# The Abject an Object of Desire: Identity Formation of Female Adoptees from China in the Netherlands

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# The Abject an Object of Desire: Identity Formation of Female Adoptees from China in the Netherlands

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"the master of the house is it at home, but nonetheless he comes to enter his home through the guest – who comes from outside…. He [re]enters his home … [through] the grace of the visitor…." (Derrida, 2000, 124 in Bhabha 2011, 7).

## Table of Contents

**Abstract**

This study shows the effects of unrecognised racism and the 'unknown' on identity formations of female Chinese adoptees in the Netherlands through 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews. It contributes to existing literature on adoption, revealing limitation of the usage of Homi Bhabha's *Third Space* in adoption literature. A struggle between the superego and the abject hinders identity formation. This research shows how a conflicting attraction and retraction of the unknown, the abject, shapes the search for identity. At the same time this thesis exposes a gap in migration literature. The adoptee, an unusual migrant, is underrepresented in political science literature. This study offers a corrective by introducing post-colonial theory and psycho-analysis to the question of the (unusual) migrant. Three recurring themes among the data were: (i) external identification schemes that cause internal social-psychological struggles; (ii) a conflicting attraction and retraction towards a 'lost' identity; (iii) the consequences of a lack of knowing.

## Introduction

Until I saw the movie Tarzan I never saw any differences between my parents and me. In the film, there is a scene in which Tarzan puts his hand against Jane's hand[1]. I remember the scene as a life-changing moment for Tarzan. He now has discovered his true identity; human. Inspired by the movie, I asked my mother to imitate that Tarzan and Jane moment with me. I've been asked multiple times, "when did you know that you were adopted?" and I always say, "I have always known". And that is true, but there is also another side to it. I *felt* adopted the moment when my mother and I put our hands against each other, and I asked, "why is mine different?".

This thesis will add to existing political science literature on migration by introducing post-colonial theory of Homi Bhabha's third space (Bhabha [1994] 2004) (Bhabha 2011) and Julia Kristeva's psycho-analysis on matricide and abjection (Kristeva [1980] 1982) (Kristeva 1991) to the migration debate with a particular regard to unusual migrants. Therefore, this thesis could be seen as a plea for a merger of disciplines when it comes to the question of identity formation of migrants. Adoption is underrepresented in migration debates, though adoptees are migrants. The data shows how dominant perceptions in the Netherlands of migrants shape the identity formation of adoptees. This study argues that even within the liminal of the third space, both boundaries and external and internal definitions follow the adoptee. Effectively disallowing the adoptee to connect with their ethnic identity. The identity that is lost, the abject, the stranger in ourselves remains seated in the unknown. Bound by internalised notions of culture, of identity i.e. the predominance of the superego the unusual migrant shows a struggle rested within the unconscious between desire and identity. Glimpses of the abject, glimpses of what could be, unanswered questions, new life, the end of a life they trigger, they provoke, they spark desire, but they never seem to be able to breach the frontiers

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D_7BwwCjXc

of the superego. I argue that a struggle between desire and identity, rested in the unconsciousness, shows the limitations of the usage of Homi Bhabha's third space in adoption literature. The argument exposes the influence of the predominance of the superego and essentialist notions on Dutch identity on social-psychological behaviour and identity formation.

