and in person, in Minneapolis, New York, Seattle, and Seoul, how they viewed these collective adult adoptee social formations—did they believe that a community, network, or movement of adoptees existed? If so, how did they know that it did?

By the time I left the field in late 2004, these questions were no longer pertinent, as the word "community" circulated with increasing fluency and fluidity. On the heels of the International Gathering of Korean Adoptees conference (commonly referred to in short as "the Gathering") in Seoul in 2004, many were actively discussing their "community," its boundaries, and its futures. Since then, the International Korean Adoptee Associations (IKAA) has been established as the official representative for the adoptee "global network," which links some ten thousand adoptees from a dozen organizations around the world. Tackling the multiple and heterogeneous sites of this project ethnographically required a traveling methodology in order to address the question of how a shared sense of personhood was established among spatially dispersed, highly diverse individuals.

Toward this goal I found the framework of "counterpublics," "social imaginaries," and "public intimacy" (Warner 2002; Fraser 1992; Habermas 1989; Taylor 2002; Rapp and Ginsburg 2001; Berlant 1997) to be useful in my conceptualization of how new media technologies and mobilities of the postmodern age facilitated the "production, distribution, and regulation of particular kinds of images, norms, and knowledges across political spaces" (Ong 1999). Also, I drew inspiration from Kay Warren's multisited and engaged methodology in her study of Pan-Maya activists and in so doing chose to focus ethnographic attention on central figures and events rather than attempting to present a "totalizing account of the movement" (Warren 1999: 28). The counterpublic framework helps me to highlight the fact that the adoptee social imaginary exists in diacritical relation to dominant publics—whether in the United States, Europe, South Korea, or an in-

creasingly transnational public sphere. The adoptee counterpublic also exists within a broader field of transnational adoption, which includes adoption agencies, adoptive parents, Korean social workers and legislators, and NGOs, but it does not exist in parallel with one single state authority. It is "counter" in that it has remapped the boundary between public and private by bringing intimate narratives and expressions of adoptee subjectivity into multiple national and transnational public spheres, with different effects in different locations. For instance, in the second half of the book I discuss the work of activist adoptees who are engaged in a social movement to gain legitimate belonging and citizenship in South Korea. These projects have relevance to evolving conceptions of the Korean nation and democracy, thereby rendering adoptee counterpublicity in South Korea more clearly legible in liberal political terms (Fraser 2005).

Conducting an ethnography of a deterritorialized social formation presented me with particular methodological challenges. I chose to focus my attention on American adoptee groups, but in Korea and at adoptee-related events I also had a chance to meet many European adoptees. Rather than following particular individuals, I designed a multisited project that followed adopted Korean circuits, cohabited their spaces, tracked their discourses, and observed their practices. I had perhaps more mobility and flexibility than most adoptees to travel and spend extended periods of time in a variety of locations, yet I was also constrained by my "nonadoptee" status and my exclusion from "adoptee-only" spaces. From my position as a Korean American nonadoptee outsider, I came to understand how adoptees, who shared a feeling of always being an outsider or misfit, inverted normative terms of social belonging and personhood to construct themselves as insiders (Goffman 1963). And by tracking the mobilities of and interconnections among adoptees, I discovered not only how online communication facilitated adoptee networking but also how face-to-face encounters, especially at major conferences, were vital to the production of what is widely referred to as the "Korean adoptee community."[7]

I spent a total of six years trailing and tracking the adoptee community, with a concentrated period of fifteen months of fieldwork in the United States and Korea. Seven months were spent conducting in-depth interviews with core members of American adult adoptee organizations in Minneapolis, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston. The adoptees in my study regularly traveled across the country to meet each other at

gatherings and conferences, participated in electronic mailing lists, and visited Korea on motherland tours. In addition, many of them also attended the Gathering conference in Seoul in 2004. By being situated at key moments and locations and mirroring their movements and practices, I was able to witness how adoptees travel and cross paths and, through these transitory moments of intense sociality, construct normative forms of belonging and identification in a transnational circuit (Rouse 1991). In total, I formally interviewed forty-one Korean adoptees who were active in community building and activism, and I had contact with dozens more, through informal interactions at collective events.

In Seoul I conducted research in a more spatially coherent yet complex urban field composed of expatriate adoptee social networks, adoptee advocacy organizations, and government-sponsored motherland tours. A total of eleven months of fieldwork in Korea involved volunteering at the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF), a government-run agency that was established as part of the government's proactive cultural and economic globalization policy that sought to reach out to ethnic Koreans worldwide. I was a volunteer for their annual motherland tour for adult adopted Koreans for three years, and I also volunteered with three adoptee-advocacy NGOs in Korea. I conducted interviews with social workers, adoptee advocates, European and American adoptees and adoptee activists, and Korean NGO volunteers.

Thanks to the generosity of funding institutions, I enjoyed a modicum of transnational mobility for a short time, but in the process I faced the dilemma of belatedness—the anxiety and actuality of missing ethnographically rich and conceptually crucial moments because I seemed so often to be in transit, even if that meant a half-hour subway ride between two locations within the sprawling metropolitan area of Seoul (Passaro 1997). My ethnographic practice shares similarities with Andrea Louie's "mobile anthropology" (2004) in which she herself became the subject of research, and also with Louisa Schein's "itinerant anthropology" (1998) in which she positioned herself as a nexus and translator between translocal sites. But eventually I came to think of what I was doing as "roving" because it conveys my experience of the disjunctive nature of multisited ethnography —the indecisive pull in multiple directions at once.

It was in Korea that I began to question how my own peregrinations and the circulation of my written work not only mapped but in some ways also

constituted the transnational connections that comprise the global network and shaped how it was understood. My project initiated a series of collapses—not only between "field" and "home" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), thereby implicating shared discursive consciousness ("when they read what we write"; Brettell 1993), the dialogic construction of knowledge, and the "writing machine" of representational excess (Marcus 1999) —but also between myself as a roving researcher and my increasingly siteless field, which seemed to be recursively (re)constituting itself around my own transnational movements.

