Adoption and Identity

Nomadic Possibilities for Reconceiving the Self

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We feel disfavor for all ideals that might lead one to feel at home in this fragile, broken time of transition. ... We ourselves who are homeless constitute a force that breaks open ice and other all too thin "realities."

—Friedrich Nietzsche[1]

It is great to have roots, as long as you can take them with you.

—Gertrude Stein[2]

Mourning and Identity

We live in a world of increasing complexity and globalization where rootlessness, forced and chosen migrations, and the deterioration of cohesive communities are increasing, where the value of a consistent, stable, and highly bounded sense of identity is being openly questioned. Postmodernism challenges modernist ideas of a unified subject, inviting us to a view of human subjectivity that instead is complex, multiple and at times contradictory. Contemporary studies of subjectivity at the interface of psychoanalysis and social theory have looked at what can be learned about subjectivity from the experience of the socially marginalized. Adoptees and their families can be seen as falling within this rubric. The problematizing of identity and the questioning of hegemonic identities by postmodern and postcolonial researchers have relevance to the framing of adoption discourse and research, as well as to our practices of nurturing the development of adoptive children. In turn, adoptees and adoptive parents' struggles with the decentering of identity and their successes in forging hybrid identities reflective of multiple roots is illuminative of crucial issues regarding identity that increasingly confront all of us.[3]

5. Leslie M. Stein and Janet L. Hoopes, *Identity Formation in the Adopted Adolescent: The Delaware Family Study* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1985), 13.

6. See Smith, Surrey, and Watkins, this volume.

7. I am proposing a resolution of this "dilemma of difference" along lines suggested by Martha Minow, *Not Only for Myself* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

8. "Race" and "ethnicity" are used here without engaging the complex theoretical question of whether or how they should be distinguished. My major premise is that these categories of race and ethnicity are culturally constructed and more often than not politically motivated. What was considered "race" in the nineteenth century, e.g., the Irish "race" or the white Protestant Yankee "race", might now be considered ethnicity, whereas today, due to lack of a biological/genetic basis for race, some theorists might question a sharp distinction between race and ethnicity. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

9. See Linda Alcoff, "Towards a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment," *Radical Philosophy* 95 (May–June 1999): 15–26.

10. Omi and Winant define racism as follows: "By racism we mean those social projects which create or reproduce structures of domination based on essentialist categories of race" (*Racial Formation in the United States*, 194, n. 1).

11. See Lawrence Blum, *Antiracism, Multiculturalism, and Interracial Community*, Distinguished Lecture Series, Office of Graduate Studies and Research (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1991), and the complexities of conflating culture and race in his *I'm Not a Racist, But ...* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).

12. Kwame Anthony Appiah denies there is "one" African or African American culture in "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections," in *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, ed. Appiah, Amy Gutmann, and David Wilkins (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Seyla Benhabib challenges the general presumption of one coherent meaning to a culture in *Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

1. See Grotevant, "Coming to Terms with Adoption." See also Janet Hoopes, *Prediction in Child Development: A Longitudinal Study of Adoptive and Nonadoptive Families* (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1982); and B. Goebel and S. L. Lott, "Adoptees' Resolution of the Adolescent Identity Crisis," paper presented at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, August 1986.

In my framing of this essay, I follow a strategy used in my earlier work on adoption.[4] Namely, in failing to satisfy dominant notions about the family and identity, the experience of adoption throws these ideas into stark relief for our reflection. Cast as an inferior form of family life by dominant taken-for-granted ideas of family and kinship, adoptive family members often improvise forms of relationality and identity that can then enrich the cultural repertoire for identity and family life that becomes accessible to others. This approach challenges the pathologizing of adoptees and adoptive family life that has marked much writing on adoption, and, instead, advocates for our seeing adoptive life as often characterized by creative resistance to normative ideas and assessments regarding family life and individual identity within it. It cautions against seeing developmental challenges arising from adoption, minority status, and multiethnic family life as predictive of ongoing identity problems, confusing snapshots at single points in an adoptee's life with developmental outcome as a whole. This resistance can begin with intellectual activism, a careful reflection on the ideas we receive from the cultural surround regarding adoption, bringing them into focus and posing alternatives.

Transracial and transethnic adoption (both domestic and international) are prime sites to explore the forging of complex narratives that mark identity. I will focus my discussion in the area of my own experience as an adoptive mother of internationally adopted children, living in a multiracial, multiethnic, and multireligion family. I believe this exploration to be relevant to other kinds of adoptive families because adoption itself, even within the same race and ethnicity, complicates the matter of identity by the ways in which its existence challenges taken-for-granted notions of family and kinship, as well as often bridging differences of class that characterize most nonfamilial adoptions in the United States.