Within the Dutch context, there is no room for ambiguous identities. You are either 'us' or 'them' (Wekker et al. 2007, 36). Even within the family's intimacy, the identity of the adoptee seems to remain vague. The adoptees' identity is not one-sided; it consists of both an 'inside' and an 'outside' identity (Ynvesson 2010, 124), making it almost impossible to create an 'us' and 'them'. Often adoptees find themselves in the position of having a Dutch national identity, but that identity is not entirely effective. Adoption literature focusses primarily on (racialised) identities of adoptees. Hübinette (2014), Wekker et al. (2007) and Ynvesson (2010) have directed our attention to the presence of the adoptee in the third space. In the third space, identity is negotiable. Past and present, inclusion and exclusion, inside and outside, all are fluid in the liminal (Bhabha 2011, 6-11). The third space is where the adoptee negotiates and constructs their identity (Wekker et al. 53) (Hübinette, 23). Hübinette does not go further than to state that the adoptee is 'the perfect example' of the third space (23). Wekker et al. focus primarily on how the adoptee uses the third space to regain agency but fails to show the process of negotiation. Ynvesson conceptualises the adoptees' identity formation as *negating identity* (Yngvesson 2010), leaning more to Kristeva's matricide concept than to Bhabha's third space. Through the negotiation of identity in the third space, Wekker et al., as well as Hübinette (2004), show how adoptees are the example of hybrid identities and how they can find autonomy and agency over their identity (Wekker et al. 53) (Hübinette, 23).

Bhabha and Kristeva seem to be after the same. Bhabha, reacting to Kristeva's paradoxical community, suggest that the realm of the paradoxical 'belongs to neither the one nor the Other' (Bhabha, 6). For Kristeva, it is through matricide we can reach the universal, the realm of the paradoxical. 'A paradoxical community is emerging, made up out of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognise themselves as foreigners' (Kristeva 1991, 195). But the road to the paradoxical is a lonely one. "Is to be free to be alone?" (Sciamma, 2019). With Bhabha the road to the universal then seems less lonely; arguably, no mother has to be killed. Still, in the process of negotiating, some things might be erased. The question then is; how does the adoptee make such choices?

This research will explore the negotiation process of the third space by adoptees. What choices does the adoptee make and how does the adoptee choose, does the adoptee make a choice? Within the process of negotiation, both belonging and identity can be questioned. Growing up in white families, but by phenotype bound to their ethnicity, adoptees provide the perfect window through which we can look at identity formation (Hübinette 2004, 23). Positioned between the Western culture they were raised in and their ethnic identity, adoptees negotiate between their birth countries' identity and their socialised identity (53). Therefore, the 'inside' and 'outside' position of adoptees allows us to examine both push and pull factors and their influence on identity. This study aims to answer the following question: How do Dutch conceptions of migrants, influence the identity formation of adoptees? The study focusses exclusively on female adoptees as I was unable to recruit male, or other identifying, interviewees. To answer the research question, I have conducted 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews with female adoptees from China. Additionally, I have drawn data from autoethnographic work.

## Literature Review

'If political regulations or legislation generally speaking define the manner in which we posit, modify, and eventually improve the status of foreigners, they also make up a vicious circle, for it is precisely with respect to laws that foreigners *exist*' (Kristeva 1991, 96; emphasis original).

### *I. Seeing like a state: Migrant identity*

Immigration is the 'central site through which national communities are institutionally imagined and materially constructed' (Vukov, 335). In the Netherlands, politics of citizenship reveal a 'deeply hierarchical logic' (Jones 2016, 605). A binary between 'autochthones' (of 'Dutch descent') and 'allochthones' (of 'foreign descent')[2] is a racialised binary with a strong connection to the Netherlands' history as a colonial power. Post-colonial influences have shaped minority policies, explicitly aimed at immigrant groups who were viewed as ethnically different and as a social risk to society (Lucassen & Lucassen 2015, 85). The binary is based on appearance and 'cultural' differences (Jones, 613). In addition, Bonjour and Duyvendak (2017) argue that Dutch integration policies are designed to prohibit 'migrants with poor prospects' from entering. According to Bonjour and Duyvendak, 'poor prospects' does not refer to 'poor' socio-economic prospects of migrants. It is a racialised political identity with strong roots in Orientalist and colonialist notions of identity that portrays the male migrant as 'lazy, parasitic and oppressive' and the female migrant as 'vulnerable, un-emancipated and secluded' versus the Western migrant who is 'highly educated and developed' (Bonjour & Duyvendak 2007, 897).