This concern became heightened at moments when it seemed I was the sole link between the sites I was examining, and when I considered that the groups and individuals I knew had themselves never met face-to-face. But I also knew that there were other linkages that I didn't know about or was unable to witness firsthand. Part of this fieldwork vertigo was an effect of being in the network (Riles 2001; Latour 2003) and participating in the production of its artifacts and also in collective representations and performances in which the global scale and scope of "the community" were made to seem real and palpable. The main aesthetic form for the adoptee network is the list (Riles 2001)—that is, lists of objectives for the network, lists of organizations that compose it, the countries in which adoptees live, their names, the adoption agencies which placed them, and so forth. I also participated in the production and reproduction of lists (Overseas Koreans Foundation 2004) and thus in the representation of the community to itself as well as through engaging adoptees in discussions about the community, whether it exists, and why it's important. Verification of the community manifested in the adoptees' talk of the community as something that was already there prior to their discovering it.

The impossibility of grasping the network as a social totality was also expressed by Liselotte Birkmose, a key organizer of the 2004 Gathering. As she told me, "It's a network that's not really a network, honestly speaking." The deterritorialized adoptee network in its unrepresentability and lack of an "outside" has come to take on the same features of the "network" as an analytic metaphor. Bruno Latour (1993) describes networks as intermediary arrangements between local and global, composed of partial views and pathways. As an imagined transnational series of relations, "the network" affords no one person a privileged view of it, but many people are engaged in sustaining and reproducing it through local actions. As I traced

the movements of adoptees, I could more clearly imagine my own views and pathways.

When I returned to New York, the field as network was still with me, or rather it was there to be dipped into daily through a phone call via Skype to an adoptee friend in Korea or an online instant messsaging chat, through the various adoptee conferences that were being planned or held in the United States, Europe, and Korea and through my writing and presenting at those conferences, or at colleges and universities where adoptees attended my talks. As I participated at one location, putting information and opinions into circulation, my words entered into a dialogic and polyvocal field, and I also began to take on force myself—as translator, transmitter of information, and producer of knowledge.

In effect, this ethnography is bounded by time and in space through its focus on what I learned from interviewing and socializing with adoptees in a variety of locations and contexts using a range of mediated technologies. It centers on the years between 1999 and 2004 and is bookended by the first and third Gathering conferences. These events are historic ones that have made the adoptee community visible to itself and that have created spaces for adoptee subjectivity to be performed and discursively produced. My ongoing connections and collaborations with adoptee activists and scholars has also informed my revisions to this work as I've become associated with a growing cadre of Korean adoption researchers, many of whom are adopted. My ethnographic representation of the adoptee counterpublic is, therefore, undeniably partial (Clifford 1988) in both senses of the word—it is constrained by physical limitations imposed on my roving methodology and it is informed by my positioned views on Korean adoption that have been deeply shaped by my relationships with adoptees.

I caution against viewing the Korean adoptees in this book as being representative of the broader Korean adoptee population. Transnational adoption is a highly contested practice in American and transnational public spheres and adoptees are not exempt from moralizing discourses about children's best interests and the best practices in adoption. Aside from insisting upon a more nuanced understanding of adoptee experiences rather than reducing them to quantifiably positive or negative outcomes, I encourage readers to approach this book as an ethnography that attempts to understand an emergent social formation and not as a portrait of "Korean adoptee identity." I resist the taxonomic desire to catalogue

adoptees within the rubrics of the Asian American or Korean American communities. Rather than taking adoptee "culture" or "identity" as my object of analysis, therefore, I examine the social imaginary of Korean adoptees as it emerged in the midst of particular historical conjunctures, ideologies, and technologies. Even as some adoptees are engaged and invested in strategic essentialist definitions of collective identity (Spivak 1988), I frame these representations as situated, performative acts directed at broader publics and structured by particular political projects.

Against "outcome" studies that aim to provide recommendations that support or denounce international adoption as a child welfare system, I draw attention to the deep ambivalence that characterizes many adoptee narratives. This is an ambivalence that allows one to say with confidence and without contradiction that one is happy to have been adopted and that one cannot imagine a different or more loving family, but also that these joys coexist with a sense of loss and sadness for people, places, and experiences barely remembered or never known. It also allows for the adoptees who were raised in abusive or dysfunctional homes to be able to express their rage and also their desire to find better, less drastic, solutions for children in need. As one adoptee put it to me, adoptees live within the dialectic of loss and gain, and it is this dialectic, I argue, that produces the ambiguous figure of the transnational adoptee and that deserves focused analysis. Adoptees' split temporality and shape-shifting transnationality encompass the complexities and contradictions of the global and also illuminate the ways in which we all negotiate contingencies of personhood out of insufficient and mutable categories of the biological and the social.

A NOTE ON THE ADULT ADOPTEE

My research is organized around what might seem to be a culturally constructed and variable distinction between children and adults. As I argue in this book, adoptee conferences are ritual-like performances that consecrate and institute adoptees as adults. Therefore, in choosing to focus on and to use the term "adult adoptee," I follow what has become a convention among adoptee organization leaders. The "adult" in "adult adoptee" refers to chronological age, which generally hews to the distinctions made between minors and adults in national legal conventions. The importance of age in determining who can participate in adoptee activities is reflected in how national and cultural conceptions of adulthood have been

Table 1 Korean children adopted overseas annually (1953–2008)

YEAR	NO.	YEAR	NO.	YEAR	NO.	YEAR	NO.	YEAR	NO.	YEAR	NO.
		1960	638	1970	1,932	1980	4,144	1990	2,962	2000	2,360
		1961	660	1971	2,725	1981	4,628	1991	2,197	2001	2,436
		1962	254	1972	3,490	1982	6,434	1992	2,045	2002	2,365
1953	4	1963	442	1973	4,688	1983	7,263	1993	2,290	2003	2,287
1954	8	1964	462	1974	5,302	1984	7,924	1994	2,262	2004	2,258
1955	59	1965	451	1975	5,077	1985	8,837	1995	2,180	2005	2,010
1956	671	1966	494	1976	6,597	1986	8,680	1996	2,080	2006	1,899
1957	486	1967	626	1977	6,159	1987	7,947	1997	2,057	2007	1,264
1958	930	1968	949	1978	5,917	1988	6,463	1998	2,443	2008	1,250
1959	741	1969	1,190	1979	4,148	1989	4,191	1999	2,409		
	2,899		6,166		46,035		66,511		22,925		18,129

Note: The total number of overseas adoptions between 1953 and 2008 is 162,665.
Sources: Data from Hübinette 2005; South Korean Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF) 2009

incorporated into international adoptee activities. For instance, at the Gathering conference in Seoul in 2004, the age eligibility for participants from North America and Australia was set at twenty-one, whereas for adoptees from Europe it was set at eighteen. This difference between European and other adoptees was based loosely on legal drinking age, which tends to be lower in European countries (sixteen to eighteen) than it is in North America and Australia (eighteen to twenty-one), and also on a rather ill-defined notion of maturity and perception of readiness.

