

South Korean Birthmothers Negotiate Everyday Violence and Child Loss Through Storytelling

Author: Jane Mejdahl
Supervisor: Paulina Kolata



Abstract

Adoption scholars have dismantled the story of adoption as a humanitarian effort to save destitute children and framed adoption as a transnational issue underpinned by neo-colonial and patriarchal structures governing the relations between the West and ‘the rest’. This thesis builds on those insights and thus contributes to a growing body of literature within critical adoption studies.

South Korea’s long-lived practice of sending children overseas for adoption has created the world’s largest population of so-called birthmothers, the women who gave birth to the many children who were adopted by couples in the West. Despite being at the centre of adoption, their voices are rarely heard in and outside of academia. This thesis analyses birthmothers’ stories of separation from their children as a negotiation of the everyday violence that particularly unwed women are subjected to by the state level legislation and within private institutional settings. In doing so it argues that storytelling provides a way for birthmothers to assert themselves as mothers in face of dehumanising conditions.

Keywords: South Korea, Transnational adoption, Storytelling, Birthmothers, Everyday violence, Motherhood, Gender

Acknowledgements

Paula, thank you for your steadfast and unfaltering support during the process of writing my thesis. You have gone above and beyond any obligation with your generous, accurate, comprehensive, sharp, but warm and forbearing supervision. Your contribution, not only during the thesis writing but throughout the last 2 years has been invaluable.

The engaging classes taught by highly qualified academic staff – Paul, thanks for introducing me to ways of looking at South Korea that I would never have found myself – the caring help of the administration, and the loving support from the Class of 2021 have made my last 2 years at Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies an absolutely amazing time. Thank you!

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the people I met during fieldwork in South Korea in January of 2023, including interview participants, adoption scholars and activists alike in the passionate community of adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, and allies. Specifically, a massive hug to Boonyoung Han for introducing me to relevant social actors and showing me the hidden gems of Seoul suburbia after hours.

Lastly, to my beloved family. I know you put up with a lot. Sincerely, you are the best.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Scope and outline of the thesis	4
2. Literature Review	6
2.1 Limitations of the literature review	6
2.2 Enablers and enforcers of transnational adoption from South Korea	7
2.2.1 Between US empire building, religious interests, and nation building.....	7
2.2.2 The development of the adoption market.....	9
2.3 Birthmothers and gender ideology in South Korea	11
2.3.1 Gender and family ideology as expressed in policies.....	11
2.3.2 Birthmothers' morality in public discourse.....	13
3. Methodology	15
3.1 Research design and presentation of data	15
3.1.1 Data sources and limitation of the data: life stories.....	15
3.1.2 Data sources and limitations of the data: interviews and site visits.....	17
3.2 Generation of data and data analysis	18
3.3 Limitation of the methodology	19
3.4 Ethical considerations and positionality	20
4. Analytical Concepts	22
4.1 Everyday violence and the question of humanity	22
4.2 The capacity for human action and meaning-making	23
4.3 Motherhood	25
5. Analysis	27
5.1 Birthmothers' mothering and the family household registration system	27
5.2 Pious motherhood and the practice of maternity homes	30
5.2.1 Everyday Violence of Maternity Homes.....	31
5.2.2 Motherhood and The Inclination Towards Piety.....	33
5.3 Motherhood, reconciliation, and the legal adoption procedure	34
5.3.1 Motherhood and the moral duty to reconcile.....	35
5.3.2 Grievance and the legal adoption procedure.....	37
6. Conclusion	41
Appendices	43
Appendix I - Terminology, Glossary and Transliteration	43
I.I Terminology and Glossary.....	43
I.II Transliteration.....	45
Appendix II - Institutions and Organisations	46
I. Public organisations.....	46
II. Private organisations.....	46

Appendix III - Interview Questions	48
Appendix IV - Codes and Themes.....	49
<i>Reference List</i>.....	50

1. Introduction

When as a young child I inquired about the circumstances of my adoption from South Korea, my adoptive mother told me that the woman who gave birth to me was a young, poor woman whose family may have been victims of the Korean War. She could even have been a prostitute, I was told. Out of love, my adoptive mother assured me, my Korean mother abandoned me on the street where I was found by US soldiers who handed me over to adoption facilitators. Later when I was old enough to read my adoption file, I learned that the story was pure speculation. My adoptive mother had no way of knowing any details of my background as the file contained nothing but a certificate that declared me an orphan with no identifying information.

I do not think my adoptive mother intentionally lied to me. Rather, I view her elaborate story as a way to comfort a confused child, and also indicative of how little we know of the South Korean women who gave birth to the overwhelmingly large number of children placed for transnational adoption (see Appendix I for terminology). My adoptive mother simply put together a story based on her scarce knowledge of South Korea, but rich awareness of the popular stories of transnational adoption from general public discourse. Although I was born several decades after the Korean War (1950-1953) was suspended with the armistice agreement of July 27 1953, my adoptive mother still connected my story to the war, speculated that my Korean mother was a prostitute, highlighted the benevolence of the US represented by the soldiers, emphasised poverty, and assured me that I was abandoned as an act of love; all known tropes in the dominant narratives that cast transnational adoption as a humanitarian effort and a win-win situation of saving non-western children to complete families in the West.

These myths not only construct adoption as the only humane and logical outcome of unfortunate circumstances, but they also conceal the nature of the market conditions that govern transnational adoption (McKee 2016:138) and the deep-seated power imbalances between the West and the rest¹ that facilitates adoption in the first place (Paté 2010:195). Furthermore, the narratives also obscure the origin of the adopted child as shown in the opening vignette. A successful adoption story reflects transnational adoptees total immersion into their new nationalities and families. This entails a complete severance of ties to the women who gave birth to them (Kim 2009:857). Consequently, these women are, like in my adoptive

¹ Inspired by Said (2003) I use the binary between the West and the rest to signify that transnational adoption discourse holds the idea that the West is superior to non-Western countries and hence considered the better environment for any child to grow up in.

mother's account, nothing but a vague figure subject to a myth formation, only enforced by their legal erasure as presented in my adoption file that declares me an orphan without known origin. The silence and the silencing of these South Korean women is uncanny. While adoptive parents and to lesser extent adoptees have dominated the public and academic discourses on adoption, very little has been written about the thousands of women who gave birth to children sent overseas for transnational adoption, also known as 'birthmothers' (See Appendix I for terminology). Culture Studies scholar Tobias Hübinette (2005:31) notes that like in the case of Spivak's 'subalterns', the South Korean birthmothers are only spoken for and represented by Western and Korean imaginaries of shame and victimhood.

To pave a way out of the imaginaries this thesis centres South Korean birthmothers. I have no intention to speak for birthmothers; my interest is in the representations of birthmothers' experiences in the form of their life stories.² I base my inquiry on two of the few publicised examples of birthmothers' own life stories, mediated through the book *Dreaming a World. Korean Birth Mothers Tell Their Stories* (2010, Dreaming henceforth) and Sociologist Hosu Kim's (2016) life story interviews with South Korean birthmothers.³ In both sets of life stories birthmothers recount the experience of being separated from their children by way of adoption.

Anthropologist Michael Jackson (2002:16) asserts that stories are not literal one-on-one accounts of events as they unfolded. When stories are told, details, actions, and whole other stories are omitted while others are accentuated (ibid:11). As such, Jackson stresses stories are results of experiences that are "replayed, recited, reworked, and reconstrued" (ibid:23), not only because reality tends to escape language, but because storytelling serves a purpose. Jackson argues that storytelling is a "strategy" (ibid:16), it helps us create meaning out of "our [author's accentuation] journey through life" (ibid). Jackson's point is urgent particularly in the face of violence or suffering. He contends that by reconstructing and sharing experiences the storytellers make sense of suffering to amend relationships with others and the world, and to recover a sense of "autonomy" (ibid:18) in light of disempowerment. Namely, storytelling provides a way to create meaning out of what is seemingly meaningless and thus makes the unbearable intelligible to the storytellers themselves and to those with whom the stories are shared.

² I use the terms 'story' and 'life story' interchangeably throughout the thesis when I refer to the representations created through storytelling.

³ See Chapter 3 for a detailed presentation of the data.

In this thesis I focus on birthmother's 'rework' of their experiences with adoption. I explore (1) **how South Korean birthmothers create meaning in the experience of being separated from their children** and (2) **how birthmothers through storytelling negotiate the gendered forms of violence they suffer at state level and in private institutional settings**. I critically engage the South Korean legislation pertaining to Family Law, the adoption procedure, and private welfare organisations such as shelters for unwed pregnant women and adoption agencies (See Appendix I for terminology) to illuminate how patriarchal normativity in family and gender ideology informs legislation and adoption practices, and generates violence that subordinate women, robs them of self-determination, and deprives them of reproductive freedom. The birthmothers' life stories exude a pervasive persistence on motherhood. Even though birthmothers are separated from their children they do not question their status as mothers or represent themselves as anything else but mothers. Considering the loss of autonomy and the dehumanising conditions of suffering and violence of legislative and adoption practices, I argue that **birthmothers, through storytelling, seek to reclaim their impaired subjectivities and restore their humanity by asserting themselves as mothers**. In Chapter 4 I discuss my analytical framework in depth, focusing on storytelling, meaning-creation, agency, and I clarify my use of the concepts of violence and motherhood.

While most studies until fairly recently have been beneficial for the promotion of adoption as an altruistic way of forging kinship (Paté 2010:11), several scholars have also critically examined transnational adoption from South Korea from a feminist and postcolonial standpoint. They pay attention to transnational adoption as a neo-colonial practice underpinned by political, financial, racial, gendered, and class-based structural inequalities between the West and the rest (See Chung 2021; Doolan 2021; Hübinette 2005; Kim 2010; Kim 2009; Marre & Briggs 2009; McKee 2016; Pate 2010; Oh 2015). Still, research on South Korean birthmothers is alarmingly scant.⁴ As far as I'm aware only Hosu Kim (2016) and Gender

⁴ For literature on birthmothers, stigma, and mental health in the US, see Baxter et al. (2012), March (2019), and Broadhurst and Mason (2020). For studies on birthmothers and social stigma in Brazil, see Claudia Fonseca (2011) and Pien Bos (2008) on birthmothers in India.

Studies scholar Shin Phil Sik (2020)⁵ have covered birthmothers from South Korea extensively.⁶

This thesis is a contribution to the growing body of feminist and postcolonial critical adoption studies. I lean on Kim's (2016) life stories as part of my empirical material and her valuable Foucauldian based insights on how unwed working-class women are subject to gender- and class-based subordination through disciplining and self-disciplining technologies inform this thesis. However, I intervene by building on Michael Jackson's work (2002) to focus on storytelling as an opportunity for birthmothers to shape and share their experiences and thus regain a sense of self-determination.

1.1 Scope and outline of the thesis

The official number of transnational adoptions from South Korea is 169.630 (Ministry of Health and Welfare 2023).⁷ The South Korean birthmothers thus constitute one of the world's largest populations of birthmothers from one single nation (Kim 2016:2). During South Korea's more than 70 years', and still active, engagement with transnational adoption, adoption policies and the demographic make-up of birthmothers have shifted. The women of the life stories became birthmothers between the mid 1980s-mid 2000s. Roughly speaking, the birthmother population during those years consisted of unwed women, including divorcees or women who engaged in extramarital relationships, in their mid to early 20s from working- and middle-class backgrounds (ibid:55). During those years, Kim claims, 'illegitimacy' of a child played the decisive role in the separation of children and mothers (ibid:56).⁸

⁵ Shin's work has not been translated to English. With his guidance in personal meetings on January 19 and January 31 2023 in Seoul and my rudimentary understanding of Korean I have been able to cite his work, but not to the degree it deserves.

⁶ See also Hosu Kim's scholarship on military prostitution in South Korea (Kim & Cho 2014) and maternity homes (Yook & Kim 2018) as sites for the exercise of biopower. As well as Kim (2018) on birthmothers' kinship formation with adoptees and other birthmothers.

⁷ Other sources estimate the number to be closer to 200.0000 (Doolan 2021:352; Paté 2010:8). Due to adoptions handled outside of official channels it is difficult to track the exact numbers. In combination with the estimated number of domestic adoptions at 100.000 in 2014 (The Korea Family Preservation Network 2014), the number of birthmothers may reach 300.000. In this thesis, I only focus on transnational adoption.

⁸ From the beginning of transnational adoption from South Korea in the 1950s until the mid 1970s the birthmother population consisted of older married and unmarried women from working-class backgrounds in their late 20s/early 30s, including sex workers in the camptowns around the US military bases (Hübinette 2005:72). Through the years the birthmothers became increasingly younger and from the 1990s and onwards many of them were teenagers. Today supposedly mainly children of undocumented immigrants, women with cognitive disabilities, and middle-schoolers are placed for adoption (Director of MHA, personal communication, February 2 2023).

If the birthmothers' perspective is largely ignored in the public and academic discourses, the fathers are even more invisible. As Anthropologist Pien Bos's (2008:43) work on Indian birthmothers suggests, the absence of Indian birthfathers both illustrates the common literal absence at the time of child relinquishment, but is also indicative of the lack of responsibility assigned to males in child rearing matters in India, and lastly of the unequal assessments of unmarried women's sexual morals in relation to men's in general. South Korean birthfathers are not in focus for this thesis, not only because data on birthfathers is virtually unavailable, but also to highlight that only women are subjected to the gendered normativity regarding motherhood and sexual conduct in South Korea as Bos points to.