Migrant identity, as described above, is an *external definition* of identity. At the individual level and the group level, 'identity is located within a two-way social process, an

[2] Both autochthones and allochthones are no longer in use.

interaction between 'ego' and 'other', 'inside and outside' (Jenkins 2008, 55). *External definitions* affect the social experiences of the categorised, as they often do not meet the *internal definition* of their identity (55). The denial of racism in the Netherlands (see Wekker 2016) complicates the counteractions of migrants to change the *external definition*. There is a clear distinction between the identity of the 'real' native and the migrant. The native is white, highly educated, developed and middle-class. The migrant is the very opposite (Bonjour & Duyvendak, 894), (Essed & Trienekens 2008, 59). Both migrants and natives, who do not meet the Dutch phenotype (white) remain 'symbolic aliens': they are/can be members of the nation in legal terms but will never be 'real members' of the nation (Schuster 1999, 221 in Essed and Trienekens, 60).

In the dominant Dutch narrative, only cultural differences exist (Essed and Trienekens, 55). Dutch persistent denial of the existence and influence of race, colonialism and Orientalism, complicate negotiations between internal and external identities. The *smug ignorance* (Essed and Hoving 2014b, 24 in Wekker 2016, 18) of the influence of colonialism, race and Orientalism allow hierarchical binaries between 'us' and 'them' to continue to exist. Additionally, dominant racialised *external definitions* of migrant identity remain unchallenged (Bonjour and Duyvendak, 897), (Wekker 2016), (Essed & Trienekens 2008), (Jones 2016). Subsequently, native citizens who, in addition to migrants, fail to meet the desired phenotype (white) are identified as 'symbolic aliens'. Therefore, borders and foreign identities, whether applicable or not, 'effectively follows them [migrants] inside [the nation state]' (Bosniak 2006,4 in Bonjour & De Hart 2021, 3). From a states' point of view, the identity of migrant and native citizens is subjected to the eye of the beholder.

## *II. Matricide: The (re)birth of identity*

'If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverises the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject' (Kristeva, [1980] 1982, 5; emphasis original).

Adoptions are seen as an 'unusual migration process'. Since most adoptees have no clue of or say in their adoption, the process of adoption can be seen as 'a type of forced migration' (Weil 1984, 277). In interethnic[3] adoptions, a 'clean break' between state and birth parents, separates the child from its past self (Yngvesson 2003, 7). The clean break myth commits matricide to create a motherless child, free to assimilate fully into the adoptive family and culture (Yngvesson, 8-9). For the adoptee, the clean break comes at a price. The concept of a 'self' is '*defined by* its blindness to this [originary] place: it cannot take into consideration without dissolving itself, without losing its consistency' (Zizek 1989, 20 in Yngvesson 2010, 145; emphasis original).

Opposite to the clean break myth is the preservation story which implies that a clean break does not exist. Identity here is associated with a ground of belonging that can be found *within* and *outside* the adoptee. The *inside* ties the adoptee to a 'primal connectedness', a 'hunger for identity' (Lifton 1994, 67-71 in Yngvesson 2003, 8). According to Weil (1984), parental accounts and general case studies of adoptions suggest that adopted children seldom maintain parts of their native culture (277). In adoption literature, there are three different ways in how adoptees identify themselves: a) the adoptee identifies as Dutch with no

[3] 'Interethnic' refers not only to the ethnicity of adoptees but also emphasizes that adoptees are socialized in white families. 'Interethnic adoption reveals a tension between individual identity and ethnic background' (Wekker et al. 2007, 7).

connection to their ethnic background, b) the adoptee feels torn apart or c) the adoptee identifies as Dutch as well with their ethnical background (Wekker et al. 2007, 7).