Following these definitions of adulthood, the adoptees that I met and who were my principal interlocutors were among those born or adopted between 1953 and 1986. In that thirty-three-year period, approximately 103,000 Korean children were adopted overseas, out of an estimated total of 162,665 (table 1). Adoptions during the 1970s alone accounted for 46,000 of those adoptions, and the annual rates continued to climb in the 1980s with a total of 66,511 adoptions in that decade. The majority of these children were sent to the United States, France, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands, with fewer numbers of children going to Belgium, Australia, Germany, Canada, and Switzerland (table 2). Hence, during the period of my fieldwork, the great majority of the adoptees who

Table 2 Korean children adopted overseas by receiving country, 1953–2008

PRIMARY COUNTRIES (1953–2008)		OTHER COUNTRIES (1960–1995)	
United States 1953–2008	109,242	New Zealand 1964–84	559
France 1968–2008	11,165	Japan 1962–82	226
Sweden 1957–2005	9,051	Okinawa 1970–72	94
Denmark 1965–2008	9,297	Ireland 1968–75	12
Norway 1955–2008	6,295	Poland 1970	7
Netherlands 1969–2003	4,099	Spain 1968	5
Belgium 1969–95	3,697	China 1967–68	4
Australia 1969–2008	3,359	Guam 1971–72	3
Germany 1965–96	2,352	India 1960–64	3
Canada 1967–2008	2,181	Paraguay 1969	2
Switzerland 1968–97	1,111	Ethiopia 1961	1
Luxembourg 1984–2008	561	Finland 1984	1
Italy 1965–2008	383	Hong Kong 1973	1
England 1958–81	72	Tunisia 1969	1
		Turkey 1969	1
		Other 1956–95	113
		Total	163,898

Sources: Hübinette 2004; South Korean Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF) 2009

participated in adoptee events and the majority of my informants were between twenty and forty and had been raised in the United States or in Scandinavia. Women tended to outnumber men in most activities by around two to one, which reflects the greater numbers of girls adopted during those decades.

In the United States, the largest wave of adoptee migrants coincided with the post-1965 expansion of Korean immigration to the United States, and Korean adoptees comprise an estimated 10 percent of the total Korean American population. Since the 1960s, agencies based in Minnesota, Oregon, Iowa, and Pennsylvania have been active in Korean adoptions (S. H. Park 1994: 166–67). At the peak of adoptions from South Korea in the 1980s, there were thirty-three United States agencies coordinating adoptions from the four designated overseas adoption agencies in Korea. The states with the highest concentrations of adopted Korean children are those in proximity to the adoption agencies that have had the closest ties

to Korean agencies. Therefore, the majority of children were placed in the Midwest (Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Michigan, Montana, South Dakota), the Pacific Northwest (Oregon and Washington), the Northeast (New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Vermont), and the West (Utah and Idaho), with very few in the Southwest or in the South.

Adoptee groups have been established in metropolitan centers with concentrations of adoptee residents, including Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Boston, and Seoul. According to IKAA, ten thousand adoptees are members of the dozen organizations that fall under its umbrella. Thus, out of the roughly one hundred thousand Korean adoptees worldwide who are over the age of eighteen, an estimated 10 percent are associated with the broader adoptee community.

BEING A NONADOPTEE

In the chapters that follow I foreground my own status as a nonadoptee because it was a key limitation in my relations with adoptees, even with those who welcomed me as fictive kin as an honorary adoptee or as someone who'd been "adopted by adoptees." As I discuss in chapter 4, adoptee social practices are organized around shared storytelling, which composes adoptee collective histories. As a nonadoptee, I have no story to tell, except in response to the question that is inevitably asked by adoptees and nonadoptees alike: How did you get interested in studying adoption? The question itself often begs for a personal story—that an intimate or family member is adopted, for instance—and when I do start to tell "my story" I often get the impression that the answer, or lack of a relevant answer, is a disappointment to the listener.

My story, then, begins with my being a second-generation Korean American woman who, like many adoptees, first got wind of what was then an emergent Korean adoptee counterpublic while surfing the Internet. It was July 1999 and I was surprised and intrigued by the numbers I read on the Website of the Korean American Adoptee Adoptive Family Network (KAAN): 140,000 Korean children have been adopted worldwide since the end of the Korean War, mostly to white families in the West. I soon learned that the numbers were closer to 150,000 or 200,000, and given the scale of this migration I was perplexed by the fact that I had never heard of it

before. Upon further reflection I realized that I had known in passing a few adoptees in my childhood but they existed on the periphery of my consciousness; that is, they were remembered not as adoptees but as Tommy or Mary who were adopted from Korea and whose parents were white. In finding Websites for adult adoptee organizations and watching the films of adult adopted Korean artists, I began to suspect that there was a progressive and politically minded set of adoptees coming of age and forming a social movement. What I found was that most adoptees were engaged in journeys of self-exploration rather than in activism per se, but that there was a latent tension around the politics of adoption, notably its pros and cons—the very tension that came to the surface in the anecdote that opened this chapter.

Even if my story about how I became interested in adoption was not particularly compelling for the adoptees to whom I recounted it, I was clear about my goals and intentions: I was interested in the agency and social mobilization of adoptees and not in compiling and analyzing personal biographies, which are the object of much pop psychologizing and voyeuristic fetishization in the media and in the academic world. Thus, my interviews with adoptees, although they may have covered the vital stats of their adoption histories (i.e., when they were adopted, to where, and from where), focused on adoptees as social actors and their participation in and views on the emergence of Korean adoptee cultural and political identity.