The history of adoption practice in the United States has been punctuated by different kinds of efforts to minimize differences between children and parents. Sixty years ago, Caucasian children were carefully matched by race, ethnicity, and, often, appearance and religion with their adoptive parents. In 1972 a growing trend toward transracial adoption was reversed when the National Association of Black Social Workers argued against the placement of African American children in Caucasian homes. While the reasons for this were multiple, one reason was common to these two situations: an assumption that shared race and appearance would aid in the development of a stable sense of identity. Sameness has been seen as conducive to self-esteem and the development of psychological resilience, inoculating against psychopathology. Difference has been seen as conducive to the formation of "identity problems," "identity confusion," or "identity diffusion,"[5] leading to portrayals of adopted children as having "a lack of self-identity,"[6] a lack of a "total sense of themselves."[7] An impaired sense of self was also seen to issue from a lack of knowledge about one's birth parents, leading to "genealogical bewilderment";[8] not knowing one's birth parents was asserted to

parents of a different race and/or ethnicity were described as having lost a part of themselves, and were shown at times to have an "undeveloped" sense of their own race or ethnicity. In other words, they failed to sufficiently identify with the race or ethnicity assigned to them. Adoption literature has often failed to question its own presumptions about optimal ethnic and racial identity and acculturation, neglecting the downside of uncomplicated identity and assuming with mainstream culture that homogeneity is preferable.

The cultural surround of adoption has shifted considerably since these practices aimed toward "sameness" held sway. The idea of race has been destabilized and is increasingly seen as a constructed idea without biological foundation.[9] Whiteness studies in the last decade have explored the lived experience of being white, interrogating how the idea of being "white" emerged, how identification with it has allowed individuals and groups to accrue benefits, and how it can be surrendered without falling into an ahistorical naive color blindness. Individuals with family history from different cultures are more openly claiming the multiple roots of their identity. There is increasing legal support for the value of providing children with a family, even of a different race, over having them in foster care placements waiting for same-race placements. Both recent and older studies have shown that children in transracial and transethnic families are not impaired in their psychological development. Their long-term psychosocial adjustment is positive and similar to that of same-race adoption[10] and results in individuals with healthy self-concept, ample self-esteem, and the experience of closeness to parents and extended family across developmental phases.[11] Neither transracial placement nor measures of racial identity are predictors of adoptees' psychosocial development.[12] This does not mean that there are not marked stresses and challenges for these children and their families, as they negotiate identity within an often racist context.

Research that has studied whether transracially adopted children have a positive racial identity has largely failed to question the racialism on which such an idea rests. Jim Jones describes racialism as a way of cognitively organizing perceptions of the world around racial categories that are believed to have immutable and inheritable characteristics such as behavior, intellect, and temperament.[13] Beliefs in racial categories usually include racial stereotypes. Kevin Cockley describes internalized racialism as identifying with any stereotype, negative or positive, about one's racial group, whereas internalized racism is an identification with negative attributions to one's racial group.[14] Thus developing a positive racial identity may entail internalized racialism. Cockley asks if racial pride is based on collective cultural achievements of a designated group or if it is a belief system built on the foundation of internalized racial stereotypes. In adoption literature, there is no questioning about whether by-products of facilitating a positive "racial identity" may be the reification of the construct of race and the internalizing of the kinds of stereotypes that contribute to racism.

they are seen to share without resorting to racialism and while gaining help to clarify the mistaken thinking that issues from racist assumptions.

Presently the most widely used model for acculturation is J. W. Berry's. He describes four modes of acculturation (integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) based on the individual's relationship to his/her group of cultural origin and with the dominant culture. Adoptees can be found in each of these strategies: retrieving and then maintaining connection with one's culture of origin while fully participating in the dominant culture (integration), relinquishing one's birth culture and fully embracing that of the dominant culture (assimilation), identifying with one's culture of origin and rejecting the dominant culture (separation), and rejecting or losing identification with both the dominant culture and one's culture of origin (marginalization).[15] As Sunil Bhatia points out, Berry's work assumes an ideal endpoint of acculturation for all immigrants.[16] We shall seek yet another strategy: one that encourages multiplicity, that is more reflective on the uses of identity, that distances from invoking dualisms to falsely accrue power at the expense of others, and that leans into the affiliative uses of identity to deepen compassion and nurture the empathic imagination.

Racism in America is alive and well. Families who adopt across lines of ethnicity and particularly across color lines place themselves in conflict with racist attitudes, and they need to prepare themselves and their children for the rejection and derogation that will come their way. To work with the traumas of racism is a work of mourning, what Sigmund Freud called *Trauerarbeit*. Eric Santner describes this as the task of integrating "damage, loss, disorientation, decenteredness into a structure of identity." As children adopted in infancy grow older, they confront to varying degrees the cultural and individual traumas that resulted in their abandonment and placement, things such as mental illness, the stigma of unwed motherhood, the tragic poverty of many in the third world, the abandonment of girl children due to patriarchal valuing of boy children, the personal legacies of war and civil strife. Santner speaks of the task of mourning as involving the "labor [of] recollecting the stranded objects of a cultural inheritance [that is] fragmented and poisoned" by the horrors of the situation in which they were sundered.[17]