Additionally, adoptees, growing up in white families, internalise *external definitions* of migrants. Interviewees described migrants as non-white, mostly male with different cultural values. Public discourse and private life are connected; Plummer calls this 'intimate citizenship' (Plummer 2003 in Schrover 2020, 2). Elsa Mulder, an adoptee from Brazil, acknowledged that because of her upbringing in a white family, she could not recognise racism directed towards her, a black woman. In conversations about potential partners, she used to go along and say that she found black people ugly[4]. Another adoptee expressed her uncomfortability with migrants:

> "I feel uncomfortable in the proximity of immigrants, which I think is because they in some sense unsettle the picture I have formed of myself as Swedish. They remind me that I, too, am a kind of immigrant, even though I feel that I am not, because I don't want to see things that way" (von Melen 1998, 63 in Yngvesson 2010, 127; emphasis removed).

What happens if we flip the question the way Kristeva does? Additionally, to ask how adoptees identity is created, we should also ask what it means for society to assimilate adoptees. Central to the justification but also attributed to the adopted child's identity is the idea of the birth country as 'unsuitable for children' (Noonan 2007, 314 in Dubinsky 2008, 340). The Dutch dominant perception of adoption was the thought of adoption as 'goed doen' (doing good). Whether illegal or not, all adoptions were justified by that very thought (Commissie Joustra 2021, 3). In Dutch newspapers, the forced migration of adoptees was

[4] Elsa Mulder, (see Pakhuis de Zwijger 48:31)

called ‘home-coming’ (Schrover, 4). For adoptions, to Western countries, the colonial context is of importance. Dominant discourse emphasised a ‘rescue metaphor’ drawing distinctions between the Dutch state as good and the sending state as bad (Schrover, 3-4). Yngvesson emphasises the importance of the adoptive family in creating a Swedish multicultural society. Within the adoptive family, racial and cultural differences were ‘bridgeable’ because the parents were ‘completely Swedish’ (Yngvesson 2010, 98). The adoptee was encouraged to ‘absorb’ their ethnicity and cultural differences while at the same time upholding their ‘Swedishness’ as the model for national identity and *real* belonging (98; emphasis original). Wekker et al. contribute to this by saying that there seems to be the idea of interethnic adoptees as non-ethnic (Wekker et al. 28).

The idea of the adoptee as non-ethnic is problematic. First, adoption then becomes an individual identity instead of a group identity where the ethnic background of the adoptee cannot exist (28). Second, the influences of whiteness on the consciousness of the adoptee is obscured (28). In other words, if we continue to think of the adoptee as non-ethnic, dominant social structures that continue to (re)create a social hierarchy based on ethnicity remain unchallenged. Therefore the ‘unusual migrant’ is the perfect migrant. Poster children for cosmopolitanism; we do not only accept the stranger in our midst, but we can also love and raise them as our own. But this love is conditional; it depends on a balance. Ynvesson hints at this balance; the adoptee has to ‘absorb’ their ethnicity while upholding their ‘Swedishness’ as the model for national identity and *real* belonging (98). The emphasis on ‘*real’* is essential; real belonging, real identity can only be found in and practised through the adoptive country’s dominant narrative on the *superego*.

*The Abject*

In the realm of the superego, otherness thrives. The superego, 'the vehicle of tradition' where '(..) past, tradition of race and of the people, live in the ideologies of the superego (…)' (Freud 1993/1992, 72 in De Oliveira 2008, 696) is formed through and influenced by external powers. The existence of otherness results from the formation of the superego and vice versa (696). If the adoptee wants to feel at comfort with their ethnic background, the adoptee must look back. However, the cultural and ethnic identity of the adoptee is changed due to their adoption. For adoptees, the dominant discourse of 'being' is the white embodiment of 'being' propagated by their parents (Ynvesson, 94), (Wekker et al. 42). Therefore, to come to terms with their cultural and racial identity, the adoptee has to commit matricide once more to retrieve the identity that is lost.