Despite my outsider status and my inability to tell the right kind of story, my friendships and rapport with adoptees were clearly built upon shared generational consciousness, experiences of racialization in the West, and educational and class dispositions. In Korea, many adoptees are themselves immersed in ethnographic explorations of Korean culture and investigations of the history and practices of the adoption system. Thus, I shared with some of the most activist of adoptees a common intellectual project—namely, scrutinizing Korean adoption as a field of practice and constructing Korean adoption as an object of knowledge. Part of my "circumstantial activism" (Marcus 1998) has been to locate and make accessible information about the historical and cultural contexts of Korean adoption, thus helping to provide a critical history for adoptees, many of whom also lack basic details of their personal histories.[8] What follows is a provisional attempt in this direction.

SITUATING KOREAN TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTION

Adoption from South Korea has continued uninterrupted for more than five decades and constitutes the longest and largest such program in the world. Until the mid-1990s, on an annual basis the nation was sending more children overseas than any other country. According to the South Korean Ministry for Health Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF), between 1953 and 2008 a total of 161,665 children were adopted into families in more than twenty-nine different countries, with the vast majority sent to North America and Western Europe (tables 1 and 2).[9] The reasons for adoption are complex and have shifted over the course of the past half century, and at every stage they have been shaped by conjunctures of state control over population and the management of bodies (Foucault 1990), gendered practices of moral persuasion and coercion (what Ann Anagnost [1997] in the context of China's population policies calls "euphemized violence"),[10] and the unevenness of Korea's fitful modernization—all of which help to determine "who is considered to be in the national body and who out of it" (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995: 3).

Unwittingly implicated in cold war geopolitics and policies of a global developmentalist regime (Escobar 1995), these legally designated "orphans" were actually victims of poverty, social dislocation, and gender inequality. They were escorted onto planes and emerged at arrival gates around the Western world to be embraced by new families, given new names, and enter entirely new social worlds. More than 75 percent were adopted into American families, with the rest going to families in Western Europe, Canada, and Australia. Overseas adoptions steadily increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s, from 638 in 1960 to nearly 6,600 in 1976. The peak was in 1985, with more than 8,800 adoptions in that year alone, and reductions in adoptions since 1989 have leveled off to approximately 2,300 children per year in the decade of the 1990s.

As I describe in chapter 1, the first adoptions from Korea were part of an emergency effort to rescue war orphans and "mixed-blood" GI children (*honhyŏla*) in the aftermath of the Korean conflict. Overseas adoption, however, continued well past the initial crisis phase and quickly transformed into a surrogate welfare system that Western observers at the time believed was encouraging the relinquishment of children (Chakerian 1968). As Korea industrialized, large numbers of abandoned children were

Table 3 Adoption circumstances of overseas adopted Koreans, 1958–2008

YEAR	ABANDONED	BROKEN HOME	SINGLE MOTHER	TOTAL
1958–60	1,675	630	227	2,532
1961–70	4,013	1,958	1,304	7,275
1971–80	17,260	13,360	17,627	48,247
1981–90	6,769	11,399	47,153	65,321
1991–2000	225	1,444	20,460	22,129
2001	1	1	2,434	2,436
2002	1	0	2,364	2,365
2003	2	2	2,283	2,287
2004	0	1	2,257	2,258
2005	4	28	2,069	2,101
2006	4	5	1,890	1,899
2007	11	2	1,251	1,264
2008	10	126	1,114	1,250
Total	29,975	28,956	102,433	161,364

Source: South Korean Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF) 2009

a consequence of rapid economic and structural transformations and cold war era population and development policies intended to build national stability. In the initial decades, poor and working-class women, widows, or single mothers gave up children due to poverty and social stigma. In addition, men living outside of the extended family structure were unable to raise children on their own, and they relinquished children due to divorce and a patriarchal family head system (*hojujedo*) that granted sole legal custody to fathers. Since the late 1990s, middle-class and working-class young women and teenage girls have constituted the great majority of birth mothers (table 3). It has been argued that Korea's international adoption system not only retarded the development of domestic adoption and child welfare policies, but also provided a quick-fix solution that has been complicit in the social disenfranchisement of Korean women (Sarri, Baik, and Bombyk 1998).

In industrializing South Korea, propaganda campaigns, sterilization programs, the promotion of emigration, and international adoption were all part of a more universal state project to check population growth in the name of modernization and economic development. The demand from

the West for adoptable children coincided with the concerns of the Korean state, thereby making Korean adoptions appear to be a viable solution to the nation's immediate social welfare problems. Offering economic relief from demographic pressures, these adoptions were also valued as literal "foreign relations" by creating intimate links between Korea and Western nations. Whereas transnational adoption developed out of a confluence of biopolitical and geopolitical interests in Korea, from the perspective of the receiving countries, transnational adoption offered a (new) reproductive technology—one that has become an increasingly commodified "choice" existing alongside a number of other, stratified consumer options for would-be parents.

Transnational Adoption as Stratified Reproduction

According to the demographer Peter Selman (2007), the total global transfers of children nearly tripled from a mean annual rate of approximately sixteen thousand children in the 1980s to nearly forty-five thousand in 2004. Related to trends in delayed childbearing and reduced fertility in the West, this expansion was most dramatic in the United States. The legalization of abortion, welfare support for and social acceptability of single parenthood, a domestic shortage in white babies available for adoption, and the power granted to birth mothers in "open adoptions" have been directly related to the increase in demand for transnational adoptions. Bringing a needy third world child into a first world home, once considered to be a gesture of humanitarianism, has now become an option of last resort in which the world's youngest and healthiest infants are highly sought within a broader field of new reproductive technologies (Lovelock 2000). Media reports and adoption agency social workers reproduce the idea that parents suffering from infertility turn to adoption after they have exhausted their own financial or physical capabilities in the quest for genetically related children. A closer look, however, reveals that humanitarian motives and egocentric desires are often more complexly intertwined in the choices that adoptive parents make, both in the past and at present.