In Chapter 2 I review literature that brings insight into global and local inequalities through which the separation of birthmothers from their children is mediated. Furthermore, I include sources on gender and family ideology that engenders the subordination of unwed mothers in South Korea. In Chapter 3 I outline the research design and methods of the study with a focus on the use of life stories for research. I present the data and discuss the ethics of my research and my positionality as an adoptee, a critical adoption activist, and a researcher. In Chapter 4 I detail the analytical concepts of agency, everyday violence, and motherhood that I apply in the analysis. In Chapter 5 I examine birthmothers' representation in life stories as negotiation with the gendered everyday violence of the South Korea legislation pertaining to Family Law and the legal adoption process, and in private institutional settings, namely the so-called maternity homes (see Appendix II for institutional overview). Lastly, I reach the conclusion in Chapter 6 where I sum up the analysis and point to potential other related paths to explore.

2. Literature Review

The literature review is divided into 3 parts. First, I discuss the limitations of the scholarly sources drawn upon in this thesis. Secondly, to situate birthmothers' experiences in a larger context of structural, global, and local relations within transnational adoption I review sources that pay attention to transnational adoption from South Korea as a pretext for neo-colonial, geopolitical, religious, capitalist, and nation building interests of the Cold War years. The sources thus point to global and local structural inequalities as root cause for birthmothers' separation from their children and provide a wider context for the issue.

In the third part I focus on the literature that foregrounds South Korean birthmothers. As mentioned, the scholarly research on South Korean birthmothers is scarce, also reflected in the limited numbers of sources directly related to the topic. To address the research gap and inform my exploration of how patriarchal normativity is instrumental in shaping the processes that rejects certain South Korean women as mothers, I include literature that attends to gender and family ideology expressed in public discourse on birthmothers, and in state policies such as family planning initiatives that promotes the nuclear family ideal.

2.1 Limitations of the literature review

The literature I refer to is mainly written in English within a Euro-American tradition as my language skills are not sufficient to cover literature in Korean. The scholarships represented are not exempt from the lopsided power dynamics involved in any Western representations of non-Western societies (See Said 2003; Spivak, 1988). The risk of biases, eurocentrism, or misrepresentation cannot be eliminated even in works that purport to analyse power relations (See Ackerly & True 2008). The main parts of the literature are however written by transnational Korean adoptees and members of the Korean diaspora, often educated both in the West and in South Korea, whose unique positions offer potent perspectives from both inside, between, and outside cultures, nations, and the South Korean transnational adoption experience.

Furthermore, most of the scholars propose a feminist, post-colonial critique of transnational adoption. Some assume an activist stance against or are at least critical of transnational adoption. Their work can be seen in light of the overall global trend of seeking rehabilitation for past wrongdoings in the name of patriarchy, religion, capitalism, and colonialism (Scheper-

Hughes 1998). Some also promote redress and reparation for the well-documented violations of adoptees and birthmothers' rights (Kim 2016; Kim 2010). While I acknowledge potential biases in the work of critical and/or activist researchers, I also recognise the value of the emic perspectives in their research as well as their involvement in the field of critical adoption activism that allows them access to networks and data otherwise not granted. I commend and am inspired by the keen analysis done by the very people impacted by transnational adoption.

2.2 Enablers and enforcers of transnational adoption from South Korea

More than 169.630 South Korean adopted overseas to predominantly white families in the West⁹ makes South Korea home to the world's largest transnational adoption program (Kim 2010:24). While the practice of adoption has a long history on the Korean peninsula, the modern mode of cross-country 'stranger adoption' in which children are sent overseas into households with whom they have no prior familial or cultural relation with was initiated around the time of the Korean War (1950-1953) (Hübinette 2005:53).¹⁰ In what follows I discuss what enabled and enforced the magnitude of the modern mode of transnational adoption from South Korea to shed light on the global and local structural inequality at the heart of women's separation from their children.

2.2.1 Between US empire building, religious interests, and nation building

Adoption from South Korea is often seen as a logical outcome of the Korean War; altruism to provide so-called war orphans with a safe future in the West far from the havoc of war. Several scholars assert though that the war cannot account for the staggering systematic undertaking transnational adoption from South Korea turned into. Inspired by postcolonial studies led by scholars such as Said (2003) and Spivak (1988), they instead point to transnational adoption as a neo-colonial practice enabled by the conditions of the US as formal and informal occupiers of South Korea (Doolan 2021; Hübinette 2005; Kim 2010; Oh 2015, Paté 2011).

⁹ Most adoptees from South Korea went to the US, followed by Western Europe, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The Scandinavian countries stand out with the highest numbers of South Korean adoptees per capita (Ministry of Health and Welfare in Hübinette 2005:264).

¹⁰ Adoption has been common on the Korean peninsula for centuries. During the Joseon Dynasty (1391-1910) adoptions aimed to secure a male family heir in accordance with Confucian law. For families with no sons the ruling classes often adopted non-agnatic males to become the heir (Peterson in Hübinette 2005:45).

Anthropologist Eleana Kim's (2010) analysis of the figure of an orphan as a potential resolution during the intensification of the Cold War displays how South Korean children were utilised to further relations between the US and South Korea and build the US empire. Kim details that while US media motivated white middle-class families to 'rescue' South Korean children by promoting them as destitute war orphans, officials in the US quickly realised the orphan's potential as a vehicle for expansion of political interests (ibid:76). South Korean children were thus construed as 'bridges' between the US and South Korea built on intimate kinship relations (Kim 2010:76, see also Oh 2015; Paté 2010). Hence Kim challenges the idea of adoption as a logical outcome of the Korean War by bringing attention to Cold War political interests as an enabler of transnational adoption.

Furthermore, Historian Yuri Doolan (2021:352) pinpoints the US' military presence in South Korea as crucial at the outset of transnational adoption and highlights adoption as a direct result of it. Accordingly, the first adoptees were so-called mixed-race children (see Appendix I for terminology), born in 'illegitimacy' to stationed US servicemen and Korean mothers, often associated with military prostitution (ibid:352). As such, Kim (2010) argues, the mixed-race children were seen as a stain on the US' perceived image as a humanitarian world leader (ibid:48). In South Korea the children were construed as detrimental to the nation building efforts; a potential threat to President Syngman Rhee's (1948-1960) desire for a monoethnic nation, expressed in the ideology "One nation, one race" (ibid:61), *ilminjuui* (일민주의), defined by a pure, shared bloodline. Historian Arissa Oh (2015) notes that commentators such as US missionary Pearl Buck described Rhee as very adamant in the question of the mixed-race children. According to Buck, he wanted them "[...] removed even if we have to drop them in the Pacific Ocean." (in Oh 2015:54). Rather than a humanitarian undertaking to 'save' war orphans, the scholars highlight the significance of South Korea's ambitions for a unified state in the exclusion of mixed-race children. Accordingly, transnational adoption became a geopolitical tool to strengthen ties between the US and South Korea and further a South Korean nationalistic project.

In the wake of the war several foreign aid organisations began to bring the mixed-race children to the US (Hübinette 2005:59). Most noteworthy was the Oregon Evangelical farmer couple, Harry and Bertha Holt who, moved by religious zeal to 'save' South Korean children, established the adoption agency Holt Adoption Program in 1956 (ibid:61). Hübinette asserts

that the Holts with their minimal documentation requirements, their method of proxy adoptions¹¹ that allowed for swift processing, and their ready acceptance of prospective adoptive parents purely based on their alleged Christian faith were fundamental for the acceleration of transnational adoption from South Korea (ibid:61). Similarly, scholar of religion Soojin Chung (2021:81) emphasises that the Holts' religious zeal and their use of powerful religious doctrine that promoted adoption as 'God's will' motivated thousands of Christian North Americans to 'save' the mixed-race children. Chung argues that adoption became a new missionary effort with the aim of 'converting' the North Americans to adopt and, in turn, the South Korean children to Christianity (ibid:142). Thus, Hübinette and Chung illuminate faith-based organisations that framed adoption as a 'calling' from God as another enabling factor of transnational adoption.

Therefore, in my thesis I built on the authors in this section who interrupt the myth of adoption as a humanitarian act by illuminating the intersection between geopolitical interests, US empire expansion, nation building, and religion as enablers and enforcers of transnational adoption from South Korea. It is within these relations of local and global, political, and religious structures that the cross-border separation of South Korean women from their children first materialises. Their insights allow us to gauge how birthmothers' lives and reproductive freedom are embedded in such structures.

2.2.2 The development of the adoption market

By the 1970s transnational adoption was in full throttle. Hübinette (2005:70) notes that the demand for children quickly outgrew the supply which prompted South Korea to allow for adoption of children of exclusive Korean descent. In opposition to the 1980s where illegitimacy seemed to play a decisive role in adoption (Kim 2016:56), the birthparents in the mid-1970s cited poverty as reason for adoption (Hübinette 2005:72). Kim (2016:40) holds that the ensuing security crisis between North and South Korea after the war prompted South Korea to prioritise the national security budget over social welfare for impoverished families thus serving as justification for sending children overseas for adoption. Scholar of International Law Lee Kyung Eun (2022:238) argues that both savings on welfare costs and profit from the

¹¹ Proxy adoption allowed adoptive parents to adopt through a Holt representative in South Korea without setting foot in the country. The practice garnered critique from social workers for not meeting the minimum requirements for protection of children's welfare (Chung 2012:77).

considerable income secured by transnational adoption motivated the South Korean state to further escalate the practice.

During the years of South Korea's famed economic development, transnational adoption soared. In the 1980s during the Chun Do Hwan (1980-1988) years regulations were liberalised for the privately run adoption agencies (see Appendix II for institutional overview) which allowed them to compete for access to children (Hübinette 2005:71). Between 1980-1988, at the height of adoption from South Korea, and in the timeframe for the events of the life stories in this thesis, more than 65,500 children left for overseas adoption (ibid:264). Each child brought significant foreign currency into South Korea in the form of donations (ibid:30) and adoption fees paid by adoptive parents (ibid:54). Hübinette claims that the adoption agencies turned adoption into a well-run profitable business scheme: "They [adoption agencies] started to invest in real estate and established their own birth clinics and shelters in the form of maternity homes, for young, unwed pregnant women [...] in order to secure a continuous supply of healthy babies" (ibid:72). Kim, Hübinette, and Lee explain how transnational adoption turned into a cost saving and profit-making effort driven less by humanitarian goals, but more by the West's insatiable demand for babies.

Gender Studies scholar Kimberly McKee (2016) notes that the birthparents' poverty is in stark contrast to the relative wealth of the middle-class adoptive parents in the West. Based on capitalist logic of materialistic propriety, McKee builds on Laura Briggs to argue that middle-class adoptive parents in the West were privileged over birthparents in South Korea in a global hierarchy of parental suitability (ibid:139). McKee thus reveals the global wealth imbalances that underpin transnational adoption. In summary, it is therefore crucial to pay attention to the capitalist market mode that turns children's bodies – and women's I might add – into resources to be traded on the global market.

In this section my focus has been on highlighting the intersection of political, religious, racial, capitalist, and class-based dominant structures in the dismissal of some women from motherhood in the global hierarchy of parental suitability. In doing so my aim is to disrupt the myth of altruism and demonstrate the global structural inequalities that underpin the purview of certain South Korean women's reproductive freedom and turn them into birthmothers.

2.3 Birthmothers and gender ideology in South Korea

Before I proceed to discuss the gender and family ideology that shapes South Korean women's experiences, I address the moral philosophy of Confucianism, implemented as a state ideology during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). Confucianism is said to have a profound impact on South Korean society, spanning from cultural practices to politics and legislation, especially in relation to gender and family matters (See Choe, 2006; Kim, 1994). According to Doolan (2021:364), scholars and laypersons often cite Confucian ideals, including the presumed cultural inclination towards marriage as a prerequisite for having children to explain why unwed women are dismissed as mothers. However, he asserts, such framing orientalises and essentialises South Korean society, and isolates the problem as specific to South Korean culture (ibid). I concur with Doolan and emphasise that to relegate all blame to South Korean culture may also relativise the power asymmetries embedded in birthmothers' lives. Several scholars illustrate that oppressive norms are not unique to South Korea; globally, unwed mothers face stigma based on gender, class, and ethnicity.¹² To focus solely on Confucianism's impact is to ignore patriarchal normativity as a global concern.

While Sociologist Seungsook Moon (2005:5) argues against dismissing Confucianism as a powerful philosophy altogether, she asserts that it is not a fixed entity underlying South Korean society. Rather, Confucianism is subject to constant negotiation and interpretation (ibid). In line with Moon, I consider Confucianism as an idea mediated in conversation with other ideas and practices that South Korean women's reproductive lives can be understood by. I move beyond essentializing accounts and focus on literature that highlight gender and family ideology as expressed in policies such as family planning initiatives and in the public discourse. Such ideologies are crucial in shaping the processes that regulate and restrict certain South Korean women's reproductive freedom.