"But, Mommy, why don't we know the exact day I was born?" asked my six-year-old daughter, adopted from mainland China. Now she is twelve. We have traveled to China together where eighty-year-old Chinese women with the vestiges of bound feet came up to her in my company with congratulatory grins and double thumbs up, so pleased are they that one like their granddaughters has found a life of possibility from the ashes of female infant abandonment. In fact, the orphanage named my daughter "Phoenix from the Countryside" perhaps for this very reason. She is growing into an understanding of why girls are still abandoned in China; why it is against the law and thus a family can leave no identifying information for their daughter (birth date, name, place of birth) for fear of being found and punished. Today at the beach she asks me again to explain why

girls are abandoned in China, and we talk about patriarchy, and the valuing of boy children, and about matriarchy. We turn to her question asked with curiosity, "Are there any matriarchal cultures now?" Then there is silence. A few minutes later: "But isn't that stupid, Mommy, that a parent would love a baby more only because he is a boy? That is so sad."

Another adoptee recounts this "recurring dream, almost a nightmare throughout [her] life":

There is a small hut, hot and confined under the blazing sun in the Philippines. An unbearable stench hangs in the air. Babies are crying, poverty stricken families surround me. I see myself sitting quietly in the corner on the dirt floor, staring out a small window onto endless fields of rice. I have the same physical features I do now, but the eyes of the girl in the dream are not mine. They seem so lost and distant. Each time I have the dream, I appear to be the age that I am at that point in my life. It is almost as though I have watched myself grow up in the dream. It took me the longest time to figure out what the dream meant. Not until I was twelve years old ... did I realize that my dreams were of what my life would have been like had I not been adopted.[18]

Many adoptees have such an imaginal access to a world that is parallel to their own. As their understanding of their birth story develops, the details of such a world are filled in. This is far from an abstract knowledge as it is anchored by images of oneself. Adoptive parents often experience a similar process of imaginative engagement with the birth parents and birth situation of their children if not an actual ongoing relationship as in open adoption.

What word could we use for this work other than mourning? It is not that our biologically born children do not also live in this world where girl children are left to die, to be found at the edge of the road, or to struggle with hunger in the grip of poverty. But they need not directly confront this at such close range as they knit their sense of self from the pieces of their life story. Parents are needed as empathic witnesses to the adoptee's work of mourning as he/she does the work of collecting fragments from a past that is often not remembered and so must be reexperienced as though for the first time in the present.

Receiving Identity

In this kind of dialogue, a child not only mourns her own uncertainty about when she was born, to whom she was born, and the circumstances that prevent these kinds of knowledge, but she is thinking through for herself the logic or illogic beneath the situation. In doing so, she is struggling against identifying with the low valuation assigned to her in the act of abandonment, proving Sartre's assertion that what matters is what we do with what others have done to us.[19]

An adoptive mother recounts:

When I brought my daughter back from India, she was eight months old. As I strolled her in her Boston neighborhood for the first time, a five-year-old neighbor boy fond of babies ran to see her. When he saw her brown skin, he turned and ran away yelling, "She is dark. She's ugly."

Several years later as she was taking a bath, she told me that a child at preschool had told her she needed to take more baths, because her skin was always so dirty.

When she was eight we moved to California. As she was walking a block from her house, some young men in a pickup truck yelled at her, "Nigger girl. Go back where you belong," as though she were not in her own neighborhood.[20]

Initially children do not manufacture their identities as much as they receive them, finding themselves in the eyes of those around them. Amin Maalouf, a French Lebanese Christian, says, "It is less a matter of our choosing our identities than that we find some of our identity constrained, strewn with obstacles."[21] This girl from northern India was seen as African American by her white classmates and even by some members of her extended family. She was interested to learn that Gandhi had been seen as black and African when he studied law in South Africa. By age eight, she had won a prize for a poem on Martin Luther King Jr.; by ten, she knew the lyrics to many rap songs; by fifteen, she had begun a study of jazz songs; at sixteen, she wrote about desegregation and read the poetry of Maya Angelou. Harriet Tubman, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Parks were her childhood heroes. She had found out early that to many in America you are either black or white. As a child and young teen, she largely lived within the designation of herself as black, but with the help of her parents and teachers she early set about casting off the negative connotations people had lent this while claiming active solidarity with others of color. In doing so, she was actively deconstructing her received identity, questioning why some people make up the kinds of destructively derisive stories they do about people of another color. Adoptees living in a multicultural and multiracial family need help to understand some of the basic psychology of racism so that they can counter racist stereotypes with a knowledge of how they function for the racist, making it less inevitable to bring inside or to keep inside the destructive reductions of identity racism confers.

Re-Conceiving Identity

James McBride recounts an experience as a black child adopted by a white, Jewish mother. One day he and his mother were walking home after a shopkeeper had treated him in a racist manner.