Transnational adoption conforms to what Shellee Colen identified as "stratified reproduction," a "transnational, highly stratified system" in which "physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and place in a global economy, and migration status and that are

structured by social, economic and political forces" (1995: 78). In other words, global inequalities determine the scope of women's reproductive choices and the distribution of reproductive labor, often serving to reproduce the stratifications on which those inequalities are based. The production of intimate kin relations out of stark economic and political asymmetries and the intensification of these inequalities in the global "free market" constitute the mundane and troubling heart of transnational adoption.

For instance, the ability of women in the West to choose to adopt from overseas is based upon the constrained choices of underprivileged women in developing countries who often have few options but to surrender their children for adoption (Perry 1998; Cornell 1999). Critics of international adoption (Masson 2001; Perry 1998; Hollingsworth 2003) view transnational adoption as a flawed system that encourages the exploitation of third world women's labor in lieu of reforming the structural inequalities that force women to give up their children. Moreover, the children who benefit from international adoption represent but a tiny fraction of the millions of needy children around the world who struggle for basic survival. In the case of Korea, one might argue that the nation's modernization miracles complicate the characterization of Korean adoption as a form of stratified reproduction. Yet just as a few hundred African American mothers send their children to Europe and Canada every year for adoption, imagining a better, less racist future for their children outside of the United States, the Korean women who relinquish their children today are, despite the nation's wealth, located in subordinated class, race, and gender positions that structure their abilities to mother their children and that render it imaginable and even desirable to send their children to Europe or the United States for a "better life."

Stratifications of gender and race are unmistakably reproduced in transnational adoption, which has been predominated by Asian female children. Especially in light of the condemnation in 1972 by the National Association of Black Social Workers of placements of black children in white homes as cultural genocide, the adoption of Asian babies has been construed as a safe choice for financially able Americans to adopt more "flexibly" racialized children who not only are more easily assimilated but whose birth parents are less likely to make claims on their children (Dorow 2006). As the transracial adoption of black and Native American children came to a virtual halt in the early 1970s, transracial transnational Korean

adoption rapidly expanded and became fully installed as an institutional-ized practice.

Claudia Castañeda critiques the ways in which the transnational trans-racial adopted child is appropriated as a sign of racial harmony or multi-cultural idealism, and thus "becomes the global" (2002: 104). This utopic, colorblind approach reduces the child's racialization to a flexible and op-tional "racial makeup" that is dehistoricized and made to be culturally insignificant (94). The relative flexibility of a child's racial makeup is also, however, largely dependent upon global hierarchies of race that inter-sect gender and age categories. For instance, model-minority myths about Asian immigrants coincide with predominant views of infant Asian girls as most likely to be accepted in white homes and communities. In contrast, older black boys in foster care have been stigmatized as the least "redeem-able" (Dorow 2006) and most risky. The disregard of racial difference in Asian adoptions is reflected in social work terminology, which reserved "transracial" for black-white placements and "international" or "intercoun-try" adoptions for adoptions across national borders.

The shifting tides of American adoption ideologies have had ripple effects on Korean adoptions, both international and domestic, over the past five decades. From the 1950s through 1970s, the "sealed and secret" adoptions promoted in American contexts provided the model for modern Korean adoptions, in which legal relinquishment was accompanied by the cutting of any prior familial ties (Modell 2002). When the adoptee rights movement and birth mother groups in the United States first began advo-cating for openness in adoption in the 1970s they paved the way for "open adoptions," the form that is most prevalent in the United States today. Views on adoption and the importance of kinship knowledge shifted dra-matically from pathologizing adoptees' desire for knowledge about origins to stigmatizing adoptees' disinterest in seeking out their origins. During this tumultuous time in American adoption, however, Korean adoptions, along with most international adoptions, remained "closed," and Korean adoptees have only just begun to make headway in their struggle for rights to information. Transnational adoptees who seek information about their natal families are no doubt influenced by the shift to openness in domestic American adoptions, and the difficult and painful searches undertaken by Korean parents and overseas adoptees suggest that desire for kinship knowledge and potential relationships is potently informed by both Euro-

American and Korean ideologies of blood and a belief in its ability to authenticate identity.

The intense privileging of blood in Korean kinship ideology marks adoption with "the dual stigma of illegitimacy and infertility" that long characterized American adoption (Wegar 1997). In 1977, the anthropologist Mark Peterson described cases of secret surrogate arrangements and of adoptive mothers in Korea disguising themselves to look pregnant in order to make the adopted child seem "natural." Because of this, birth mothers in Korea, now given a choice, reportedly prefer to place children internationally in the hopes of meeting them again in the future, which is less likely to happen if the child is adopted into a Korean family. Thus, even though recent press reports about openly adoptive families are suggestive of changing attitudes toward adoption in Korea, the primacy of blood and patrilineality in Korean kinship are continually cited as major hurdles to the opening of Korean adoption. Indeed, given the low figures in domestic adoption statistics, one must assume that the majority of adoptions that take place in Korea continue to be arranged outside of the adoption agency system. These facts suggest to some observers that Confucianism continues to retain a strong hold on Korean perceptions of legitimate kinship, and that only blood can substantiate family relations. Attitudes toward adoption provide lenses onto contemporary conceptions of family and kinship in Korea, where modernization and Confucian values are often counterposed and considered to be in conflict.

Transnational Adoption and Korean Child Circulation

In studies of Korean kinship, traditional or customary Korean adoption typically refers to a practice that came into prominence during the seventeenth century with the institutionalization of a neo-Confucian orthodoxy in the middle of the Chosŏn period (1392–1910). As Peterson (1996) argues, this form of agnatic adoption (*suyang*) developed during the "Confucian transformation" in which legislative codes permitted only male patrilineal relatives of a younger generation (typically agnatic nephews in their adulthood) to be adopted. Whereas adoptions in the earlier Koryŏ period had been largely concerned with the inheritance of property, these agnatic adoptions were motivated by social norms of patrilineal descent and continuity of ancestral rites (*chesa*) (Deuchler 1992). According to Peterson, this standard for aristocratic (*yangban*) lineages gradually trickled down

and became the ideal model for family and social organization across class strata. This neo-Confucian turn in Korean law and society involved a radical conversion from bilateral kinship structures to patrilineal ones, from uxorilocal and ambilocal to patrilocal residence, and from equal inheritance for sons and daughters to inheritance based on primogeniture. Prior to the seventeenth century, women, wives' relatives, and nonkin adoptees could have inheritance rights. With the ascendance of primogeniture, agnatic adoptions became the norm and women's status was reduced through their exclusion from ancestral rites and inheritance. A woman's value became wholly dependent upon her ability to bear a son for her husband's lineage.