2.3.1 Gender and family ideology as expressed in policies

Korean Studies scholar Hyaeweol Choi (2009) disputes the notion that Confucian family and gender ideology has continuously dominated South Korea since the Joseon Dynasty. Choi argues that it was a combination of Confucian values of filial piety, *hyo* (孝) – respectful and virtuous conduct in honour of parents and ancestors, Japanese models of gender ideology, and

¹² See Baxter et al. (2012), March (2019) on US birthmothers, Bos (2008) on India, and Fonseca (2011) on birthmothers in Brazil.

religious Western middle-class family ideals introduced by Christian missionaries in the early 20th century that informed modern gender ideology (ibid:4).

Choi examines the notion of ‘wise mother and good wife’, *hyonmo yangcho* (현모양처), a Japanese Meiji era (1868-1912) construct introduced to Korea at the turn of the 20th century by Korean intellectuals as a modern gender ideal (ibid:4). The ideal promotes the education of women to become responsible for home making, children’s schooling and health, and respectable partners to their husbands (ibid:6). Despite the emphasis on women’s education, Choi contends that the notion, similar to its Japanese counterpart, was a gendered ideal motherhood construct that confined women to the domestic sphere (ibid). It extolled Korean women as thrifty managers of the home, influenced by Christian missionaries who advocated North American middle-class ideals of gendered division of labour and women as the moral backbone of the conjugal unit based on the modern idea of a nuclear family (ibid:11). Thus, Choi contends that Confucian values of filial piety were impacted by Christian ideas of piety and demonstrates how women were designated as mothers and wives in an ideal that eventually fashioned modern gender ideology in South Korea and profoundly impacted unwed women’s lives.

The notion of ‘wise mother and good wife’ impacted modern nation building in South Korea during the military rule (1961-1987) (Moon 2005:81-87). Nationwide Family planning policies (FPP) promoted positive images of nuclear families, sterilisation programmes, and education on contraception to curb the number of childbirths in the developmental state while casting women as solely mothers and wives as prescribed by the ideal of ‘wise mother and good wife’ (ibid:94). Eunjoo Cho (2016:803) references Foucault to show how ‘disciplinary power’ was exercised through a normative discourse of patriarchy, family, and sexuality in the FPP. Cho shows that the FPP advanced sex as pleasurable and downplayed the procreational purposes of sex, but only in the context of marriage (ibid:812). Cho contends that the campaigns highlighted the model family as based on conjugal love, liberated from concerns of unwanted pregnancy, and ultimately established heterosexual marriage as the norm in a modern state (ibid). Kim (2016:51-54) contends that the FPP was an ‘ideological framework’ that framed women as essential for the reproduction of the nation while simultaneously spurring marginalisation of unwed women who did not conform to the framework.

While Moon (2005) directs attention to the FPP as an ideology that domesticated women, Cho's (2016) analysis underscores the promotion of conjugality as the foundation for sexual activity. With restrictions on childbirth even within marriage, unwed pregnancies became an even bigger concern. Kim (2016) stresses the FPP as a restrictive ideology that turned women into utilities for the state's reproduction and regulated participation in the state for those who failed to live up to patriarchal kinship norms, particularly unwed women not included in nuclear family structures.

In this section I have shed light on the gender and family ideology embodied in the domesticating notion of 'wise mother and good wife', its impact on state policies in South Korea, and the production of patriarchal normativity. The authors' observations inform my discussion on how unwed pregnant women's deviation from the gendered ideals signifies incompetence and thus invalidates them as potential mothers in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 Birthmothers' morality in public discourse

Normative ideals about gender and sexuality and the non-conformity to those ideals by unwed birthmothers are also reflected in public discourse on adoption. Doolan (2021:353) asserts that the 'camptowns', small entertainment settlements surrounding US military bases, are central to understanding a presumed link between transnational adoption and birthmothers' sexual (mis)conduct. Doolan claims that the connection between military prostitution in the camptowns has constructed birthmothers as promiscuous by both locals and Western standards (ibid). By associating promiscuity with birthmothers, the moral imperative of marriage is exacerbated and intensifies the discounting of unwed women as mothers.

The association between birthmothers and alleged debauchery pervades media in South Korea, illuminated by Shin (2020:3) who shows how the imagined behaviour of some women serves as the rationale for transnational adoption in media discourse. Presumed irresponsibility reflected in unwed women's unplanned pregnancies is pointed out as the very reason why transnational adoption exists. Comparably, Kim (2016:3) puts forward that in public representations birthmothers are both imagined by the figure of an older, sacrificing woman who gave up her child due to poverty, and by the figure of an unwed woman, a sexually reckless character whose 'indiscretions' leave her no option but to relinquish her child. In my analysis of the gendered violence exercised by state legislation and in private institutional settings in Chapter 5 it is this latter younger figure that birthmothers are understood by. Building on the

authors in this section, I will attend to how sexual morality serves as justification for excluding her from reproductive freedom.

In this chapter I emphasised colonial legacies, nation building, and capitalists' interest's impact on transnational adoption and therefore also for the transformation of women into birthmothers. In the last section I have pointed to the significance of morality in the construction of unwed women as unfit as mothers. The insights serve as the backdrop for my analysis on the violence that is inherent in the social and material conditions of birthmothers' lives.

3. Methodology

In this chapter I present data and sources for the thesis and map out my applied methods of data collection and analysis.

3.1 Research design and presentation of data

This thesis follows a qualitative and interpretivist approach (Bryman 2016:375) as I explore how birthmothers through life stories create meaning in the experience of being separated from their children and how they negotiate the violence subjected to them by legislation and private institutions. Jackson's (2002:85) perspective on storytelling as a meaning-making activity provides a framework for me to explore what birthmothers call upon when they seek to make sense out of being separated from their children. Thus, birthmothers' life stories are the primary field of knowledge production.

The research principally relies on publicly available material in the form of birthmothers' life stories. Data from interviews and site-visits conducted in South Korea in January 2023 serves as the basis for contextual descriptions and as support for my analysis of the life stories. This multiple methods approach allows me to gauge the strength of my interpretations and lend credibility to the analysis (See Bryman 2016:386 on triangulation of data for credibility in qualitative research).

3.1.1 Data sources and limitation of the data: life stories

The first set of data is from the book, *Dreaming* (2010), edited by Han Sang Soon. The book comprises seventeen life stories written by South Korean women who resided at a shelter for unwed pregnant women, the maternity home called Aeranwon between the mid 1980s-mid 2000s during pregnancy and childbirth. At the time of events, they were between the ages of 16-22 and from middle- and working-class backgrounds. None were involved with the fathers of their children. Fifteen of them placed their children for adoption after giving birth. The women are all anonymised; some by using parts of their real names and others are presented as nameless. For the latter group I have chosen to name them to enhance their subjectivity.

Dreaming's life stories are curated by an editor who was also the director of the maternity home when the book was published. It raises the question of what and whose stories have been omitted. Parts of *Dreaming* have already been analysed by Yook and Kim (2018). I share their

reservation that being mediated through one of the key actors in the adoption process, the book serves a specific purpose (ibid:2). An in-depth discussion of this is found in Chapter 5. I acknowledge that the stories are not representative of all birthmothers in South Korea but recognise the insight into aspects deemed of significance by the editor and the life stories' authors.

Dreaming (2010) presents reconstructions of women's rather dismal experiences in deciding whether to keep their children or give them up for adoption. Jackson (2002:22) reminds us that storytelling involves rhetorical devices, reworks, and rearrangements to create meaning for the author and the audience. This allows me to view the life stories as a strategic meaning making effort. The life stories follow a classic, emotional storytelling arc (Boyd et al. 2020:1). Initially they feature the women's lives before pregnancy, then a middle-passage of inner crisis and abuse from surroundings during pregnancy ensues. The crisis builds up to a dramatic climax when the child is handed over to the adoption agency before the stories reach a cathartic resolution when the women start to plan for the future.

Hence, Dreaming consists of dark, yet carefully crafted, well-rounded stories written several years after the fact, thereby introducing a chronotypical (Bakhtin 1981) – temporal and spatial – distance from when the events unfolded to the stories were created. Stories are never “once upon a time”, but always present “here and now” (Jackson 2002:254) as storytellers emphasise themes most crucial under current circumstances. Despite the historical past of the events of the stories, storytelling conflates the chronotypes, blurs the boundaries between then and now, and underscores the ongoing relevance of the issue at hand.

Furthermore, storytelling is a social process that involves an audience who engages with, interprets, and potentially transforms in the process of listening or reading, regardless of when events took place (Jackson 2002:254). Jackson's proposition that stories are “authored and authorised dialogically” (ibid:11) is particularly pertinent in this case. The stories, presented as letters from birthmothers to the adoptees they are separated from by adoption, aim to target adoptees “to ease the pain and curiosity of adoptees” (Han 2010:2). In that light it is unsurprising that the stories are crafted to evoke empathy and ties up in a neat resolution. They convey the underlying message that if birthmothers resolve their situation, perhaps struggling adoptees will too?

To support the life stories of *Dreaming* I rely on Hosu Kim's (2016) collection of "oral histories". Kim sampled life stories through interviews with 21 married and unmarried birth mothers between 21-70 years of age, all from working class backgrounds, in the period from 2005-2012 (ibid:191). Events unfold in approximately the same time frame as the ones in *Dreaming*, between the early/mid 1980s to the early/mid 2000s. I do not have access to the full interviews or their context and thus have limited insight into the way they were constructed for meaning. Kim's material retells the circumstances of becoming pregnant and being separated from their children by adoption. In contrast to the stories in *Dreaming*, Kim's life stories emphasise instances of violence, coercion, and rejection of birthmothers. The stories display immense grief and anger with no apparent redemption. Akin to *Dreaming*, Kim's stories are also mediated on a specific background. Kim's aim is not to alleviate adoptees, but to present a critique of the violent practices of birthmothers' separation from their children. In this way Kim's collection sheds light on parts of the stories left out in *Dreaming*. In Chapter 5 I revisit the discussion of the sources in light of their particular backgrounds.

3.1.2 Data sources and limitations of the data: interviews and site visits

The supporting data for the thesis includes material from three 2-hour semi-structured interviews and site visits in South Korea, facilitated by translators. I took notes, transcribed, and made summaries. The interviews, files and transcriptions are stored in a password protected online storage.

I met with the director of a maternity home, anonymised as Maternity Home A (MHA), for an interview and a guided tour of the residents' living quarters. MHA's aim to improve the lives for single mothers through social welfare offerings was the main focus. In the early 2000s MHA was the first maternity home in South Korea to provide support and shelter to women who kept their children after birth. This resulted in a significant increase in women who decided to keep their babies. However, for most of the events in question of the life stories (mid 1980s-mid 2000s) MHA was, like the rest of the country's maternity homes, key in the adoption agencies' acquisition of babies. Although MHA has changed significantly since the early and mid 2000s the data from the interview provides contemporary context that allows me to analyse the birthmothers' current reworks of their experiences while residing at a maternity home in the mid 1980s-mid 2000s.

I interviewed the Senior Pastor of a Presbyterian foundation, Christian Foundation B (CFB) and their secretary. The foundation manages a so-called baby box, a literal hatch in the wall for relinquishing babies. They operate temporary housing and care for the babies before they are referred to institutions or adoption agencies. CFB offers counselling and prayer service to women who relinquish their babies and welfare support to women who decide to keep their children. As outspoken anti-abortion proponents the foundation ardently supports adoption. They participate in policymaking and advocate for lenient adoption regulation. The interview centred on the foundation's work with women and the policymaking. Although CFB was not operational in the timeframe of the life story events, their methods echo old procedures of the maternity homes and thus provide contextual data for the analysis.

I met with volunteer Organisation C (ORGC) for an interview with their spokesperson. Comprising 17 Korean women, ORGC assists birth families in searching for their adopted children and vice versa. They translate adoption files for adoptees and facilitate 'reunions' between adoptees and their birth families. The interview explored the organisation's experiences with searching for adoptees and birth families and their role in reunions and provides other examples of birthmothers' stories.

Anthropologist Claudia Fonseca (2011:312) asserts that working with fragments of data from different times and contexts poses a risk to coherency in the analysis and may also perpetuate a time- and placeless birthmother figure and thereby aid further mythmaking. Hence, I tread cautiously when I apply data from different timeframes but will stress that use of contemporary data provides clues to what shapes the crafting of the life stories.

3.2 Generation of data and data analysis

For the interviews I applied a semi-structured technique with open-ended questions (see Appendix III for interview questions) to highlight the participant's own perceptions and to illuminate what is important to them paired with questions targeted at reflexive discussions (Galletta 2013:2). While I do not aim for statistical validity, numerical representativeness, nor generalisability, I endeavoured to incorporate diverse perspectives by involving practitioners for and against adoption (Bryman 2016:385).

All data were analysed using qualitative content analysis that relies on coding to systematically classify and sort material into analytical themes (Cho & Lee 2014:3). I employed an open inductive approach to simultaneously tease out themes from both Dreaming (2010), transcriptions and summaries of interviews, and fieldnotes (Cho & Lee 2014:4). I shifted towards a deductive approach as the codes began to overlap (ibid). Kim's (2016) collection of "oral histories" was added later and I used the existing codes as a departure to read Kim's material and add new codes. Subsequently I returned to Dreaming to apply the new codes before I generated overarching themes from the codes (see Appendix IV for codes and themes).

3.3 Limitation of the methodology

Qualitative methods align with this study's interpretivist focus on storytelling as a way to understand, experience, and produce social worlds (Upadhyay 2012:124). However qualitative research is limited in statistical and generalisable validity, and reliability for replication (Bryman 2016:383-384). To address this, I maintained an audit trail and triangulated data using different methods and data sources to enhance credibility (ibid).