The 'lost identity' for the adoptee is the identity of a foreigner; 'Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries (..)' (Kristeva 1991, 187). Kristeva directs our attention to a separation that should not be regarded as a neutral process. Matricide is a violent physical and psychological process in which borders between selves are constituted (Stone 2012, 122). There lies a threat in confronting the foreigner in yourself, an uncanniness that emerges when boundaries blur (Barclay 2010, 5). Here, Kristeva's *abject* comes to the fore. The abject is the 'me that is not me'. Abjection is the aversion that defines *you* as pure and the perverted as the body improper. The abject is neither subject nor object (Kristeva [1980] 1982). For Kristeva, the abject lies within the liminal of a ritual that leads to your place in society. Kristeva links the abject to the superego 'to each ego its object, to each superego its abject' (Kristeva [1980] 1982, 2). The abject constitutes boundaries; it draws a line between our subjectivity and objects through rejection (Kristeva [1980] 1982).

It is essential to pay attention to the question both Zizek and Kristeva seem to ask; can you exist without boundaries? For Zizek, the self is defined by a 'blindness' to an (original) place; without that blindness, the self would lose 'its consistency' (Zizek 1989, 20 in Yngvesson 2010, 145). Kristeva ruthlessly abjects the original place as a whole. Only then the superego can exist. But it is through abjection that the superego comes into existence. What does this mean for the adoptee? Its superego tied to western notions of identity, its lost identity tied to the abject. The me that is not me *is* me. The unusual migrant cannot afford certain blindness towards its original place. To know, to see, they have to take off their blindfolds and look back and search for the abjected.

## *III. Entering the 'Third Space'*

> "And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha [1994] 2004, 56)

In Euro-American conceptions of identity, the ego possesses a 'unitary social entity' (Yngvesson 2007, 568). The interethnic adoptee's identity consists of both an 'inside' and an 'outside' identity. Therefore, the adoptee is always 'slightly out of place' (Yngvesson 2010, 124). Wekker et al. (2007), Hübinette (2004) and Yngvesson (2010) show how adoptees negotiate their identity in the realm of a *third space*. Yngvesson (2010) conceptualises identity negotiation as 'negating identities'. Hübinette but mainly Wekker et al., recognise the value of post-colonial theory in the understanding identity formation of interethnic adoptees. The adoptee's ethnical identity seemed to be insignificant, undefined even, within the context of the family of the adoptee (Wekker et al. 40). Even though the adoptee's ethnicity is of no significance within the family on a practical and social level, their ethnicity is significant. There is an ambivalence between 'how it should be' and 'how it is' (40). The ambivalence

between 'how it is' and 'how it should be' (40) pushes the adoptee, even those who identify as entirely Dutch, into otherness.

As stated earlier, there are three different ways adoptees identify themselves: as Dutch without a connection to their ethnical background, as torn apart, or the adoptee identifies with both the country of birth and the country they are brought up in (Wekker et al. 7). Wekker et al. attribute these schemes of identification to interethnic experiences of adoptees. Growing up in pro-dominantly white families, racial and ethnic divisions were exceeded. The interethnic experiences direct our attention to '*essentialist* presumptions on physical characteristics' (7). At the same time identification schemes show the existence of a space '*between* black and white' categorisations (7; emphasis original).

It is not a coincidence that several authors have referred to the third space. The third space is a liminal space, a transition stage, a border (Kalua 2009, 23). Bhabha argues that knowledge of identity and difference is not merely a question of history and epistemology. Identity and difference come with an 'perceptual' and 'phenomenological' problem. A problem that '… relates to *how we see* and *from where we look* – or, in relation to the stranger – *at whom we are looking'* (Bhabha 2011, 8). The third space is 'the place of the witness' (Bhabha, 7). In the third space culture has 'no unity, purity or fixity (..) where primordial notions of race and nation have been replaced by a floating hybrid existence' (Hübinette 2004, 23). The third space is a place of recognition 'open to question' where a shift from 'the language of enmity' to 'the language of proximity' is possible (Bhabha 8-9). In other words; the third space is a space of negotiation, resistance, agency, and fluidity where all boundaries blur. A dialogue between the stranger and the self emerges. It is within this dialogue that we are able to identify with the Other and to enter the unconsciousness of the Other as the very limits of our self-construction dissolve in the beyond (Bhabha, 9). In the beyond, space and time cross each other and produce multifaceted 'figures of identity'. Past and present, inside