Agnatic adoptions of adult male heirs may have become hegemonic, but evidence exists of other social classes engaging in alternative forms of child circulation and fosterage (Roesch-Rhomberg 2004). For instance, peasant families adopted young girls as daughters-in-law (*minmyŏnŭri*) as a strategy of inheritance and marriage (Seth 2006; Kim Harvey 1983; H. O. Park 1998) and some Korean families adopted unrelated children, sometimes to provide care for childless elderly couples and sometimes as servants or slaves (Kim and Henderson 2008; Deuchler 1992). These diverse practices lead Kim and Henderson to assert that "the currently pronounced common belief that the Korean traditional family is based on blood ties and never had space for outsiders is far from the historical situation in the Chosun Dynasty, which was surprisingly more open and benevolent than modern 'traditional attitudes' " (16–17).[11]

Thus, despite historical evidence that Koreans adopted unrelated children before the seventeenth century, most of the South Koreans that Peterson met in the 1970s understood adoption only in neo-Confucian terms, and they found American adoptions of nonrelatives to be "incomprehensible" (1977: 83). Until the 1990s, sex ratios at birth and adoption statistics reflected intense son preference among Koreans, especially as government initiatives to restrict family size encouraged many women to use sex-selective abortion, secret adoptions, or overseas adoption as family planning strategies in their pursuit of a son.

More recently, the social transformations related to industrialization—massive rural to urban migration, the rapid nuclearization of the family, and the precipitous decline in the birthrate—have helped to reduce the significance of ancestral rites, the preference for having sons, and, con-

comitantly, agnatic adoption. The anthropologist Eunhee Kim Yi's re-
search on the changing Korean family reveals how the nuclearization of
the family has promoted stronger bonds between natal parents and their
daughters, who are more highly valued and less likely to be treated as
outsiders. Sons are no longer considered to be dependable supports for
parents in their old age, and as such "the old practice of adopting a son
from agnates has almost disappeared. None of those who had only daugh-
ters told me about plans to adopt a son. This decline in the practice of
adoption shows that the importance of *jesa* [ancestral rites] has weakened.
But it also reflects changes in the perception of the relationship between
the mother and the son. In responses to questions about adoption, people
often comment that even their own son does not want to live with his old
parents and that people want to give property to their own daughter, the
blood child, rather than to distant agnates" (2001: 24). As this brief survey
suggests, the factors that constitute modern or traditional Korean gender
identities, kinship relations, and adoption are continually under construc-
tion (Kendall 2002). Even though adoption and extramarital births retain a
strong social stigma, publicly acknowledged adoptions (*konggae ibyang*)
are slowly gaining visibility in the Korean media and have become some-
thing of a trend among young celebrities. Adoption (*ibyang*) in Korea
has thereby ceased to refer to agnatic inheritance and instead indicates
Western-style agency-facilitated adoptions of nonrelative children, the
majority of whom are infant girls.

Transnational Adoption as Transnational Biopolitics

As Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp note, "Throughout history, state power
has depended directly and indirectly on defining normative families and
controlling populations" (1991: 314). In modernizing South Korea, control
of the population was a key concern of the developmentalist state. One
could very well consider the first adoptions of mixed-blood children to be a
form of "state racism" (Foucault 1997) in the context of President Syngman
Rhee's official nationalism that drew upon an ideology of "one people"
(*ilminjuŭi*) to buttress his own authoritarian claims to legitimate leader-
ship.[12] The ideology of "one people" borrowed its power from anticolo-
nial era nationalist historiography that posited Korea as an ethnically ho-
mogeneous nation based on unbroken ancestry and shared bloodline (Shin
2006). In this context, children of mixed parentage presented a polluting

element and also a public relations problem in the midst of cold war hostilities, as they offered clear evidence to North Korean communists of South Korea's dependency on and subordination to postwar American occupying forces (see chapter 1).

In addition to functioning as a mechanism of population control and securing national loyalty through state racism, adoption became a source of foreign capital early during the postwar reconstruction. Between 1951 and 1964, the number of abandoned children at orphanages increased from 715 to 11,319—a remarkable figure that suggests, as Richard Weil notes, that the "presence of efficient foreign adoption facilities encouraged the abandonment of children" (1984: 282). It could well be argued that orphanages (which were largely funded by Western relief organizations), and, later, state-subsidized adoption agencies, functioned as a surrogate welfare system and a conduit for foreign exchange. The period between 1960 and 1975 in which urbanization, education, female employment, and the availability of contraception contributed to the rapid decline in fertility —from 6.3 to 4.2, thus representing "one of the fastest national fertility transitions in recorded history" (Repetto 1981: 3)—also witnessed the rapid amplification of adoptions overseas, from 638 adopted children in 1960 to more than 5,000 in 1975.

These startling statistics, coupled with the propinquity of money and children in transnational adoption and the attendant implications of human trafficking, have made Korea's overseas adoption program a target of criticism throughout its history. The program also played into cold war antagonisms between North and South Korea, when Pyongyang first began its repeated criticism of the South Korean government's liberal adoption policies in 1959. These criticisms reached a peak in the early 1970s and undoubtedly helped to motivate South Korea's decision to reduce the numbers of foreign adoptions and encourage domestic adoption by instituting the Five Year Plan for Adoption and Foster Care (1976–1981) (Sarri, Baik, and Bombyk 1998).[13] Negative reviews also arrived from South Korea's capitalist friends and neighbors when the nation's pride in hosting the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul was tainted by reports in the American press asserting that children constituted Korea's "largest export" (Chira 1988a). In 1989, with most countries sending less than one tenth of 1 percent of live births abroad, South Korea was still sending 1 percent of live births (Kane 1993).