Due to my poor proficiency in Korean, I relied on translation in 2 of the interviews (the interview with ORGC was conducted in English). Use of a translator potentially questions the validity of the data considering the translator's subjectivity (Borchgrevink 2003). In the interviews with MHA and CFB, bilingual individuals familiar with the subject and active parts of the social field translated for me. I have no way to assess what was potentially omitted or enhanced in the mediations. As Kim's and Dreaming's life stories have been translated too, the issue of potential biases in my data remains. Anthropologist Axel Borchgrevink challenges the idea of neutrality in any translation and draws on Quine to assert that all translation involves interpretation as nothing can be relayed one-to-one with the original intent (in Borchgrevink:105). The challenge is amplified when translators are actors of the social settings. I view the translators as potential gatekeepers and recognise their role in shaping my data in a certain way (ibid:110). To corroborate the interviews, I consulted other sources including discussions with Korean scholars, a documentary (Solo Mums, 2014), and newspaper articles about adoption from South Korea (Cho & Kongsted 2023; Choe 2023; Kim 2022a; 2022b; Lee 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; Rickmers 2021; Rothschild 1988; Smith et al. 2022).

3.4 Ethical considerations and positionality

The study adheres to the ethical considerations outlined by the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University (2021) for Master students. I clarified the study's purpose, publication dates, public availability of the thesis, and potential subsequent publications drawing on the data with interviewees. Participants were informed that the study is for research purposes, data is stored securely, anonymity will remain, and that consent for participation can be withdrawn at any time (ibid:5).

In all research gender, sexuality, level of education, nationality, and ethnicity impact interpretation of data (Bryman 2016:388). Particularly relevant in this case is how I approach participants, especially those with whom I disagree with as a critical adoptee and an activist. When I interviewed the CFB who supports continuous transnational adoption from South Korea, I debated whether to reveal my critical stance on the adoption system, and then risk either a rejection or emotional discussions I was not sure I was ready for. While it is ethically questionable to conceal the researcher's identity and intentions, because it denies the research participants the right to informed consent (Lugosi 2006:542-544), I never actively concealed nor disclosed my identity or intentions. In the analysis I strive to engage equally critically with all data sources.

As the study involves vulnerable people, I rely solely on publicly available material on birthmothers. Birthmothers face widespread marginalisation in South Korea, and adoption is a contentious issue. Writing about marginalised groups entails the risk of perpetuating disparagement despite intentions. I am not an activist researcher who explicitly aims for social change (Speed 2006:67), but I am an activist and a researcher who aims to critically examine the violent practices that I am also personally affected by as an adoptee. This underlines Hoffman's (2007) emphasis that research involves considerable emotional labour; "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild in Hoffman 2007:322). I struggle as I approach birthmothers' stories as a meaning-creating activity in the face of suffering. Frustration but mostly shame set in as the echo of birthmothers and adoptee's suffering – systemic falsification, coercion, deceit, and fraud in adoption, not to mention lives lost to suicide, depression, abuse, and addiction¹³ – rings in my ears. It makes

¹³ See Smith et al. (2022) for just one out of numerous reports about illegal adoption. See Slap et al. (2001) on the heightened risk of suicide and substance abuse among adoptees. See Broadhurst and Mason (2020) on birthmothers' mental health deterioration after child relinquishment.

me question the moral in trying to find sense in others' suffering (Levinas 1998:99) as if that suffering is not also partly mine too. My ambivalence towards meaning-creation and potential ensuing reconciliation is mirrored in my analysis. Every time I claim that a birthmother makes sense of her experience, I cringe, and words stop flowing. I proceed awkwardly while I navigate my own emotions, mindful of not falling for what Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas calls "the temptation of theodicy" – the tendency to construe even immense cruelty as a meaningful part of a 'bigger plan' (ibid:96), while at the same time acknowledging that the drive to find meaning is existential (Jackson 2002:93).

Furthermore, I openly align with the critical adoption scholarship discussed in Chapter 2 and I recognise the bias of being a critical adoptee and an activist doing research. I seek to mitigate my position by being critical of all data sources and offer a perspective that is flawed but informed by my dual position as an insider adoptee/activist with access to unique information and network, and a researcher with the goal of disseminating knowledge.

4. Analytical Concepts

In this chapter I expound on the theoretical perspectives of the thesis. I employ a reflexive approach rather than to rely on one “grand theory” (Mills 2023). I utilise several analytical concepts: ‘agency’, ‘everyday violence’, and ‘motherhood’ relevant for the analysis of (1) how birthmothers through life stories create meaning in the experience of being separated from their children and (2) how they negotiate the violence they endure in the structures and practices of state legislation and private institutional settings. Through this, I argue that birthmothers in storytelling seek to reclaim their impaired subjectivities and restore their humanity by asserting themselves as mothers.

4.1 Everyday violence and the question of humanity

In Chapter 5 I juxtapose the analysis of how storytelling becomes a vehicle for birthmothers’ negotiation of the gendered forms of *violence* they encounter with a focus on the practices of legislation and private institutions, underpinned by patriarchal normativity that strips women of self-determination and denies them reproductive freedom.

Drawing on Anthropologists Arthur Kleinman et al.’s, (1997) perspective on violence as the cause of *social suffering*, I adopt the understanding of violence as “the devastating injuries that social force can inflict on human experience” (ibid:xi), generated at political, economic, and institutional orders on “local, national, global” levels (Kleinman 2000:226). Kleinman (2000) envisions this as a form of structural violence “of everyday life” (ibid:228). Anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1996) terms this “everyday violence” (ibid:889) to distinguish it from the acute consequences of war. However, Kleinman stresses that the impact of structural violence of everyday life sanctioned by the state (ibid:239) or the public (ibid:230) is no less severe than that of mass destruction. Rather, ‘everyday’ refers to the invisible and ubiquitous nature of this kind of violence (ibid:228). Henceforth, I use Scheper-Hughes’ term ‘everyday violence’ for simplicity, but not to dismiss the impact of this form of violence. I apply Kleinman’s understanding that social suffering is caused by everyday violence imposed on birthmothers during the process of separation from their children, manifested on the structural level of state legislation and in the practices of institutions such as maternity homes and adoption agencies.

To comprehend what legitimises the everyday violence some South Korean women endure, I turn to postcolonial scholar Lisa Marie Cacho's (2012) analysis of the roles of race and imposition of morals in the 'criminalisation' of racialised groups in the US. Addressing the legal/illegal divide associated with migrant workers in public discourse, Cacho illustrates how racialisation and perceived "illegality" – and thus moral digress – cast brown migrant workers as both less deserving of protection under the law and justifiable targets of juridical and public violence (ibid:43). In other words, Cacho argues that racialisation *and* "misrecognition" (ibid:8) of migrant workers' morals generate their rightlessness. They have none and cannot demand rights as they are already rendered guilty (ibid). In my analysis of how everyday violence of legislation and institutions deprives women of rights and autonomy, I employ Cacho's insights and suggest that the misrecognition of unwed women's morals in relation to 'responsible' family planning and sexual conduct beget their status as 'de facto guilty' and serves as justification for the everyday violence of exclusion from having and demanding rights.¹⁴

4.2 The capacity for human action and meaning-making

Several scholars cited throughout the thesis rely on a poststructuralist Foucauldian critique of inscription of power. To address how power produces subjects out of children and women, some draw on Foucault's (2003) notion of 'biopolitics' – processes in which certain parts of a population emerges as a specific political problem (p. 245) and 'biopolitical technology' – technologies of power regarding the restriction and management of perceived crisis at the level of population (p. 246). For example, Hübinette (2005) argues that transnational adoption is a social engineering tool of the South Korean modernity project that uses 'biopolitical technologies of power' to dispose of unwanted elements: disabled, racial others, and children born out of wedlock (p. 76). Kim (2016) refers to Barbara Yngvesson's claim that if transnational adoption functions as a technology that expels some children from the nation, then it also regulates and restricts certain adults from becoming parents (in Kim, 2016, p. 80). These insights are crucial to understanding that power is productive (Foucault 2016). Through 'technologies', power produces 'excess' populations and thus engenders the exclusion of some women from recognition and reproductive freedom. Without delving into the extensive debate on Foucault's perspective on subject formation and the potential for agency and resistance,

¹⁴Kim (2016:9) draws on Lisa Marie Cacho's analysis, not to highlight birthmothers' 'de facto guilt' as legitimization of violence, but to call attention to how the rightlessness of birthmothers pronounces their legal and social erasure.

especially in feminist writings¹⁵, I simply note the absence of a clear address of agency in the cited writings. Although Kim (2016) argues that birthmothers' life stories elucidate resistance to their "social death" (ibid:146) — understood as birthmothers legal and social erasure, a devastating effect of the regulations and restrictions of biopower — a perspective on agency is never developed.

The question of agency is vital for addressing how birthmothers create meaning in loss and negotiate violent terms. Given the extent and severity of violent and coercive relations – kidnappings are rife and well documented in transnational adoption – as represented in both Kim's (2016) work and others' (See Marre & Briggs 2009), it is no wonder that Rickie Solinger refers to adoption as the result of a birthmother's "choiceless" decision (in Kim, 2016:200). In this light, use of the word agency seems almost absurd. However, with agency, I do not mean a normative kind of agency as in birthmothers' 'freedom of choice' in relinquishment to adoption. Rather, I refer to storytelling.

Michael Jackson (2002:14) argues that storytelling envisions an existential urge to assert one's being as a meaningful existence when met with forces beyond one's control. He builds on Hanna Arendt's conception that storytelling is "a vital human strategy for sustaining *a sense of agency* [my accentuation] in the face of disempowering circumstances" (ibid:15). Reworking experiences of intense loss of self-determination aids the storyteller in recovering a form of "autonomy" (ibid:18). Storytelling thus allows for the disempowered, the ones who are acted upon to become the actors (ibid:16). Hence when birthmothers tell their stories they establish *a sense of agency*. Striving to create meaning out of the meaninglessness of loss and violence, they act upon the world, even if it is for a short time in the context of storytelling.

In Chapter 3 I addressed my ambivalence towards analysing birthmothers' storytelling as a meaning-creating activity. Levinas (1998:96) argues that it is nefarious to attempt to seek meaning in others' suffering. The only way to approach suffering is to view it as a state of being: vile, tragic, and absurd (ibid:99). I do not mean to suggest that finding meaning brings liberation or healing from trauma as some scholars suggest according to Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer (1997:54). Langer rejects any notions of redress in relation to holocaust

¹⁵ McLaren (2002) outlines the feminist rejection of Foucault's belief that subjectivity is always produced in power relations leaving the subject "wholly determined by social forces" vis-a-vis feminists' call for a politically subversive and liberating movement (p. 2).

survivors' storytelling. He points to the *durability* of the experience of abominations and argues that the atrocities are frozen in time and makes the experience of them constant. No storytelling can escape the duration of such violent atrocities (ibid:55). So, when birthmothers tell their stories they establish a *sense of agency*, but I do not propose that meaning-creating activities automatically spawn liberation or healing. In Chapter 5, as I reserve space for and place heavy emphasis on the violence of legislation and institutions, it results from my attempt to balance a shaky teleological line between attention to what purpose storytelling serves and recognition of the 'frozen in time' experiences of abject violence that make birthmothers have a story in the first place.

Furthermore, storytelling does not erase suffering or subordination. In some cases, stories may even play out as conformity to or reinforcement of dominant forces (See Jackson 2002, p. 230). Anthropologist Saba Mahmood (2001) in her ground-breaking work on women's participation in the Islamic revival in Egypt argues that the tendency to associate human agency with "resistance" or subversion within liberal feminist scholarship curbs an understanding of women's perspectives in "non-liberal" societies (ibid:203-204). Instead, Mahmood proposes that we view agency "as a capacity for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create." (ibid:203). In other words, Mahmood highlights a capacity for action *within* the context of particular conditions.

In Chapter 5 when birthmothers' stories align with and assume patriarchal normativity, it is not merely a matter of discipline or self-disciplining subjugation to power. Rather, expressions of patriarchal normativity allow birthmothers to codify their experiences within their context. I dovetail on Jackson's understanding that storytelling is birthmothers' way to recover a sense of agency and actively engage with the conditions that omit and reject them. I employ Mahmood's perspective that agency is a capacity for action that may sometimes play out as affirmation of the logic and structure of dominance.

4.3 Motherhood

In all the life stories birthmothers consistently emphasise maternal love. Loss of their children does not impede the perception of themselves as mothers. Maternal love and motherhood seem to be taken for granted presumably through the events of pregnancy and birth. In face of dehumanising violence, I argue that birthmothers through storytelling seek to reclaim their

impaired subjectivities and restore their humanity by asserting themselves as mothers. Thus, I perceive birthmothers' motherhood as centred on maternal love, but also as a site of defiance, not necessarily to the structures of subordination but to dehumanisation.