and outside, inclusion and exclusion are ambiguous, fluid, negotiable in the beyond (Bhabha 2004, 2 in Kalua, 25). The third space 'lies in the interstices of agency and identity (Bhabha, 11). From the literature we might deduce that the identity formation of the adoptee is formed through both internal and external definitions; the native as white, high cultured, highly educated, middle-class, and the migrant as the opposite (Bonjour & Duyvendak 2007, 894), (Essed & Trienekens 2008, 59), (Jenkins 2008, 55). The adoptee is also a migrant, an unusual, forced migrant, but still, a migrant (Weil 1984, 277). However, the adoptee, as opposed to the migrant, is not the opposite of the native. The adoptee is raised by 'natives' as 'native', the adopted identity requires the blurring of us/them binaries. But the Dutch identity disallows such a blurring of binaries; expecting the adoptee to both 'absorb' their ethnicity and the adoptive countries' national identity at the same time (Yngvesson 2010, 98).

This literature review has presented two theoretical concepts from different fields that both deal with the question of the Other. Both theoretical concepts would do well on their own, clarifying how the adoptee constructs their identity. One of them, the third space, has already been used in previous adoption literature. However, the third space lacks depth and understanding and falls short in showing the complexities of identity formation when knowledge is missing. The second concept, abjection, has not yet been used to explore the identity formation of unusual migrants. Previous research has located the identity construction of adoptees in the realm of the third space. Arguing that the adoptee is not only the 'perfect example' of the third space, but that the third space allows the adoptee to negotiate their identity outside existing boundaries (Hübinette 2014), (Wekker et al. 2007), (Yngvesson 2010). It is through the concept of abjection that we can start to understand that the negotiation of identity for the adoptee is more complex and needs a critical understanding of what it means for identity and desire to reside in the unconsciousness.

## Methodology

13 in-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted with adoptees who came to the Netherlands from China between 1994 and 2001. The interview existed out of ten semi-structured open-ended questions that emphasise the interviewee's lived experience (Bryman 2016, 466). During the questionnaire, additional questions not laid out in the interview have occurred. The questionnaire was a mix of specifying, follow-up, direct- and indirect, intermediate and interpreting questions. The research question is directed towards a specific population. Therefore, I have used *purposive* sampling, meaning I have sampled participants in a strategic way to ensure that those sampled are relevant to my research question (Bryman, 408). Purposive sampling is a *non-probability* sample which implies that some are more likely to be selected then others (Bryman, 174). Therefore, the sample and does not allow me to generalise the outcome of the data to a population (ibid.: 408). Apart from the relation to the research question, the interviewees are selected on the year of arrival (between 1994-2001). Interviewees were self-selected. They have been contacted through social media platforms *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Most interviewees enlisted through my call on the *Facebook* page of *Adoptiepedia* or enlisted themselves via a *story* posted by the *Instagram* account of *Adoptiepedia*. Self-selection has not led to only interviewing people who felt encouraged and able to speak on the matter. Some interviewees were simply curious of the outcoming of the research. There were, however, some more bias concerns. For instance, no one who identifies as male has participated. The gender gap can be clarified by CBS statistics, between 1995 and 2001 7% of the adoptees from China were male and 93% of the adoptees were female. I have unfortunately not been able to deflect this gender bias[5].

Additionally, I have used autoethnographic data. In one case autobiographical data was presented to me. Autobiographical data show the significance of the meaning the writer