In the midst of the most scathing media critiques in the 1980s, it was reported that Korea was making $15 to $20 million per year on adoption, and that the adoption business had become a cost-effective way of dealing with social welfare problems (Herrmann and Kasper 1992; Rothschild 1988; Sarri, Baik, and Bombyk 1998). The cost of international adoptions has increased exponentially since they began, which leads many to question the "not for profit" nature of adoption agencies and to suspect that financial motives lie behind the purported altruism of adoption as a social welfare project. In the first two decades of adoption, prospective parents were responsible for only the immediate costs of immigration documents, medical clearance, and airfare. Today, the average cost for a Korean adoption is around $15,000, and an estimated $6,000 is collected by the Korean agency, which totals $35 million per year when calculating the foreign adoption placements of all four agencies (K. S. Kim 2004). The public welfare services diverted by the state to the four government-approved overseas adoption agencies—prenatal care for unwed mothers, homes for disabled children, and preadoption foster care—are funded by revenue earned from overseas adoption placements.

Whether or not the government actually profited directly from the adoption of its Korean children, as some believe (Rothschild 1988), it is hard not to view Korean children as victims of a misogynistic and patriarchal developmentalist state that encouraged fertility reduction and outmigration as solutions to overpopulation (Moon 1998). As more stories of birth parents surface in the Korean media and from adoptees who are reuniting and learning the circumstances of their relinquishments, a picture of how agencies functioned as agents of biopower has emerged in which hegemonic familist ideologies combined with Eurocentric notions of the child's best interests. The close intertwining of welfare facilities and adoption agencies suggests the existence of a system that was geared toward the efficient processing of children for adoption rather than toward the preservation of existing kinship relations.

Even if adoptions offered economic benefits or alleviation of social welfare burdens for the Korean state, they also continued to symbolize South Korea's dependency on Western aid. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s attempts were made to develop alternative solutions to child welfare, including long-term foster care and domestic adoptions. Shortly after Park Chung Hee's coup d'etat, the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs

launched a movement to deinstitutionalize the child welfare system and encourage the raising of children in families. Called "Every Person Should Raise an Orphan" (Koa han saram sik mata kirŭgi undong), this 1962 initiative began by requiring government workers to adopt one child each. This program had mixed results and was eventually discontinued, but efforts to encourage domestic adoption were outlined in special adoption legislation in 1976 (Social Welfare Society 2004).

In the 1980s, these programs were abandoned under the military regime of Chun Doo Hwan. During this decade, overseas adoptions were radically expanded and rationalized as part of an emigration and civil diplomacy (*min'gan oegyo*) project, with unrestricted numbers of children being sent to the West "to improve relations between South Korea and the receiving countries" (S. H. Park 1995). The negative press generated by these adoptions during the 1988 Olympic Games stemmed the tide, and since then international adoptions have been tightly tied to domestic adoption placements through a "quota system." The number of domestic placements made by each agency in any given year determines how many international placements will be permitted in the following year. Since then, domestic adoptions have fluctuated between 1,000 to 1,500 placements per year, and these rates are still considerably lower than those of overseas adoption. Because of the difficulty in placing children domestically, adoption advocates argue that Korea is not ready to suspend its international adoption program, and they insist that Koreans must first begin by changing their Confucian attitudes toward adoption even as they promote conservative versions of best families. Implicit in these views are universalizing paradigms of childhood and children's best interests that paternalistically construe non-Western governments as morally flawed and "incapable of running their own societies" (Pupavac 1998: 6).

Transnational Adoption and Neoliberal Family Values

Attitudes toward adoption not only provide a window onto beliefs and practices of kinship in Korea but also reflect the stratifications of gender and class that accompanied South Korea's rapid yet uneven process of modernization. By the end of the 1950s, the numbers of children categorized as mixed blood began dwindling and full-Korean children constituted the majority of overseas adoptees. Many of these might be more aptly described as economic orphans who were relinquished in large part

Table 4 Overseas adoptions by gender and disability, 1955–2008

YEARS	NO. OF CHILDREN	MALE/FEMALE (%)	HEALTHY/DISABLED (%)[1]
1955–1957	1,216	n/a	n/a
1958–1960	2,532	29.0/71.0	37.3/62.7
1961–1970	7,275	31.1/69.2	71.6/28.4
1971–1980	48,247	35.9/64.1	90.5/9.5
1981–1985	35,078	45.4/54.6	79.9/20.1
1986–1990	30,243	46.6/53.4	69.2/30.8
1991–1995	10,974	50.1/49.9	55.4/44.6
1996	2,080	56.7/43.3	55.0/45.0
1997	2,057	54.6/45.4	61.9/38.1
1998	2,249	57.5/42.5	62.4/37.6
1999	2,409	57.0/43.0	65.8/34.2
2000	2,360	60.3/39.7	73.1/26.9
2001	2,436	55.9/44.1	69.5/30.5
2002	2,365	58.3/41.7	65.0/35.0
2003	2,287	59.8/40.2	71.6/28.4
2004	2,258	61.3/38.7	68.8/31.2
2005	2,101	64.4/35.6	64.9/35.1
2006	1,899	66.0/34.0	62.5/37.5
2007	1,264	57.1/42.9	60.4/39.6
2008	1,250	61.8/38.2	91.4/8.6

Sources: Ha 2002; South Korean Ministry for Health, Welfare and Family Affairs (MIHWAF) 2009
[1]Children are categorized as "normal" (*chŏngsang*) or "disabled" (*changae*) in South Korean government statistics. In the past, the categories were "normal" and "abnormal" (*pichŏngsang*) with the latter category inclusive of mixed-race children. In the recent past, children in the disabled category have included those with a range of conditions, from relatively minor and/or treatable conditions to more severe, congenital diseases.

due to extreme poverty and a lack of social service options. A preference for sons was evident in the sex ratio of children adopted throughout the 1960s and 1970s, during which time between 60 and 70 percent were girls. But since the 1980s, as the average family size shrank and the main cause for adoption relinquishments shifted from poverty to out-of-wedlock births, gender ratios have become nearly evenly balanced (tables 3 and 4). In addition, because domestic adopters have shifted their preferences from boys to girls in the last decade, an excess of boys is now being adopted overseas.