As I walked home, holding Mommy's hand while she fumed, I thought it would be easier if we were just one color, black or white. I didn't want to be white. My siblings had already instilled the notion of black pride in me. I would have preferred if Mommy were Black. Now, as a grown man, I feel privileged to have come from two worlds. My view of the world is not only that of a black man, but of a black man with something of a Jewish soul. I don't consider myself Jewish, but when I look at Holocaust photographs of Jewish women whose children have been wrenched from them by Nazi soldiers, the women look like my own mother and I think to myself, There but for the grace of God goes my own mother and by extension, myself.[22]

Rachel was adopted from Brazil, and is probably part Portuguese, part African, and part Amerindian, but she doesn't know for sure. Where she lives in California, others code her as Mexican American. Where she used to live on the East Coast, she was coded as African American. Her adoptive family is multicultural and multiracial. Her father is Jewish; she is Quaker and attends a traditional Catholic high school. She was born into poverty but lives in the upper middle class. She went to Afro-Brazilian dance classes when she was a child but later chose flamenco dancing as her passion. When she dates a white teen, she straightens her hair. When she goes out with a Hispanic or African American teen, she wears her hair curly. While applying to college, she remarks that it isn't right that affirmative action policies would apply to her as she has had the advantages of private schools since kindergarten. Her best friend is Guatemalan; her sisters are Indian American, Chinese American, and Italian American. People have told her that her sisters are not her sisters and her parents are not her parents because she does not look like them. She derides their limited ideas of family.

The pathologizing glosses of "identity confusion" and "identity diffusion" do not fit her. Like a budding anthropologist, she is learning what is expected in the multiple ethnic and racial communities and situations she travels in. At times her aim is "to blend in"; at other times she enjoys stressing a feature of her repertoire that is at odds with her environment. She repels racist comments with a brusque "back in your face" attitude. "You know, I don't take that shit," she announces firmly with pride. Like all of us, her identity reflects the influences of both those who have tried to make her one of them and those who have sought to exclude her.

To understand identity development for such a young woman, I have turned to ideas from poststructuralist theory about reconceiving identity. She is not lacking roots, but her roots are more rhizomatic in nature, allowing her to emerge into situations marked by different ethnic sensibilities, supported by her own experience that links them. She is not exactly a "migrant," brought to one culture from another. She moves between multiple cultural locations in the present, not just between two. Nor is she an "exile," as she can and already has chosen to return to

her birthplace for short periods. And yet the adoptee is not that different from many others whose identities have had to complexify as a result of migration or exile. Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen propose that we see accultur-ation through the metaphors of travel, translocality, and deterritorialization, replacing an essentialist and monolithic concept of culture with a sense of how cul-tures are "moving and mixing," creating multiple contact zones in the present.[23]

A number of theorists describe variations of what Rosi Braidotti calls "nomadic subjectivity." Braidotti describes "nomadic identity" as recovering a multiplicity of selves that have slipped into the cracks and that have become disavowed, unwit-nessed, by the dominant culture. "Nomadic subjectivity is about the simultaneity of complex and multi-layered identities" where axes such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others interact with each other.[24] A nomadic identity affords us multiple interconnections while steering clear of appropriation. It is "rather an emphatic proximity, intensive interconnectedness" that allows us to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience.[25] The nomad does not take up residence within one fixed and central experience of identity but can blur fixity, using ambiguity as a bridge to connect with multiple others. Such a perspective, according to Bhatia, challenges "the achievement of racial or ethnic identity" referred to in adoption research, as well as an accultura-tion based on integration and assimilation rather than negotiation and dialogue.[26] A nomadic self continues to be a "self-in-process," a continuous becoming that moves against the fixing of identity. Here we encounter the utopic aspect of nomadism. Braidotti urges the leaving behind as much as possible of fixed identi-ties, seeing them as the sedentary sites that breed reactive passions like greed, paranoia, and Oedipal jealousy.

Fixed, singular identities reduce the complexity of others into that which resembles the self and that which is different, most often derogating the differ-ent as "inferior," and thus deserving of ill treatment. The past century is laden with the horrors of such exclusionary thinking taken to the extreme of "pure" and "impure" and the annihilations that result from such simplistic and self-serving polarizations.

Adopted children do not choose nomadism out of idealism. They are backed into it. The preclusion of full inclusion in the host country or culture is enforced by the racism around them, where the privileges of class that come with many non-family-based adoptions in the United States cannot fully offset racial preju-dice. Having enjoyed the educational benefits and other advantages of the eco-nomic class of their adoptive parents, these children, most often of color, find themselves seen through the same racist lens as communities still affected by the United States' exploitative immigration context and its legacy of slavery. Yet when they turn back to their birth country or to communities of those who have immi-grated from it, they are rarely embraced and most often cast as outsiders. Thus the status of outsider is experienced initially through the traumas of exclusion.

It precludes the fixing of ethnic or racial identity and opens the possibility o[f] nomadism.