To specify an understanding of motherhood, I build on feminist scholar Evelyn Nakano Glenn's (2016:4) suggestion to think of motherhood as a practice; 'mothering' rather than a static set of ideas. Hence, I understand birthmothers' reification of their status as mothers in their continuous references to care and love as a mothering practice. I do not mean to reaffirm ideas of motherhood as 'natural' to women, nor that all birthmothers should or want to mother. Instead, I bring attention to a kind of motherhood that mirrors aspects of normative motherhood, but also redefines it. Birthmothers' mothering is ambiguous. Their possibility to mother is acutely restricted by the fact that the object of motherhood, the child, is missing, but they still reproduce a normative motherhood in which the connection between pregnancy, giving birth, and being a mother is naturalised (Fonseca 2011:317). However, through storytelling motherhood is also redefined. Let me elaborate.

Writing on birthmothers' representations of grief and loss in personal entries on public internet fora, Kim (2016:146) argues that when birthmothers tell their stories they construct and reconstruct their motherhood. Kim builds on Glenn's suggestion to think of motherhood as a relationship that plays out in specific social and historical contexts "in which one individual nurtures and cares for another" (in Kim 2016:12). In Kim's writing the context for mothering thus becomes the technology mediated representations (ibid:13). I build on Kim's understanding of Glenn to shed light on storytelling as the site for birthmothers' mothering. It is in the context of storytelling that birthmothers care and nurture. This understanding brings forth Jackson's (2002) suit that storytelling is never a recap of past experiences, but always in "the here and now" (ibid:254). Consequently, birthmothers' mothering is at once both alternative as it only exists in the here and now of storytelling, but also conformist as the idea of a 'natural' tie between pregnancy, birth and mothering is reified. In summary, I understand storytelling as the context for birthmothers' acts of alternative mothering and show that birthmothers seek to reclaim their humanity by asserting themselves as mothers.

5. Analysis

In the analysis I focus on the process of placing a child for adoption and I examine how birthmothers create meaning out of the loss of their children. I analyse life stories from the book *Dreaming* (2010) and Kim's (2016) collection of "oral histories" to demonstrate how women negotiate gendered forms of everyday violence at state level legislation and in private institutional settings through storytelling. Life stories are brought into conversation with a description of legislation and institutional settings that regulate certain women's lives. The chapter is structured around three particular points of departure that allows me to explore processes of everyday violence. The three points reflect three successive steps in the separation of birthmothers from their children.¹⁶ First, the South Korean family household registration system excludes all single women from becoming mothers in a legal sense. Second, institutional settings exemplified by maternity homes amplifies the legal system's rejection of single women as mothers by rendering adoption the only logical outcome for unwed mothers. Third, the legal adoption procedure, also known as plenary adoption, defines the complete severance of kinship ties between birth families and their children¹⁷ and executes the exclusion prompted by the family household registration system and the maternity homes, and turns single mothers into birth mothers by way of adoption.

5.1 Birthmothers' mothering and the family household registration system

I had my baby girl when I was twenty-two years old. But I couldn't register her birth on the family registry, because her father and I were not legally married. According to the officer in charge of the ward office, there seemed to be no way to register a birth without a father. I had to find the father. (Eun in *Dreaming* 2010:86-87)

Unmarried and separated from the child's father due to lies and abuse, Eun was prevented from registering her child (ibid:86) by the former main pillar of the South Korean Family Law, the family household registration system, *hojuje* (호주제). In this subsection I approach the *hojuje* as a site for exercise of everyday violence and juxtapose Eun's story from *Dreaming* (2010)

¹⁶ I could have prioritised other points of departure for my discussion of the relinquishment process such as the general lack of social welfare services for unwed mothers, the media discourses, or birthmothers' social circles. The life stories account significant abuse at the hands of social networks when pregnancies become known. However, these departure points are selected for their key role in the exclusion of some women as mothers and the choice also reflects the data, I have available.

¹⁷ Plenary adoption is the norm in South Korea in contrast to 'open adoption' in which a connection between the adoptee and the birthparents is made possible through non-anonymous relinquishment.

and Lee Mi Sun's from Kim's (2016) life stories to shed light on birthmothers' negotiations with the system.

The *hojuje* was a patrilineal/patrilocal system established by the colonial Japanese government and abolished in 2005 (Lim 2021:499) at the end of the timeframe of the life stories' events. Under the *hojuje* all citizens of South Korea were recorded in a family registry, a *hojeok* (호적), headed by the oldest male of the household (Moon & Choe 2020:3). For unwed mothers the system's privilege of the male population was particularly restrictive. Only a man could register a child which necessitated acknowledgement of the child by the child's father or the mother's own father for legal registration (ibid:6). Failing to comply, the child was denied registry and full access to citizenship, including ID-documents and social security coverage (Lim 2021:499).

Eun's story reveals that she tracked down her child's father and convinced him of marriage for the sake of birth registry. After her child was registered she never saw the father again until she filed for divorce years later (Dreaming 2010:86-87). Eun solved her dilemma by entering a proforma marriage and thus circumventing the regulations. In the same vein Sungyun Lim (2021) sheds light on another method used to address the challenges of the system, namely 'false birth registration' in which a domestically adopted child is registered as the adoptive parents' own birth child to ensure the image of an unbroken heritage line on the *hojeok*. Akin to false birth registration, Eun also negotiated the conditions of the system to her advantage. Eun's story stands out among the life stories. In some way she 'beat' the system but, in her story, she also emphasises her regret about marrying a man who had deceived and abused her:

I didn't realize what I was doing. I didn't know what I was going to go through because of the marriage [...]. If only I had known another way to register my baby girl's birth back then, I wouldn't have done it. I should never have married him. (Eun in Dreaming 2010:87)

Even though Eun was able to keep her child she still suffered as she had to marry an abusive man to secure her child's rights. Eun makes sense of her decision to enter a proforma marriage by emphasising it was for the sake of her child. As such Eun asserts her maternal love against the challenges of the system.

The *hojuje* not only posed problems of an unregistered child's rights, it also denied single women official status as legal mothers unless married to the child's father. A condition also underscored by the fact that a child born as a result of extramarital sex would upon registration become the father's wife's legal child (Moon & Choe 2020:9). Unwed mothers unable to marry her child's father, would have to accept that she had no rights over her child. In the opposite case where an unmarried male or a male engaging in extramarital sex wished to register a child as his, he could freely do so (ibid:6). The system only 'punished' women (and by association unregistered children) for the 'transgressions' of engaging in extramarital or non-conjugal sex. Morality related to gender was thus imposed in the assessment of women's eligibility to become mothers. In line with Cacho's (2012) insights, it was their alleged non-conformity to patriarchal gender and family ideology, in other words, their de facto status as 'guilty' that propelled and justified the everyday violence in the regulation of single women's reproductive freedom and their exclusion from motherhood.

Lee Mi Sun from Kim's (2016) oral histories lost her child in 1986. In her story, recognition of motherhood and legal rights also appear as central in her deliberations on her child's future. She recounts how she fell pregnant because of rape before she entered a relationship with her assailant.¹⁸ Lee Mi Sun soon realised that the man was already married with no intentions of divorcing. Her son would then either be registered as her own father's child "as a cohabitant, not as my child" (ibid:57) or in her partner's household with his wife as the legal mother. In the latter case she describes her concern:

If he was registered with his father and his legal wife, the child would be mistreated by his wife. That was my worry. Both situations were unbearable to me. (ibid:7)

None of the options would grant Lee Mi Sun custody of her child or possibility to intervene in case of mistreatment. Her concerns articulate the restriction: as an unwed woman she was excluded from motherhood.

¹⁸ Relationships between survivors of rape and perpetrators are not uncommon in South Korea. Attitudes of blame towards survivors for not protecting their 'chastity' and shame for engaging in sexual acts out of wedlock are potential reasons why many survivors feel obliged to enter relationships with the perpetrators (See Lee et al., 2012).

Lee Mi Sun also worries about her child's future possibilities as an "illegitimate" child:

His status of "illegitimacy" would follow him everywhere, from school to the workplace, interfering with any opportunities that might come his way. His illegitimacy would preclude him from working as a public servant or at big corporations ... If I had wanted to be selfish, I would have hidden him and raised him myself. But for his sake, I chose adoption. (ibid:56)

Lim asserts the social significance of the registry and refers to the *koseki* – the Japanese equivalent of the *hojeok* – and the concept of "koseki consciousness": the careful maintenance of the *koseki* to keep it free of potential 'negative' social markers such as divorce and children born out of wedlock (Krogness in Lim 2021:500). Lee Mi Sun also enunciates the registry' as a public signifier of a child's social value. Worried of being perceived as selfish and with limited options she decided to relinquish her son for adoption. Hence Lee Mi Sun's story envisions her selfless love for her child. Ironically, and dismally, in face of the restrictions of the *hojuje*, adoption becomes the motherly choice.

Both stories show that the process of deciding what to do in case of an unplanned pregnancy is mediated on the everyday violence of the registry and channelled through gendered regulation of women as mothers. Despite the divergent outcome, Lee Mi Sun places her child for adoption while Eun enters a proforma marriage to keep hers, through storytelling both women create meaning by emphasising maternal love and care. In light of the dehumanising conditions, despite devastating consequences, Lee Mi Sun, and Eun both demonstrate capacity for action when they tell their stories and reify motherhood.

5.2 Pious motherhood and the practice of maternity homes

Below I explore the practice of maternity homes as an amplification of the restriction on single women already posed by the *hojuje*. I build on Kim's (2016) life stories and analysis of maternity homes to suggest that maternity homes construe adoption as the only moral solution for unwed pregnant women. I contrast this analysis with stories from Dreaming (2010) to demonstrate how birthmothers make sense of the decision to relinquish even if it means assuming the logic of the structures that subordinate them.

In *Dreaming*, birthmothers stress adoption as a decision made out of love for the child. Miss Yu¹⁹, who gave birth in 2000, details her thoughts when she learned she was pregnant after break-up with her boyfriend:

But in the end I didn't want to ruin my child's future because of a selfish desire. I didn't want my child to be branded "a child of a single mother" in Korea, a place still overflowing with conservative and judgemental eyes. "I love you, but there are so many hurdles we have to overcome for us to be together. I don't mind getting hurt, but if you get hurt, if you get hurt because of people's prejudice, I would prefer my own death over yours". (ibid:129)

Miss Yu links societal pressure to her conviction that she cannot care for her child. She deems herself selfish for wanting to keep her child. Throughout *Dreaming* relinquishing a child is constructed as the motherly choice opposite the selfish choice of keeping the child. Kim (2016) highlights the interference of the South Korean maternity homes as pivotal for birthmothers' realisation of adoption as the selfless and moral choice.

5.2.1 Everyday Violence of Maternity Homes

I previously discussed how transnational adoption turned into a profit-making business. Within the logic of supply and demand, the maternity homes became a central source for the adoption agencies to acquire children by. Established by Christian welfare foundations, the maternity homes provided shelter, practical, spiritual guidance, and vocational training for unwed, pregnant women (Director of MHA in Personal communication, February 2 2023). In 2009 South Korea had 25 maternity homes, all with ties to the adoption agencies (Dobbs 2009).²⁰ If not owned directly by adoption agencies, the maternity homes would receive financial backing from them (Kim 2016:84). By the mid 2000s more than 2500 women sought shelter at maternity homes annually (Lee in Kim 2016:84). Up to 95% placed their children for adoption after childbirth (ibid). For Aeranwon in *Dreaming*, in 1995, only 1% of the residents decided to keep their children (Han 2010:4). Considering the adoption agencies' market driven

¹⁹ In *Dreaming* Miss Yu is referred to as 'Miss' whereas the rest of the non-anonymous women are known by their family, first name or full Korean name.

²⁰ Maternity homes still exist in South Korea. I write about them in past tense to signify it is their practice at the time in question for the life stories that is in focus.

motivations and their close affiliation with maternity homes, Kim (2016) suggests that the path towards adoption was already paved upon entry into the shelters (ibid:85).

Entry into the maternity home often depended on a woman's willingness to consider adoption. Such an example is Choi Hee Sun's story from Kim's collection:

When I asked if services were available, I was asked whether I wanted to keep or give up my baby. "There is no availability, if you want to keep your baby after delivery in our facility" was the answer. I said, "I haven't decided yet." They told me, "Then, one spot is available for you". (ibid:88)

The women often find themselves without a support network or financial means at the time of pregnancy. Seeking out a maternity home seems like an obvious choice. However, the condition posed to Choi Hee Sun that she could only receive help if she was open for adoption encapsulates the significance of close ties between the maternity homes and the adoption agencies' quest to secure babies (ibid:88). Choi Hee Sun's story also stresses her ability to negotiate the institutional setting; to receive help Choi Hee Sun at least had to show an openness towards adoption adding an extra layer to the complexity of 'free choice' and agency. I'll return to that discussion below.

Spiritual guidance at the maternity homes also seems significant in the drive towards adoption. Founded by Christian organisations the maternity homes offered church service for residents, including the so-called "pledge for purity" ceremonies that promoted sexual abstinence before marriage (ibid:92). The preoccupation with sexual morality is also evident in the data from CFB. When a woman relinquishes her child in the Baby Box, an alarm goes off inside the building. The staff will hurry outside to invite her in for 'counselling'. In counselling the foundation preaches abstinence and stresses that sexual activity is for procreation purposes only (Senior Pastor and Secretary of CFB in personal communication, January 11 2022). Such ceremonies and counselling are critical to highlight, because they show how assumptions about female sexual transgression work to establish women as unworthy of motherhood. In that way, inflictions of shame herald adoption as the only choice for unwed women.