Whereas the women who relinquished their children in the 1960s and 1970s tended to be poor factory workers, as South Korea's economic boom took off in the 1980s, unmarried college-age women were releasing their infants. In the late 1990s, an increasing trend in teen pregnancies supported the supply of adoptable children. Today, nearly all the children adopted overseas are infants born to unwed mothers in their late teens and early twenties. The births take place in "homes for unwed mothers" (*mihonmo chip*) run by the adoption agencies, and the babies are cared for by agency-paid foster mothers until their departures to their Western families (W. J. Kim 1994).[14]

In 2008 the government announced to great fanfare that, for the first time in history, domestic placements in 2007 had exceeded those of international ones, thereby suggesting that the "domestic adoption first" programs had been effective and that international adoption would soon be regarded as a thing of the past. A closer look at the numbers, however, suggested more complicated circumstances. Korean domestic adoptions had been on a steady decline since 1999, and the 1,300 placements in 2007 actually represented a low point in domestic adoption. Indeed, it was the restrictions placed on international placements rather than an increase in domestic adoptions that accounted for the historic shift. It would seem that the exigencies of statistical targets were being privileged over the welfare of needy children. The celebration over the numerical reversal diverted attention away from the state's longstanding reluctance to devote more resources to social welfare, including protections for women and children, programs to prevent unplanned pregnancies and child abandonment, and economic support to single mothers.

At this writing, the future of Korean adoption remains uncertain given Korea's economic instability and sensitivity to international opinion. But the "problem" of adoption (*ibyang munje*)—a question of national pride— is continually attributed by journalists and policy officials alike to the tradition-bound blood obsession of Koreans (*hyŏlt'ongjuŭi*), who, it is argued, need to become more open to Western forms of adoption. State policies are likewise premised on the notion that residual Confucian values stand in the way of solving the adoption problem, and that abandoned children constitute a cultural problem rooted in the refusal of Korean citizens to take responsibility for their children. In presuming that domes-

tic adoption is the only solution to the overseas adoption problem, policy-makers and cultural observers discount the possibility of birth mothers keeping and raising their children, as a growing number reportedly would choose to do, if they had the necessary financial and social support.

There are an estimated eighteen thousand children currently living in welfare institutions and an estimated ten thousand children born to un-married women in Korea each year. South Korean and international adop-ters can only partially alleviate the problems of all abandoned Korean children, a situation that creates hierarchies of desirability and disability—perfect infants and "waiting" or "special needs" children. Public education campaigns encouraging greater receptiveness to domestic adoption have been instituted by adoption agencies in South Korea, and increasing open-ness among parents of adopted children has helped to reduce some of the stigma of adoption in South Korea. Yet familist ideologies that spurn non-normative, nonnuclear family arrangements continue to conspire with en-trenched patriarchal values and conservative sexual moralities in the "eu-phemized violence" that governs and constrains the reproductive choices of single women.

In effect, state policies reinforce the conservative family values that disparage motherhood outside of marriage. For instance, under the "do-mestic adoption first" policy initiative, "singles" (*toksinja*) became eligible to adopt children, thereby allowing never-married, divorced, or widowed individuals to qualify as parents. In the context of Korea, where Confucian-ism and blood ideology are often blamed for the adoption problem, ex-tending adoption rights to those who are already nonnormative house-holders might appear to be a solution that embraces a liberalized view of the family. At the same time, however, the policy implicitly reinforces the censure of extramarital sex and motherhood by creating a hierarchy of singles—those who are parents through adoption and rewarded with state subsidies versus those who are single mothers outside of marriage and therefore less deserving of provisions that might make it economically feasible for them to keep and raise their children. Recent experiments in group living and innovative fund-raising practices by independent unwed mothers' homes represent a few responses by these women and their advo-cates to help them raise their children in the face of social stigma and inadequate welfare support. As such, they are producing new kinds of

households based on communal living and childcare arrangements that are minimally dependent upon the state, but, unlike single adopters, their efforts go unrewarded and uncelebrated.

These developments are occurring alongside the emergence of new postmodern representations of gendered identity in postmodern South Korea. A prominent example of these new identities is the "Miss Mom" character that has appeared in various domains of public culture. She is financially independent, sexually empowered, and unencumbered by tradition (Lankov 2008). In these narratives, unwed motherhood is framed as a choice for privileged women who reject marriage but embrace maternity. Thus, the shameful, secretive *mihonmo*, which literally means "not yet married mother," is now accompanied by its neoliberal doppelganger, the *pihonmo*, which means "unmarried mother," but that connotes self-fulfillment through sexual freedom and class-based entitlement. Whether these images of emancipated pihonmo will further marginalize actual mihonmo (who do not enter into motherhood based on choice but through what might appear to be residual forms of patriarchal oppression and victimhood) or whether they will foster the acceptance of alternative kinds of parenting and family life is an open question. What is clear, however, is that neoliberal rationalities and global imaginaries are increasingly influencing the value placed on women's reproductive choices and capacities.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is organized into two sections. In the first section, I situate Korean adoption and the emergence of the Korean adult adoptee counterpublic within the political and economic transformations of the late twentieth century. I describe in detail in chapter 1 how adoption to the United States developed in the immediate aftermath of the Korean War. In chapters 2 and 3, I contextualize adoptee personhood by analyzing how common experiences of alienation and disidentification with dominant categories of kinship and citizenship serve as the grounds for the adoptee social imaginary. In chapter 4, I bring ethnographic focus to adoptee counterpublic activities at the Gathering conferences, which become the sites for ritual-like performances of categorical and collective adoptee personhood. In part II, I shift the focus and location of analysis to South Korea. I examine the South Korean government's recognition of adoptees as "overseas Koreans" in chapter 5, by closely analyzing problems of cultural citi-

zenship that confront adoptees who live and work in Korea. I extend this analysis in chapter 6 to consider the relationship of returning adoptees and the Korean NGOs that emerged in the late 1990s to help them. The concluding chapter unpacks the figure of the humanitarian orphan in order to show how it continues to influence the political subjectivity of adoptee activists and their attempts to intervene into hegemonic discourses about adoption and child welfare.