Braidotti in her discussion of nomadism uses the term *figuration* to ref[er] to a "style of thought that evokes or expresses ways out of the phallocentr[ic] vision of the subject." By this she means a movement away from dualistic con[-] ceptualizations and "monological mental habits" that mitigate against dialogic[al] encounters with others and even with hidden aspects of one's self. The creatio[n] of and the living into a figuration is an affirmative deconstructive move, cha[l-] lenging taken-for-granted ideas of identity and posing an alternative, political[ly] informed subjectivity that is mobile, complex, and shifting.[27] The "as if" quali[ty] of a figuration opens an improvisational space for consciously performing iden[-] tity rather than unconsciously enacting a set of unreflected identifications.[28]

Other figurations proposed that are resonant with nomadic identities includ[e] diasporic identity, hybrid identity, the protean self, creolization/transculturalit[y,] pilgrims, migratory identities, postconventional identity, multiculturalist incl[u-] sive identity, and the ensembled self.[29] All of these "figurations" embrace ambigu[-] ity, complexity, and multiplicity and encourage resistance to cultural norms. The[y] encourage us to pass "beyond separate and easy identification, creating bridge[s] that cross race and other classifications among different groups via intergener[a-] tional dialogue. Rather than legislating and restricting racial identities, it tries t[o] make them more pliant. The personal and cultural narratives are not disinter[-] ested, objective questionings of identity politics, but impassioned and conflicte[d] engagements in resistance."[30]

Gloria Anzaldua calls selves resonant with these figurations "border cros[-] sers."[31] She imagines a new tribalism arising from such transgressors, connectin[g] people who embody unique configurations of identity and who share [a] penchant for inclusion (rather than exclusion) and empathic connections acros[s] differences. The *mestiza* consciousness of such border crossers explodes past dic[-] tated dualities. She says although the consciousness of the Borderlands

is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each paradigm. As a *mes-tiza* I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine.... I am cultureless because, as a feminist I challenge the collective cultural/religious male-derived beliefs of Indo-Hispanics and Anglos; yet I am cultured because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images that connect us to each other and to the planet. *Soy un amasamiento,* I am an act of kneading, of uniting and join-ing that not only produced a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings.[32]

Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg underscore that borders are like "mine-fields, mobile territories of constant clashes. ... Living in the border is frequently to experience the feeling of being trapped in an impossible in-between. Franco-Maghrebis who are denied the option of identifying with either France or Algeria and are harassed both by white racist extremists and Islamic xenophobes. ... Borders and diasporas are phenomena that blow up—both enlarge and explode—the hyphen: Arab-Jew, African-American, Franco-Maghrebis, and black-British. Avoiding the dual axes of migration between distinct territorial entities, the hyphen becomes the third space."[33]

Amin Maalouf sees those able to claim complex identities as living

in a sort of frontier criss-crossed by ethnic, religious and other fault lines. ... They have a special role to play in forging links, eliminating misunderstandings, making some parties more reasonable and others less belligerent, smoothing out difficulties, seeking compromise. Their role is to act as bridges, go-betweens, mediators between the various communities and cultures. And that is precisely why their dilemma is so significant: if they cannot sustain their multiple allegiances, if they are continually being pressed to take sides or ordered to stay within their own tribe, then all of us have reason to be uneasy about the way the world is going.

[These "frontier dwellers"] will be a kind of mortar joining together and strengthening the societies in which they live.[34]

From the displacement and losses of adoption, from the impossibility of simplistic identifications, and from the necessarily multiple roots of their identities, adoptees can be such frontier dwellers, illuminating a way in which others can begin to conduct their own identities.

From Transgression to Nomadism: Adoptive Parents and Identity

Adoptive parents of children from a different racial or ethnic background than their own are warned in the adoption literature that they cannot be role models for an identity they do not have. "White parents cannot give Black identity. [They have the responsibility] to help their child define him or herself as a member of the racial community of the child's genetic heritage. Feelings of belonging do not come in halves; one either feels part of or separate from."[35] This kind of advice is a necessary reminder to white parents who have identified with a "color blind" approach, unaware of the difficulties of surviving in a racist society and of their children's feelings of not "fitting in" to either the group of one's adoptive parents or of one's assigned racial or ethnic cohort. We need to ask a further question, however. How can adoptive parents conduct themselves regarding their own and others' identities that can become a model for their children? The difficulty of the task is not so much the arranging of culture camps

for our children, choosing godparents who share their ethnicity or race, or eve arranging family vacations to our child's birth country, though each of these ma provide important experiences. The psychological task is for adoptive parents as well as others who interface with adopted children (teachers, counselors, d care workers)—to see through our own cultural location and to stretch beyor its limits, leaving the comfort and familiarity we may have grown used to. doing so, we become more adept at entering into and creating dialogical spac where individuals can share their cultural experiences with one another.