The maternity home also provided ‘counselling’ with social workers from adoption agencies who assessed women’s capabilities as mothers. Kyong from *Dreaming* (2010), with no family support, recounts:

After being admitted to the facility, the social worker knew it would be difficult for me to raise the child alone and recommended that I consider adoption. There was a group meeting concerning the baby’s future where we had to discuss what resources we had to raise the child. I had no resources and no one to help me. I didn’t see any other option, and thought it was best for the child (ibid:180).

Kyong was deemed unfit for motherhood based on her lack of resources. Her decision to relinquish was thus rationalised highlighting her presumed failure to provide for her child. The story suggests that counselling conducted within the confines of the maternity home, by the adoption agencies whose interest was to secure a child for adoption, paved the way for Kyong’s decision.

With relinquishment as a condition to receive support and a curious mix of infliction of moral values stipulated in spiritual guidance, the rash assessment of women’s parental capability in counselling sessions, the adoptions agencies’ market governed quest for children regulated women’s sexual behaviour and restricted their reproductive freedom by constructing adoption as the only right and noble choice (See also Kim 2016:92). In this way the maternity home intensified the gendered normativity of the family registry’s dismissal of single women as mothers. As Kim (2016) also points out, I understand birthmothers’ decisions to relinquish their children for adoption as an outcome of the everyday violent practices of the maternity home (ibid:92). However below I intervene by bringing attention to how birthmothers in *Dreaming* make sense of the “choiceless” decision to relinquish (ibid:200).

5.2.2 Motherhood and The Inclination Towards Piety

After long and tormented prayer I decided to go ahead with an adoption for my baby. I wanted her to live without the label of a fatherless child. Instead of this helpless and unmarried mother my baby would have capable and caring parents (Min in *Dreaming* 2010:14).

Min stresses the agony she has gone through to decide on adoption and reconciles it with her wish for her child to live without discrimination. She posits herself as “helpless” suggesting her status as “unmarried” makes her an unfit mother compared to a married more “capable” set of parents. Birthmothers’ stories illuminate how the women internalise social pressures: due to their ‘failures’ they must surrender their children as the right choice. The ‘choiceless’ decision is thus rationalised as an act of pious, motherly love.

Birthmothers engage with the norms of ‘wise mother and good wife’ (discussed in Chapter 2), framing relinquishment as the morally right, maybe even redemptive decision. Much like Mahmood’s (2001) who in her analysis of Egyptian women’s paradoxical participation in patriarchal normativity urges us to move beyond the idea of feminine resistance and focus on women’s own positive desires to be morally right characters (ibid:221). For birthmothers keeping their children would not be in alignment with the desired conduct of a wise mother in a healthy conjugal based home. Thus, relinquishment is, again ironically and dismally, a chance at redemption.

To summarise, in the context of storytelling, I view the rationalisation of the decision to relinquish a child as a choice made out of a desire to be pious and motherly loving. It serves as a way for the women to make sense of the everyday violence of regulation and restrictions of their reproductive freedom while at the same time the women offset the relinquishment to themselves and their adoptee audience. They reify their motherhood by underscoring that motherly love is at the centre of all decisions and thus strategize to claim humanity. I don’t mean to imply that ‘making sense’ or strategizing are mundane activities that people can engage in frivolously to redeem oneself. Drawing on Jackson (2005) I rather view birthmothers’ storytelling as a matter of defiant survival in face of matters over which one have little control.

5.3 Motherhood, reconciliation, and the legal adoption procedure

In this section I analyse stories from *Dreaming of birthmothers*’ ‘reconciliation’ with their loss as a meaning-creating activity. I critically approach the legal adoption procedure as the final rejection of some women as mothers. I bring the two sets of life stories into conversation to illuminate their diverse aims and backgrounds to discuss how each makes suffering intelligible.

5.3.1 Motherhood and the moral duty to reconcile

My beloved daughter, I love you so much. Bye, and let's not cry when we happen to meet in the future. Let's hold each other like two friends coming back from a short trip. Be happy and respect yourself. Good-bye, my baby (Min in *Dreaming* 2010:18).

Min was pregnant with a man who raped her on her way home from work. Forced to live with the perpetrator by her family who considered the pregnancy a result of her 'indiscretion', she describes her families' abuse, the perpetrators' eventual betrayal when he resumes his old marriage, and the anguish when she decides to place her child for adoption (ibid:12-15). Her farewell message reflects both grief and hope as she wishes for her child to accept the circumstances and be happy. Despite pain Min's own reconciliation with her situation shines through. Birthmothers in *Dreaming* often convey a sense of, if not alleviation, then reconciliation after the child is relinquished.

Scheper-Hughes (1998) claims that in a world fraught with violence, reconciliation has emerged as a "master narrative" (ibid:126), a promise of redress, to heal individuals and societies from past wrongdoings and suffering. To be able to ameliorate evil or bad experiences is seen as a sign of resilience on a cathartic, therapeutic quest to "overcoming" [author's accentuation]" (p. 126). Thus, implying that if you fail to reconcile you become a failure. Paraphrasing Clifford Gertz: suffering is a problem, *not of how to escape suffering, but a moral problem of how to suffer* (in Kleinman 1997:331). Hence to reconcile has become a moral duty (Scheper-Hughes 1998:131). In Scheper-Hughes analysis of how South African mothers assume the duty to reconcile with those who brutally murdered their children in the tumultuous years of political violence in South Africa, she refers to the mothers' forgiveness as "a painful sort of accommodationist "maternal thinking" [author's citation marks]" (ibid:125). But the thinking also reflects the grieving mothers attempts to make sense of their harrowing loss. The mothers not only accept their children's untimely deaths as meaningful by referring to their children as martyrs, but they also forgive the assailants and thus aid a wider national call for reconciliation in South Africa (ibid:125). To make sense and reconcile in this case is an attempt to transcend the inhumanity the mothers have endured (ibid).

Min's story does not serve any national ambitions, but I too view her conciliatory writing as a way to make sense out of her loss. To be a pious mother she assumes a moral duty to reconcile and thereby posits herself as a dignified human being.

The call to reconcile is also evident in birthmothers' reflections on future plans after relinquishment. Miss Yu recalls that after the adoption of her daughter was finalised, she felt "unsettled" and "depressed" (Dreaming 2010:132). However:

Then one day it dawned on me that if I continued in this way, someday my child would grow up and visit me and see that my life was a mess. [...] "Get up, be stronger. Study hard and one day show your child how healthy and stable I am". For my child I had to pull myself together. And the fact that she was under the same sky, breathing the same air, gave me enough comfort to live again (ibid:132).

Miss Yu emphasises her commitment to be a harder working and thereby a 'better', perhaps a rehabilitated, person. Her pledge can be seen as almost cathartic exactly as the promise of reconciliation divulges.

Reconciliation also involves commitment to spirituality. At the CFB the Senior Pastor invokes religion to 'heal' women after they have relinquished babies in the baby box. The pastor explains that thus far the women have experienced nothing but scorn and stresses that the women believe that they are unworthy as mothers. In contrast the pastor praises them for not having an abortion before he encourages them: "Why don't you invite Jesus Christ to your baby?". The Secretary elaborates that by becoming what CFB calls "praying mothers" the women receive a "calling" to become "something" for their children. In other words, the women are given a way to reconcile with their loss by committing themselves to be "praying mothers" (Personal communication, January 11 2023).

Much like Jinyong who gave birth in 1997 and left her abusive family before she finished high school. She became pregnant after being raped and decided to get an abortion. As she couldn't go through with the plan, she entered Aeranwon, was baptised, and later placed her child for adoption (Dreaming 2010:69-70). Jinyoung prays:

I hope you will entrust your life to God, as I have met Him at the edge of the cliff. I make the following prayer to him: Please release my daughter's pain onto me, so that her pain may be alleviated. Please pour onto her, like a waterfall, what I did not have before—freedom, joy and happiness—so that she can lead a fulfilling life (ibid:76).

Jinyong becomes what CFB calls a “praying mother”. She enlists the help of God to protect her daughter and transfer the daughter’s potential pain onto herself. Religion becomes a tool to reconcile with loss by committing to being a praying, sacrificing mother. As Scheper-Hughes (1998) claims for victims of Apartheid, strong religious faith holds the promise of turning a “victim” into the “victor” (ibid:121). This may be true in Jinyoung’s case too.

The stories in *Dreaming* disclose that abuse is at the heart of child relinquishment. However, it seems that when the stories reach resolution women entirely blame themselves for losing their children, explicit in their commitment to atone by working harder or praying, and self-sacrificing. I understand women’s self-blame as engagement with the duty to reconcile. By reconciling birthmothers assert themselves as moral beings, noble, and pious mothers. I sympathise with Scheper-Hughes’ (1998) reservation that such thinking may be viewed as an “accommodationist maternal thinking” (ibid:125). At the same time, similarly to the South African mothers who forgive their children’s murderers to defy the meaninglessness of their loss, birthmothers’ cathartic stories of devotion to self-sacrificing motherhood are their way to retain agency and make their loss intelligible too.

5.3.2 Grievance and the legal adoption procedure

The director of MHA tells me of a young woman who depressed and under the influence of alcohol used to call them several times a week for months to ask where her child was. Every time she called, she would have forgotten about the previous conversation (personal communication, February 2 2023). Similarly, the Spokesperson from ORGC tells me a story of a birthmother who has been going to the adoption agency two hours away from her home every month for 10 years to seek information on her child’s whereabouts (personal communication, January 9 2023). These examples suggest that reconciliation may be just one way to navigate loss.

The Spokesperson of ORGC stresses that the adoption agency continuously refuses to disclose any information about the child. They maintain that birthmothers have no right to know about their children after relinquishment (Personal communication, January 9 2023). Because of the legal adoption procedure birthmothers are denied access to information as the procedure erases the birthmother’s connection to her child.

In the introduction to the thesis, I refer to my own adoption file. It contains a certificate of orphanhood, my *hojeok*, that records me as the head of my family with no parents. However, contrary to general beliefs only a small number of the transnationally adoptees from South Korea were actual orphans (Shin 2020:378). At the same time US laws mandated that only orphans were eligible for adoption to the States (Lee 2022:239). With the US as the largest receiving country (Hübinette 2005:77) and a constant growing demand for children, the South Korean government had to come up with a solution. In 1961 a set of procedures was established that declared a child, regardless of its status, an orphan and thereby eligible for adoption (Social Welfare Services in Lee 2022:240). The procedures allowed the adoption agencies to report a child, no matter the circumstances of how the child was acquired,²¹ abandoned to the authorities, who in turn sealed the child's new status by issuing a certificate of orphanhood. Thus cleared, the head of the adoption agencies would apply for and be declared legal guardian over the child. As such, the agency head now had the custodial right to consent for adoption (ibid:240).²² The procedure obscures the child's background and permanently erases any ties between the birthmother and her child.

While the *hojuje* excluded single women from becoming mothers, the maternity homes magnified the rejection and rendered adoption the only logical solution to pregnancy out-of-wedlock, the legal adoption procedure is the final step in the separation of children and mothers. Claudia Fonseca (2011) dubs a similar procedure in Brazil "the dekinning of birthmothers" (ibid:314). She claims that the procedure makes adoption attractive to adoptive parents as erasure of the child's history and another mother mitigates adoptive parents' ambivalence towards their 'non-blood-based' relations with their adopted child. The procedure allows adoptive parents to imagine that the child has always been theirs (ibid). Hence the legal adoption procedure cements the everyday violence, regulation, and rejection of unwed women and turns mothers into birthmothers. Moreover, the scant information in the adoptee's file and the denial of birthmothers' information search make it highly unlikely for Min, Miss Yu, Jinyoung, and birthmothers alike to have their vague hopes of meeting their children fulfilled.

²¹ Intake of children happened through maternity homes, birth clinics, orphanages, the police, or local government agencies (Lee 2022:240).

²² Fabricating 'paper orphans', children who no matter their background are declared orphans on paper to render them eligible for adoption, is a well-used method in transnational adoption globally. Some scholars argue that it constitutes child trafficking as recognised by international law (See Van Doore 2016).

Kim Joo Hee's story from Kim (2016) portrays the acute impact the legal adoption procedure has on a mother's rights. Kim Joo Hee found out that she was pregnant as an unwed high school student on the very day she gave birth to her child in 2001. Right after delivery she was approached by an adoption agency to discuss adoption. Without knowing what she signed, Kim Joo Hee gave up her child (ibid:199). Next day she tried to reclaim her child, but the request was denied since adoptive parents had already been assigned to her child (ibid:202). In just a few moments, the legal adoption procedure turned Kim Joo Hee into a birthmother, rendered her rightless, and forever 'de-kinned' her from her child.

Adoption agencies' attitudes towards birthmothers who ask about their children's whereabouts further lament the situation. Kim Sung Hee was told that her twin daughters died after a complicated birth at a birth clinic in 1985. Later when she learned that her twins lived, but were placed for adoption by her then husband she went to the adoption agency to inquire about them. Here she was met with disdain: "You're the one who abandoned your children; why are you looking for them *now* [author's accentuation]" (ibid). Similarly, Soo Yeon, a widow, whose child was placed for adoption in 1982 describes that the adoption agency accused her of engaging in "bar work" (ibid), a euphemism for sex work. The reference to Kim Sung Hee's supposed crime of abandoning her twins and to Soo Yeon's alleged moral corruption suggest that their 'de facto guilt' voids their rights to information. This only embellishes the dehumanisation of birthmothers.