[5] https://opendata.cbs.nl/#/CBS/nl/dataset/80399ned/table?searchKeywords=China visited 13-06-2021

places on the data provided it 'locates the place and importance of a trait in a person's life and life project' (Howard, Maerlender, Myers, and Curtin 1992, 404). Autoethnography and autobiography allow the data to be built on experiences more thoroughly than other methods (Deitering et al., 2017, 8). Autoethnography and autobiography create a balance between 'rigorous analysis' and 'honest emotion and creativity' (8). Emotions that might get lost or will not be shared during the interview, are now out in the open. Autoethnographic data varies from memories of conversations and my answers to questions asked by the interviewee in a process that I called 'reverse'. In the 'reverse', I let the interviewees interview me at the end of the interview. I encouraged them to remember any question(s) that felt provoking or made them feel uncomfortable and ask those questions in return. The questions asked varied from questions about my family situation to personal questions regarding my feeling towards my birthparents. Autoethnography challenges essentialist value-neutral categorical thinking by emphasising the emotional in which 'culture flows through self and vice versa' (Ellis & Bochner in Grant, Short and Turner, 4). Objectivity relies on facts, not feelings. Ontological and cognitive distance between the subject and the researcher is desired (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 104). A cognitive externality can hinder understanding and interpreting the data that is shared (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 106). In qualitative research, physical separation is not possible and arguably, for interpretive research, cognitive distance is not possible either (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 110). Unable to separate me from the subject might impact the neutrality of the study; however, in this case, neutrality is not the most important quality of the method. Placing myself in the context of the study has required a high sense of reflexivity (see Campbell 2016, 97 and Grant, Short & Turner 2013, 5).

Interviewees were keen to talk to me and it was noticeable that they felt comfortable opening up. At several occasions the interviewee spoke in manners of 'we' and 'us'. Additionally, there were times when the interviewees did not feel the need to explain certain

feelings as they thought I would recognise them without having them to say them aloud. Often, I could, if not, I asked. As a Chinese adoptee born in 1994, I myself was a subject of my own study. At times when analysing the data, it felt as if I was explaining myself to myself which was a weird feeling. It is inevitable that my interpretations and judgements of the data have influenced how the data is understood (Hawa & Raman 2000/2001, 123). My own relation to the field has impacted the meaning that will be given to the data. Personal knowledge and affiliation are challenging as it might influence the neutrality of the study (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea 2015, 107).

Being a subject was a strength. At times I asked deeply personal questions that proved to be experienced as uncomfortable. It became clear that because of my appearance and being an adoptee myself, the interviewees were fully committed to answer all of my questions. The interviewees often shared rich personal descriptions of social phenomena. Epistemic insights help present 'social reality from the viewpoint of the subject(s) (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 110). My inability to physically and cognitively distance myself as a subject from the subject(s), enabled me to get more epistemically 'inside' than I would be able to if I were not who I am. As a subject myself, I thought I would be able to control the narrative 'that represents that social reality' (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 110), (Hawa & Raman 2000/2001,122), after al; it is my narrative too (Campbell 2016, 96). I was wrong, not all our stories are the same. Although there were numerous descriptions of social events that I was able to relate to; at the same time, I met some limitations in that department.

‘The place of the abject is where meaning collapses, the place where I am not’

(Kristeva 1982, 2 in Creed 1986, 46).

## Analysis

After analysing the interviews, three themes emerged: (i) *external identification schemes that cause social-psychological struggles*. Ascribed external identifications influence how the adoptee engages social relationships as well as how they construct their identity. (ii) *A conflicting attraction and retraction towards a 'lost' identity*. Here the struggle between desire and identity becomes most visible as the birthparent is both abjected and desired at the same time. (iii) *The consequences of a lack of knowing*. If the adoptee wanted to become acquainted with Chinese culture it became apparent that the Chinese culture was inaccessible. The inaccessibility contributed to feelings of loneliness and desolation. The three themes will be analysed below in this order.

### *I. Hometown Glory*

Looking back at their (early) childhood, all interviewees recognise the existence of phenotypical differences between them and their environment. For some, the reactions of others to their physique played a significant role in constructing relationships with others and how they identified themselves. Of the 13 interviewees, seven identified as Dutch, four identified as Chinese-Dutch or 'undecided' and one explicitly denounced a Dutch identity. The data shows a correlation between the lived experiences of racism and the influence of the reaction of both parents, classmates and friends to these experiences on the identification process of the adoptee. When confronted with racist remarks, most adoptees knew there was something 'not right'. A telling example is that of Marit, who said being called out because of her looks did not disturb her, as her parents told her 'not to be bothered' with it.