Most adoptive parents do not set off on the path of adoption in order transgress societal norms regarding family, kinship, race, and ethnicity. The are coming to grips with infertility and proceeding with building a family an the loving of a child this entails. Nevertheless, the decision to adopt is itself transgressive act, compounded by adopting a child from another "race" or eth nicity. I entered into adoption with much unconscious naïveté, unsuspectin how my acts of adoption would often leave me at the outskirts of my family an other circles. The depth of my mother's rejection of my plan to adopt and th unarticulated racism it issued from deeply surprised me, making ever mo sweet her eventual love for and commitment to my children. I had not antic pated the degree to which other parents would treat me as different from their selves, or the freedom with which others would disparage the multiracial an multicultural nature of my family. Nor did I anticipate how taking a stand o issues of diversity at my workplace and in my children's schools would set m apart from others with whom I have other experiences in common. For som spectators of our families, we are lifted onto a platform to be idealized for "tal ing in needy children." Others set us apart from their own experience, thinkin it unlikely we could harbor the kinds of feelings they do for their own birthrigt children or assessing us as traitors to our race, ethnicity, class, or religion. On is treated as though outside the center, the norm. In our children's birth cour tries, we are also often idealized or disparaged. When I adopted my daughter fror Brazil, there was a rumor in the press that Americans were adopting Brazilia babies only to harvest their organs to sell to biotech firms. Next to my joy at mott ering a daughter, I had to grow into an acknowledgment of being perceived a the worst kind of colonizer, one who would take the baby of a poor Brazilia woman, knowing it would be killed for my financial gain. Holding these juxta posed images of oneself, being seen as "different" and as cast out in a variety o ways can begin a pilgrimage, a creative foray into reimagining and experiencin one's own identity. If this fall from the center can be embraced as not only nec essary but desirable and interesting, even if unexpected, then a potential trans formation of one's own subjectivity can be sought. Twenty years later, I can sa that each way I fell out of grace has opened up potentials for new relationship with others and myself, insights and avenues in my work I could not have antic ipated. French psychoanalyst and feminist Luce Irigaray argues that only thos

who are secure in their subjectivity have the luxury of playing with subjectivity.[36] Assuming many adoptive parents enjoy such security by virtue of the status conferred by their class, age, race, or nationality, might not our "playing" establish a safer place in which our children can make forays into the complexity of their potential identities?

But of what does this serious play consist? It has both an external and internal level. The former involves building relationships with those we have grown accustomed to place outside our ordinary circles. To do so may, in time, involve changing our neighborhood, our workplace, our place of worship, and sometimes even our work as a result of our shifting alliances. We need to place ourselves in situations that can help us to open up the unconscious of our multifaceted identity, "detecting within it those chips of heterogeneity that it has been unable quite to dislodge."[37] We must give care to creating access for our children and families to communities and individuals with whom they can be in dialogue and from whom the culture of their birthplace is actively transmitted. Helene Lorenz describes these kinds of experience as facilitative of acquiring what she calls "organic memory," the lifeblood of cultures.[38]

The internal component of playing with our subjectivity has to do with learning to see our cultural location, which includes, for those of us who are white, the deconstruction of being white. Those in positions of cultural power by virtue of race, ethnicity, gender, or class often fail to see their social location and the meaning of it for themselves and others. It has become "naturalized," taken for granted; one is identified with it and thus unable to reflect upon it. Various psychologies of liberation articulate the need to disidentify with one's social position, to shift away from a sedimented identity. This creation of an antagonism with oneself, ejecting "the introjected subject positions of dominant groups," allows affiliations and alliances outside of one's usual circles and new forms of subjectivity.[39]

If one is white, a move toward nomadism involves understanding that identification with being white is a recently constructed experience of the colonial period. In entering the United States, many immigrant groups became "whitened" to distinguish their fates from that of Native Americans and blacks. Beneath the assumption of "being white" lies denial and amnesia regarding the multiple ethnic roots of many who live in America. To meet our children, we need to reverse this forgetfulness and claim our own discarded pieces of identity. We need as well to see clearly the privileges that have accrued from our claim to whiteness and the shadow of dispossession this casts even on our own children.

The stepping out of taken-for-granted patterns of family creation necessitated by adoption can begin a pilgrimage that can become paradigmatic for our child's own odyssey. The occasion of receiving one's child can be extended into an evolving and deepening relationship to the cultural origins of the adopted child, an unfolding relationship to his/her original culture, its people, arts, concerns,

and struggles. From these engagements, the deepening of interest in and respe for differences and an increasing ease in crossing borders can become availab to the expanding repertoire of the child. This is also true of our odyssey in understanding the multiple roots of our own identity and understanding th processes of repression and exclusion that characterize the modes of our pre entation to others and ourselves. The consistency and coherence that identity supposed to provide are not absent in nomadic figurations. They arise from t deepening of capacities for dialogue, improvisations, and resistance, all of whi contribute to resilience.