In the stories the women emphasise their attempts to challenge their rightlessness by either trying to reclaim their child or searching for information. By sharing they gain a chance at displaying maternal love and at mothering. Markedly these stories also highlight that the everyday violence continues for years after the child has left the country. They underline birthmothers' continuous commitment to motherhood, but also bring attention to the unsettled nature of the experience of being robbed of self-determination. Opposite the stories in *Dreaming*, Kim's oral histories underscore continuous grievance and remain 'unresolved'.

However, *Dreaming's* cathartic stories are not evidence that birthmothers have in fact reconciled with loss nor can I interpret Kim's birthmothers' display of anger a sign that they have not 'healed'. I echo Langer's (1997) caution against pathologizing anger as a sign of an internal struggle to heal (ibid:54) and rather consider the differing modes of storytelling, which

purposes each set of life stories serve, who the stories are shared with, and not least the diverse backgrounds on which they're mediated.

Jackson (2005) differentiates between stories of suffering told in "acceptance" and "grievance mode" (ibid:370). The first is characterised by engagement in solemn reflections as reconciliation is reached at the end of a story while the latter is defined by rage, resentment, but also resignation (ibid). As I do not have access to Kim's (2016) full interviews I only tentatively suggest that stories could be told in grievance mode while I see the stories in *Dreaming* as told in acceptance mode. The stories from *Dreaming* are meant to "ease the pain" of adoptees (Han 2010:2) and are published by an editor who as head of a maternity home was part of processes that propelled women to relinquish their children. Not surprisingly these stories focus on reconciling grief for mothers and children. Kim's stories, with Kim, the critical adoption scholar as mediator and listener, illuminate those processes as the very source of suffering when notions of oppression, rejection, disdain, and contempt reoccur. In *Dreaming* birthmothers solicit a pious, conciliatory motherhood while in Kim's stories maternal love is what spawns grief and anger. Considering how each collection is curated, creating meaning in *Dreaming* is not the same as creating meaning in Kim's stories.

Regardless of differing modes, birthmothers practise capacity for action in the one way they can: by telling their stories. In storytelling birthmothers embody the existential imperative to believe that "one's own actions and words matter and make a difference" (Jackson 2002:12) on a greater scale of human existence. Storytelling is resistance to the dehumanisation of patriarchal normativity and everyday violence. Through it, birthmothers engage in mothering and thereby assert their humanity.

6. Conclusion

The invisibility of South Korean birthmothers is remarkable given the extent and durability of transnational adoption over the last 70 years. In this thesis I focused on two of few publicly available stories told by birthmothers. I examined how birthmothers, through storytelling, create meaning in the experience of losing their children and how they negotiate forms of everyday violence they endure at the state level legislation and in the private institutional settings in South Korea.

The thesis contributes to critical adoption scholarship that seeks to place adoption and birthmothers' experiences in a wider context of colonial legacies. I illuminated how the intersection between political, religious, racial, capitalist, and class-based domination has subordinated South Korean women in a global hierarchy of parental suitability and promoted the commodification of children and women's bodies. Additionally, I highlighted prevailing gender and family ideology in South Korea to underline the significance of the infliction of morals in the construction of unwed women as unfit for motherhood.

In the analysis I critically engaged legislation represented by the household registration system to demonstrate how it penalised single women by excluding them from obtaining legal motherhood. In my discussion of maternity homes, I showed how regulatory practices driven by religious underpinnings and the market demand for adoptable children inflated the restrictions of the *hojuje* to construct adoption as the only possible choice for unwed mothers. The final step in the separation of children and mothers, the legal adoption procedure, detached mothers from children by erasing them forever from the child's official background. I illustrated how such structures has subordinated and dehumanised unwed women. 'De facto guilt', presumed breach of sexual conduct and disregard for patriarchal family ideals have motivated and justified the everyday violence towards unwed women and robbed them of self-determination.

Storytelling displays birthmothers' capacity for action to navigate the dehumanisation of everyday violence. In storytelling women seek to reclaim their impaired subjectivities and restore their humanity by highlighting their maternal love and asserting themselves as mothers. Kim's (2016) collection of life stories emphasise grief, anger, and resistance such as birthmothers trying to reclaim or retrieve information about their relinquished children. In

Dreaming (2010), stories indicate alignment with patriarchal gender and family ideals when adoption is constructed as the loving and moral choice for a pious mother or when grief is reconciled with dedication to self-sacrifice. I consider stories of both adherence and opposition to patriarchal normativity as ways of making loss intelligible. In storytelling, women mother by conveying their maternal love, and reify their ongoing commitment to motherhood, even if love also means loss of their children. This makes birthmothers' motherhood ambiguous or at least alternative as mothering is only made possible through the medium of storytelling. A future pursuit could contain further perspectives of motherhood, kinship, and relatedness (Carsten 2000) for instance in birthmothers and adoptees reunions (Prébin 2013).

Throughout I noted my reservation towards seeking meaning in suffering, especially as a healing endeavour. I reconciled (sic) my ambivalence with Jackson's (2002) consolation that storytelling is about an existential need to assert oneself as a meaningful being in face of immense anguish and bereavement. In that light, who would blame grieving birthmothers or maybe even me, a shameless/shameful researcher and adoptee for at least trying to fashion some kind of meaning? (Scheper-Hughes 1998:125). For future relevant ways to push the issue of storytelling and meaning-creation it would be relevant to include discussions on Veena Das' admonition that preoccupation with how people seek meaning in suffering by seemingly conforming to dominant powers may read as a downplay of the impact of violence, sometimes even as an endorsement of such powers (in Kleinman 1997:318). Or Kleimann's et al.'s (1997) points that media and other marketed witness accounts of violence demonstrates a global tendency to fetishize suffering for commercial purposes, even if the aim is to highlight injustices (ibid:19).

Lastly, the last 70 years of adoption history make the question of adoption an ongoing relevant topic. In everyday lives, when denied access to background information, and in rare and wistful reunions, birthmothers and adoptees continuously face the consequences of the practice. All the while transnational adoption continues in South Korea. Despite the tremendous economic development, improvements in social welfare, legislation attempts at impediments, and the global decline in transnational adoption, unmarried women still suffer loss of their children. The events in the stories of this thesis may have happened in the past, but the continuous practice and through storytelling's conflation of times and spaces the past is here and now.

Appendices

Appendix I - Terminology, Glossary and Transliteration

I.I Terminology and Glossary

In a field as contested as that of adoption terminology is political. For critical adoption activists it is of great importance to rephrase and alter the terminology traditionally used to describe adoption. The main argument is that dominant adoption terminology with its emphasis on altruism is used to silence the ones whose rights are removed by adoption. It is highlighted as the language of colonisers that reflects the uneven power structures at a global level. Furthermore, adoption concerns different academic and political fields. Each field potentially has its own traditions in terms of terminology. Below I clarify my use of terminology. My overall reason for employing a particular term is that I wish to reflect the conventions used in the scholarly literature I engage with. Not all words are subject of debate but would still need an explanation.

Adoptee: The term refers to the person being sent for adoption. To critical adoption activists the continuous public use of ‘adopted child’ to describe adopted people, no matter their actual age, reflects the proliferation of the image of adopted people as the perpetual child, an ‘infantilization’ of adopted voices. In South Korea, *ibyangga* (입양아), meaning adopted child, is frequently used. I will use the word ‘adoptee’ to reflect the practice of the literature I refer to.

Adoptive parents: The term refers to the people adopting the child. Some critical adoption activists prefer to use the word ‘adopters’ as to reject the preconception of adoption as an event that can create parenthood. I use the word ‘adoptive parents’ to stay within the terminology used in the scholarly literature.

Adoption agency: Critical adoption activists will sometimes refer to the adoption facilitating organisations as ‘adoption companies’ or ‘firms’ in the context of South Korea to reflect how such organisations are legally registered as incorporated companies, but also to underline that adoption is a commercial effort subject to market mechanisms. I will follow the practice of the literature I interact with and use the word ‘adoption agency’ to refer to the adoption facilitators.

Birthmother: A common word that refers to the genitors of a child in adoption is *mihonmo* (미혼모), meaning ‘unwed’ or ‘not-yet-married’ mother. Some mothers involved in adoption are married, but the association with the status as unwed is reflected in the use of *mihonmo* as the general term for all genitors. Among critical adoption activists, terms like ‘biological’ or ‘birthmother’ are rejected. Instead, they use the term ‘first mother’ in order not to ‘reduce’ the women’s experience to a matter of only childbirth or to the realm of biology. I would like to stay true to my analysis which puts emphasis on the women’s motherhood beyond pregnancy and childbirth. Still, I opt to reflect the terminology used in the scholarly literature I refer to which means I employ the term ‘birthmother’.

Transnational adoption: Within International Law and Human Rights, ‘intercountry’ or ‘international’ adoptions are preferred to describe instances of a child who crosses nation borders to be adopted from one country to another. Critical activists claim that all terms tend to cloud the lopsided neo-colonial relations between sending and receiving countries. In lack of a better alternative, I employ the term ‘transnational’ adoption to follow the practice of some of the scholarly literature I engage with.

Mixed-race: Race and ethnicity signifiers are contested, also outside the topic of adoption. In the early years of transnational adoption from South Korea it was mainly children born to US/UN soldiers and Korean mothers who were sent overseas for adoption. In South Korea those children are sometimes referred to as *honhyeol* (혼혈), signifying ‘mixed blood’ origin. That term along with ‘mixed race’ children could be viewed as problematic. However, I follow the convention in the scholarly literature and refer to such children as ‘mixed-race’ children.

Receiving country: The term refers to the country to which the child in question for adoption is sent to in transnational adoption.

Sending country: The term refers to the country in which the child in question for adoption originates from in transnational adoption.

The Korean Peninsula: Even though ‘Korea’ will often be sufficient in English to signify ‘South Korea’, I opt to use ‘South Korea’ throughout the thesis to denote the nation state of The Republic of South Korea as not to disregard North Korea’s stake in Korean-ness.

Sometimes I use ‘the Korean Peninsula’ or ‘Korean’ when I either quote or refer to matters before the separation into the two Koreas or regarding both Koreas.

I.II Transliteration

Romanisation: Against prevalent transliteration practice in academia, I use the revised romanisation of Korean rather than the McCune-Reischauer system. To me the revised romanisation of Korean is simpler and more intuitive. I use the system with no hyphenation, but with space between syllables except for names that have common English transliterations like Syngman Rhee). When I cite or refer to Koreans, I follow the Korean convention and place the family name first, again unless established names in English such as Syngman Rhee or Korean American scholars’ author names suggest otherwise.

Appendix II - Institutions and Organisations

Below I name and clarify the function and purpose of the institutions and organisations involved with adoption and birthmothers to provide an understanding of the institutional landscape that facilitates adoption from South Korea.

I. Public organisations

Ministry of Health and Welfare: Formerly known as Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. Transnational (and domestic) adoption as well as social welfare support for single parents fall under the regulations of the South Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare.

Local government agencies: Before a revision of the adoption law in 2011 local government agencies were responsible for obtaining consent for adoption, investigating, and clearing the adoptability of a child, and appointing the adoption agencies' presidents as legal guardians of the child. After the 2012 implementation of the revisions to the law, a child's adoptability is determined by the court.

The Police: Local police offices register children who are abandoned outside the context of established facilities or in the Baby Box as missing children. The police are also responsible for searching for family members before the child is transferred to the custody of authorities.

II. Private organisations

Adoption agencies: Private, profit-making organisations, often with Christian affiliation, responsible for operating adoptions, institutionalisation or foster care for children, facilitation of legal processes, and matching of adoptive parents and children. The adoption agencies work with organisations in the receiving countries that handle immigration, and the fees adoptive parents pay to adopt. For most of the years South Korea has been a sending country, 4 adoption agencies have been licensed by the Ministry of Health and Welfare to facilitate transnational adoption. Today 3 of them are still in operation. The adoption agencies are also subsidised to manage social welfare tasks such as institutionalisation of disabled children and support programmes for single mothers. Earlier the adoption agencies owned or sponsored maternity homes before the South Korean government suspended that practice in 2015.

Orphanages: Some orphanages are owned and run by adoption agencies, others by other Christian organisations, or hospitals. If the orphanages are not directly owned by an adoption agency, they serve as partners for the agencies. Today most children who are processed for transnational adoption are in foster homes before they are sent overseas.

Birth clinics/Hospitals: Adoption agencies cooperated with birth clinics and hospitals for childbirth procedures for women who before birth consented to adoption and for contact with unwed or otherwise vulnerable pregnant women.

Appendix III - Interview Questions

- 1) Introduction
 - a) Introduction of me, purpose, explanation of consent, anonymisation, use and storage of data, publication, sign consent form
 - b) What is your name, age, profession, years 'employed'?
 - c) Please present the organisation/place. What is the background, aim, mission, support from whom, organisational makeup?
- 2) What is your personal motivation or personal aim?
- 3) Grand tour
 - a) Would you walk me through what happened from the start to finish of let's say yesterday?
 - i) Deep dive into motivations, emotions, values
 - b) What else do you do?
- 4) The work with women
 - a) How would you describe the women you work with?
 - i) Who are they, how are they 'recruited/who is excluded', what do they need help for, for how long?
 - b) What are examples of the work you do with women?
 - c) Adoption education?
- 5) Necessity of the organisation
 - a) Why is there a need for your organisation?
- 6) Personal suggestion for 'solutions'
 - a) When is the organisation redundant? What needs to happen for your organisation to become redundant?
- 7) Others working in the same field
 - a) What's the differences between your organisation and (X)?
 - i) Attitudes, values, work?