Conclusion

Movements toward heterogeneous identity are moral moves, as well as psych logical and social ones. As we see all around us, when people's complex identiti are narrowed and reduced, it becomes easier for one group to act destructive against another. Philosopher Kelly Oliver says that previous models of subje tivity have grounded identity in dualistic thinking that often unwittingly pr motes such hostility toward others. The other is what I am not, or what I do n want to be and cannot accept about myself. Thus to ground our subjectivity di ferently we must initiate processes of hosting our repressed otherness as well placing ourselves in situations where we can work through "whatever we mig find threatening in relation to otherness and difference."[40] She sees the poss bility of grounding our subjectivity not in exclusion but in relationship throu difference. Seen in this light, the love in adoptive families that is based on strengthening capacity to embrace another in their difference is extende beyond the boundaries of the family. "Love is an ethics of otherness," Oliv says, "that thrives on the adventure of otherness. This means that love is an et ical and social responsibility to open personal and public space in which othe ness and difference can be articulated. Love requires a commitment to th advent and nurturing of difference."[41] Adoptive families can be beacons for th forging of this kind of commitment in our culture.

Beneath the alienation and apparent rootlessness of our current moment i history lies a rich and complex root system. Adoptees' sense of existential home lessness, of mourning for a simple and straightforward identity that was never pe sonally possible and their bearing of vulnerability left by the absence of hard-edge exclusionary definitions can work to expose the intertwining root system that i their legacy by virtue of birth and adoption. Julia Kristeva describes wanting he writing to exist "on the fragile border where identities do not exist or only barel so: double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject."[42] Per haps if we can join her in this place, we will have a vantage point from which to se identities as they shift into greater definition, a place to wonder aloud with eac other the functions for such sharper definition, struggling against those that ar

destined to create the kind of oppositions from which our poor world suffers so greatly, and out of which many adoptions become necessary.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Rosi Braidotti, "Difference, Diversity, and Nomadic Subjectivity," Rosa Braidotti homepage, http://www.let.uu.nl/~Rosi.Braidotti/personal.

2. Quoted in Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

3. We must try to be careful not to universalize Euro-American notions of identity. For instance, African psychologist Amini Mama says that she is not aware of a term for identity in any of the African languages she knows. As a young girl, she felt she received identity only when she left Africa to be schooled in England. "We recall distasteful colonial impositions that told us who we were: a race of kaffirs, natives, Negroes and negresses." "I grew a more specifiable identity only when I went away to school in Europe. It was in an English boarding school that I was first compelled to claim and assert an identity, if only to correct the daily nonsense I was subjected to" which included the assumption that she had "an identity problem," being "reduced to being a 'colored girl,' or a 'black.' To be treated as an orphan, a refugee, or an immigrant" (Amini Mama, "Gender, Power, and Identity in African Contexts," *Wellesley Centers for Women, Research and Action Report* 23 [2002]:7).

4. Mary Watkins and Susan Fisher, *Talking with Young Children about Adoption* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Betsy Smith, Janet Surrey, and Mary Watkins, "Adoptive Mothers: Real Mothers in Resistance," in *Mothering against the Odds: Diverse Voices of Contemporary Motherhood*, ed. Janet Surrey, Kathy Weingarten, and Cynthia Garcia-Coll (New York: Guilford Press, 1998).

5. David Brodzinsky, Marshall Schechter, and Robin Henig, *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 103. Brodzinsky described identity diffusion as having no clear path for oneself, applying it to someone who is "unrealistic about where she has been and where she is going, and lacks a clear sense of what she believes in or who she is." Such a person is "unable to make a commitment to a particular identity such as a career, a sexual orientation, or a set of moral values."

6. Betty Jean Lifton, *Lost and Found: The Adoption Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 45.

7. R. J. Simon and H. Alstein, *Transracial Adoption* (New York: Wiley, 1977). The National Association of Black Social Workers, opposing transracial adoption of African American children, stated, "Black children belong physically, and psychologically and culturally in Black families in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future. Human beings are products of their environment and develop their sense of values, attitudes, and self-concepts within their own family structure. Black children in white homes are cut off from the healthy development of themselves as black people."

8. "The resulting confusion undermines the child's security and affects his mental health and may send him on a relentless pursuit of the facts of his origins from adolescence on" (Lifton, *Lost and Found*, 45).

9. The fact that there is more genetic variation between two fruit flies than there is between two persons of different races is exploding essentialism about race based on genetic fantasies.

10. William Feigelman and A. Silverman, "The Long-term Effects of Transracial Adoptio *Social Service Review* (December 1984): 588–602.