Appendix IV - Codes and Themes

- 1) Initial codes after reading Dreaming: ‘fear’, ‘shame and guilt’, ‘desire to be a mother’, ‘anguish over pregnancy’, ‘adoption as the right choice’, ‘adoption is equivalent of love’, ‘love and care for the child’, ‘reconciliation with separation’, ‘stigma’, ‘sexual moral’, ‘family ideology’, ‘abuse’, ‘rightlessness’, ‘rejection’
- 2) Codes added after reading Hosu Kim’s collection of oral stories: ‘repressive legislation’, ‘anger’, ‘regret’, ‘coercion’, ‘violence’
- 3) Themes: ‘Institutional violence’, ‘Motherly love and motherhood’, ‘Reconciliation and anger’

Reference List

Ackerly, B. & True, J., 2008. Reflexivity in practice: Power and ethics in feminist research on international relations. *International Studies Review*, 10(4), pp.693-707. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1111/j.1468-2486.2008.00826.x>.

Bakhtin, M., 1981. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics. *The dialogic Imagination: four essays*. Austin: University of Texas, pp.84-258.

Baxter, L.A., Scharp, K.M., Asbury, B., Jannusch, A. & Norwood, K.M., 2012. "Birth Mothers Are Not Bad People" A Dialogic Analysis of Online Birth Mother Stories. *Qualitative Communication Research*, 1(1), pp.53-82. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1525/qcr.2012.1.1.53>.

Borchgrevink, A., 2003. Silencing language: Of anthropologists and interpreters. *Ethnography*, 4(1), pp.95-121. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/1466138103004001005>.

Bos, P., 2008. *Once a mother. Relinquishment and adoption from the perspective of unmarried mothers in south India*, Ph. D. Thesis. Radboud University, Nijmegen. Available at: <https://repository.ubn.ru.nl/bitstream/handle/2066/73643/73643.pdf> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Boyd, R.L., Blackburn, K.G. & Pennebaker, J.W., 2020. The narrative arc: Revealing core narrative structures through text analysis. *Science advances*, 6(32), p.eaba2196. Available at: DOI: [10.1126/sciadv.aba21](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba21).

Briggs, L., 2012. *Somebody's children: The politics of transracial and transnational adoption*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Broadhurst, K. & Mason, C., 2020. Child removal as the gateway to further adversity: Birth mother accounts of the immediate and enduring collateral consequences of child removal. *Qualitative Social Work*, 19(1), pp.15-37. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/1473325019893412>.

Bryman, A., 2016. *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cacho, L.M., 2012. *Social death: Racialized rightlessness and the criminalization of the unprotected* (Vol. 7). New York: NYU Press. Available at: https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/4660646/mod_resource/content/1/Cacho%20-%20Social%20Death%20-%20full%20book.pdf (Accessed 10 November 2023).

- Carsten, J. (Ed.), 2000. *Cultures of relatedness: New approaches to the study of kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Center for East and South East Asian Studies, 2021. *Guidelines for the master's thesis*. Lund University, Lund.
- Cho, H. & Kongsted, A., 2023. 'Korea is hiding our past': the adoptees searching for their families and the truth, *The Guardian*, 28 April. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/28/korea-is-hiding-our-past-the-adoptees-searching-for-their-families-and-the-truth> (Accessed 10 November 2023).
- Cho, E., 2016. Making the 'modern' family: The discourse of sexuality in the Family Planning Program in South Korea. *Sexualities*, 19(7), pp.802-818. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715624455>.
- Cho, J.Y. & Lee, E.H., 2014. Reducing confusion about grounded theory and qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences. *Qualitative report*, 19(32). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1028>.
- Choe, S. H., 2023. World's Largest Baby Exporter Confronts Its Painful Past. *New York Times*, 19 September. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/17/world/asia/south-korea-adoption.html> (Accessed 10 November 2023).
- Choe, M.K., 2006. Modernization, gender roles, and marriage behavior in South Korea. In Chang, Y. U. & Lee, S. H. (Eds.) *Transformations in twentieth century Korea* (pp. 291-309). London and New York: Routledge.
- Choi, H., 2009. "Wise mother, good wife": A transcultural discursive construct in modern Korea. *Journal of Korean Studies*, 14(1), pp.1-33. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1353/jks.2009.0004>.
- Chong, K.H., 2006. Negotiating patriarchy: South Korean evangelical women and the politics of gender. *Gender & society*, 20(6), pp.697-724. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206291111>.
- Chung, S., 2021. *Adopting for God: The Mission to Change America through Transnational Adoption*. New York: NYU Press.
- Doolan, Y., 2021. The Camptown Origins of International Adoption and the Hypersexualization of Korean Children. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 24(3), pp.351-382. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1353/jaas.2021.0032>.

Van Doore, K.E., 2016. Paper orphans: Exploring child trafficking for the purpose of orphanages. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 24(2), pp.378-407. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718182-02402006>.

Fonseca, C., 2011. The de-kinning of birthmothers: reflections on maternity and being human. *Vibrant: Virtual Brazilian Anthropology*, 8, pp.307-339. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S1809-43412011000200014>.

Foucault, M., 2016. Discipline and punish. In *Social theory re-wired*, pp. 319-329. London and New York: Routledge.

Foucault, M., 2003. "*Society Must Be Defended*": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976* (Vol. 1). New York: Macmillan.

Galletta, A., 2013. *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication* (Vol. 18). New York: NYU press.

Glenn, E.N., 2016. Social constructions of mothering: A thematic overview. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang & L. R. Forcey (Eds.) *Mothering*, pp.1-29. London and New York: Routledge.

Han, S. (Ed.), 2010. *Dreaming a world: Korean birth mothers tell their stories*. Minneapolis: Yeong & Yeong Book Company.

Hoffmann, E.A., 2007. Open-ended interviews, power, and emotional labor. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 36(3), pp.318-346. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/08912416062931>.

Hübinette, T., 2005. *Comforting an orphaned nation: Representations of international adoption and adopted Koreans in Korean popular culture*, Ph. D. Thesis. Stockholm University, Stockholm.

Jackson, M., 2002. *The politics of storytelling: Violence, transgression, and intersubjectivity* (Vol. 3). Charlottenlund: Museum Tusulanum Press.

Jackson, M., 2005. West-African warscapes: Storytelling events, violence, and the appearance of the past. *Anthropological quarterly*, pp.355-375. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4150838> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Kim, T. H., 2022a. Survivor of abusive facilities searches for lost Korean roots. *Associated Press*, 11 July. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/seoul-south-korea-busan-crime-business-176178a6eccdd0a0e4c0ee1d12872cf9> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Kim, T. H., 2022b. South Korea's truth commission to probe foreign adoptions. *Associated Press*, 8 December. Available at: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-business-adoption-south-korea-government-a9fd3d7670e07655f93cfdc9ad87481> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Kim, H., 2018. Reparation Acts: Korean Birth Mothers Travel the Road from Reunion to Redress. *Adoption & Culture*, 6(2), pp.316-335. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ado.2018.0016>.

Kim, H., 2016. *Birth mothers and transnational adoption practice in South Korea: Virtual mothering*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53852-9>.

Kim, H. & Cho, G.M., 2014. The kinship of violence. In Duncan, P. (Ed.) *Mothering in East Asian Communities: Politics and Practice*, pp.31-52. Bradford: Demeter Press.

Kim, E.J., 2010. *Adopted territory: Transnational Korean adoptees and the politics of belonging*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Kim, J., 2009. An "Orphan" with Two Mothers: Transnational and Transracial Adoption, the Cold War, and Contemporary Asian American Cultural Politics. *American quarterly*, 61(4), pp.855-880. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27735028> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Kim, R., 1994. The legacy of institutionalized gender inequality in South Korea: The family law. *BC Third World LJ*, 14, pp.145-165. Available at: <https://heinonline-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/bctw14&i=151> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Kleinman, A., 1997. "Everything that really matters": social suffering, subjectivity, and the remaking of human experience in a disordering world. *Harvard Theological Review*, 90(3), pp.315-336. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000006374>.

Kleinman, A., 2000. The violences of everyday life. In Das, V. (Ed.) *Violence and subjectivity*, pp.226-241. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kleinman, A., Das, V., & Lock, M. M., 1997 (Eds.). *Social Suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The Korean Family Preservation Network, 2012. *Monitoring South Korean Intercountry and Domestic Adoption From a Human Rights Perspective*. Joint Submission to The United Nations Universal Periodic Review Republic of Korea Second Cycle, 14th Session.

Langer, L. L., 1997. The Alarmed Vision: Social Suffering and Holocaust Atrocity. In Kleinmann, A., Das, V. & Lock, M. (Eds.) *Social Suffering*, (pp. 47-67). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lee, K.E., 2022. South Korea's legacy of orphan adoption and the violation of adoptees' rights to know their origins. *Childhood*, 29(2), pp.235-251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/09075682221090823>.

Lee, K. E., 2021a. Legally 'orphaned' to be adopted transnationally, *The Korea Times*, 12 June. Available at: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/09/715_310278.html (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Lee, K. E., 2021b. The unrestrained expansion of 'child exports' during 1980s authoritarian period, *The Korea Times*, 25 September. Available at: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2021/09/197_315952.html?tw (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Lee, K. E., 2021c. Secrets of birth: Multiple layers of falsehood in Korea's birth documents, *The Korea Times*, 10 December. Available at: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/09/715_319084.html (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Lévinas, E., 1998. *Entre nous: On thinking-of-the-other*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lugosi, P., 2006. Between overt and covert research: Concealment and disclosure in an ethnographic study of commercial hospitality. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), pp.541-561. Available at: <https://doi-org.ludwig.lub.lu.se/10.1177/10778004052828>.

Mahmood, S., 2001. Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival. *Cultural anthropology*, 16(2), pp.202-236. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/656537> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

March, K., 2019. Unwed Motherhood, Social Exclusion, and Adoption Placement. In Byvelds, C. (Ed.) *Motherhood and Social Exclusion*, Chapter 4. Bradford: Demeter Press.

Marre, D., & Briggs, L., 2009. *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*. New York: NYU Press.

McKee, K.D., 2016. Monetary flows and the movements of children: The transnational adoption industrial complex. *Journal of Korean Studies*, 21(1), pp.137-178. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jks.2016.0007>.

McLaren, M. A., 2012. *Feminism, Foucault, and Embodied Subjectivity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mills, C. W. (2023). *The Sociological Imagination*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2023. *해외입양 수용국 통계 2*.
- Moon, S., 2005. *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Oh, A. H., 2015. *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption*. Redwood: Stanford University Press.
- Pate, S., 2010. *Genealogies of Korean adoption: American empire, militarization, and yellow desire*, Ph. D. Thesis. University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.
- Prébin, E.M., 2013. *Meeting once more: The Korean side of transnational adoption*. New York: NYU Press.
- Rickmers, K., 2021. Aeranwon (애란원), *International Adoptee Magazine*, 24 February. Available at: <https://iam.goal.or.kr/aeranwon/> (Accessed 10 November 2023).
- Rothschild, M., 1988. Babies for sale: South Koreans make them, Americans buy them. *The Progressive*, 52(1), pp.18-23.
- Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Scheper-Hughes, N., 1998. Undoing: Social suffering and the politics of remorse in the new South Africa. *Social Justice*, 25(4 (74)), pp.114-142. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29767103> (Accessed 10 November 2023).
- Scheper-Hughes, N., 1996. Small wars and invisible genocides. *Social Science & Medicine*, 43(5), pp.889-900. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(96\)00152-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(96)00152-9).
- Shin, P. S., 2020. *한국 해외입양과 친생모 모성, 1966~1992*, Ph. D. Thesis. Seoul National University, Seoul.
- Slap, G., Goodman, E. and Huang, B., 2001. Adoption as a risk factor for attempted suicide during adolescence. *Pediatrics*, 108(2), pp.e30-e30. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.108.2.e30>.
- Smith, N., Shamanauri, K., Barber, H., & Townsley, S., 2022. Lies, love and deception: Inside the cut-throat world of international adoption, *The Telegraph*, 9 December. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/international-adoption-scandal/> (Accessed 10 November 2023).
- Solo Mums, 2014. Al Jazeera. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/101-east/2014/8/29/solo-mums> (Accessed 10 November 2023).

Speed, S., 2006. At the crossroads of human rights and anthropology: Toward a critically engaged activist research. *American Anthropologist*, 108(1), pp.66-76. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2006.108.1.66>.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In Nelson, C. and Grossberg, L. (Eds.) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp.271–313. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Upadhyay, P., 2012. Interpretivist Tradition in Qualitative Anthropological Research Writings. *Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology*, 5. Available at: DOI:[10.3126/hjsa.v5i0.7044](https://doi.org/10.3126/hjsa.v5i0.7044).

Yook, S.H. & Kim, H., 2018. Decolonizing adoption narratives for transnational reproductive justice. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 20(6), Article 8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3323>.