11. D. S. Kim, "Intercountry Adoptions: A Study of Self-concept of Adolescent Korean Cl dren Who Were Adopted by American Families" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chica 1976); O. Gill and B. Jackson, *Adoption and Race: Black, Asian, and Mixed Race Child in White Families* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983); L. McRoy, L. A. Zurcher, M. L. Lauderd and R. E. Anderson, "Self-Esteem and Racial Identity in Transracial and Inrac Adoptees," *Social Work* 27 (1982): 522–26; Amanda Baden, "The Psychological Adj ment of Transracial Adoptees: An Application of the Cultural-Racial Identity Mod *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless* 11 (April 2002): 167–91; Leslie Hollingswo "Effect of Transracial/Transethnic Adoption on Children's Racial Identity and S Esteem: A Meta-analytic Review," *Marriage and Family Review* 25 (1997): 99–130; E. Indi "Ethnic Identity of Transracially Adopted Hispanic Adolescents," *Social Work* 33 (198 531–35; M. Devon Brooks, "A Study of the Experiences and Psychosocial Developmer Outcomes of African American Adult Transracial Adoptees" (Ph.D. diss., University California, Berkeley, 2000); Leslie Doty Hollingsworth, "Transracial Adoptees in 1 Media: 1986–1996," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 72 (April 2002): 289–93; R Simon and Howard Alstein, *Adoption, Race, and Identity: From Infancy to Young Adulth* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002).

12. In Feigelman and Silverman, it was found that Korean adolescent adoptees in inter cial families actually surpassed adoptees in same-race families in terms of psychol ical adjustment. In Weinberg, Scarr, and Waldman, transracial adoptees compared biological children of the same group had higher academic test scores (R. A. Weinbe S. Scarr, and I. D. Waldman, "The Minnesota Transracial Adoption Study: A Follow of Test Performance at Adolescence," *Intelligence* 16 [1992]: 117–35).

13. Jim Jones, *Prejudice and Racism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).

14. Kevin Cockley, "Testing Cross's Revised Racial Identity Model: An Examination of t Relationship between Racial Identity and Internalized Racialism," *Journal of Counsel Psychology* 49 (October 2002): 476–83.

15. Dan Hocoy, "Cross-cultural Issues in Art Therapy," *Art Therapy: Journal of the Americ Art Therapy Association* 19 (2002): 141–45.

16. Sunil Bhatia, "Is 'Integration' the Developmental End Goal for All Immigrants? Redef ing 'Acculturation Strategies' from a Genetic-Dramatistic Perspective," in *Dialogical in Development*, ed. Ingrid Josephs (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003): 197–216.

17. Eric Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (Itha Cornell University Press, 1993): xii.

18. A. M. Ryskamp, "You Light Up My Life," *Adoptive Families* 32 (1999): 21–23.

19. In Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

20. Personal communication with author.

21. Amin Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong* (New York: Arca Publishing 2000), 25.

22. James McBride, *The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother* (New Yor Riverhead Books, 1996), 103.

23. Hubert J. M. Hermans and Harry J. G. Kempen, "Moving Cultures: The Perilous Problet of Cultural Dichotomies in a Globalizing Society," *American Psychologist* 53 (1998): 111–2

24. Rosi Braidotti, "Difference, Diversity, and Nomadic Subjectivity," 6.

25. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 5.

26. Bhatia, "Is 'Integration' the Developmental End Goal for All Immigrants?" 198.

27. Ibid., 2–3.

28. Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York: Basic Books, 1993). Stuart and Gilroy discuss creolization/transculturality in Braidotti, "Difference, Diversity, and Nomadic Subjectivity."

29. Eric Santner speaks of Habermas's idea of a postconventional self in *Stranded Objects*, 62. He describes it as "a self that feels entitled to play with its boundaries (rather than denying or reifying them), and it will be a self more consistently able to experience the vitality of that 'free association between emotions and events' which ultimately grounds the human capacity to bear witness to history and to claim solidarity with the oppressed of history, past and present." W. E. Cross describes the multiculturalist inclusive identity as embracing a black identity as well as at least two other identity categories, such as gender or sexual orientation, in *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). The ensembled self is discussed in Edward Sampson, "The Challenge of Social Change for Psychology: Globalization and Psychology's Theory of the Person," *American Psychologist* 44 (1989): 914–21.

30. Gloria Anzaldua and Analouise Keating, eds., *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2.

31. Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987).

32. Ibid., 80–81.

33. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996): 15–16.

34. Maalouf, *In the Name of Identity*, 4–5, 36.

35. Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall, "Is Transracial Adoption Easier for Multiracial Kids?" PACT: An Adoption Alliance, http://pact.best.vwh.net/press/articles/easier.html.

36. Quoted in review of Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects, Me Iron Academentia Green Travels*, http://www.stumptuous.com/comps/braidotti.html.

37. Eagleton, quoted in Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 100.

38. Helene Lorenz, "Interrupted Subjects: Psychologies of Loss and Liberation," in *Remembering the Soul of the World*, ed. Karin Carrington, H. Teich, and Susan Griffin (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

39. A. R. JanMohamed, "Some Implications of Paulo Freire's Border Pedagogy," *Cultural Studies* 7 (1993): 246, 111.

40. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 10.

41. Ibid., 20.

42. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 207.

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