*Marit:* *When I am meeting someone new, I do feel the urge to tell them that I am adopted just so they know that I am Dutch. Because, there are prejudices*

*towards Chinese people and you just notice that you will be treated differently. And I notice that I want to tell them immediately 'I am adopted so basically, I am Dutch, just like you'.*

Though Marit emphasised on multiple occasions that her 'daily life is not affected' by the comments made on her appearance; she has adopted a coping mechanism. She either ignores the comment made or she resists being classified as non-Dutch. By addressing her looks head on, she takes control over her narrative and makes her identity non-negotiable. She tries to obscure the perceived 'otherness' that her peer might notice; stating clearly 'I am Dutch, just like you'. Other interviewees expressed feelings of hurt, disorientation and confusion when confronted with racist comments. Feelings that translated in anger, self-hate, loneliness and a repulsion of Chinese culture and its citizens. As one interviewee put it:

*Milou:* *Where I live… is quite a white community, not many foreigners. At elementary school, me and my sister were the only Chinese. As a child you get the idea that you are not entirely fitting in. I remember seeing myself for the first time in the mirror and I realised I didn't look like the people around me. That was momentous, I remember that. Everyone was blond, quite tall, blue eyes, big eyes and, when I looked at myself I saw an alien.*

There were multiple examples of interviewees wanting to talk about their feelings. They were met with uneasiness, unwillingness and a denial to acknowledge the existence of racism.

*Interviewer:* *Did you talk to someone about what happened?*

*Lisa:* *(..) it [name-calling] wasn't classified as racism, because racism in the eyes of others [parents] was Apartheid in South-Africa. For them, that was racism.*

*And if someone just called you something then you just had to be funny, you had to be able to deal with it. So, yes, I don't know. It was always somewhat dismissed.*

*Interviewer:* *Did it feel racist?*

*Lisa:* *No, not at that time because everybody said, 'it isn't racism', I began to doubt myself by thinking of it as racism. Later I started to think of it as racism.*

Conversely, uneasiness, unwillingness and a denial to acknowledge the existence of racism is not always addressed by the adoptee either:

*Fei:* *Were there things you recognised when I talked about them?*

*Interviewer:* *Yes, when you talked about comments made in class or by your friends. I find it especially hard when they say, 'It doesn't apply to you'. It makes it hard to become angry. Because I feel, when I get angry I am placing myself outside the 'Dutch-group' and inside a group of 'Others'.*

*Fei:* *Then it does apply to you.*

*Interviewer:* *Yes, and there is nothing wrong with that, but that's not what I want. The only thing I want is just to be Dutch.*

Thus, acknowledging the existence of racism is met with internal resistance from the adoptee and external resistance from those close to the adoptee. Those close to the adoptee, family and friends, seem to want to stay clear from the subject. As the adoptee is 'one of them', a difference in phenotype is not a popular subject to talk about around the kitchen table. Here we can see the balance between *real* belonging and the 'absorption' of ethnicity (Yngvesson 2010, 98). The adoptee is regarded as 'one of us', a notion that seems to blur binaries between 'us' and 'them'. As 'one of us', the adoptee might not be able to recognise racism, like their

family and friends, the adoptee has learned that racism in the Netherlands does not exist (Essed and Trienekens 2008, 55). Colour does not exist either (Wekker 2016, 31) what might explain why family, friends, and distant relatives show resistance when the 'nativeness' of the adoptee is questioned. For them, there exists only one identity; completely Dutch. However, the notion, of the adoptee as completely Dutch, does not resonate with how the adoptee feels when they are othered, let alone why they are othered.

When confronted with 'comments in class or by your friends', internal struggles emerge. On the one hand there are people who tell you that you are one of them, on the other hand you are constantly reminded that in fact, you are not one of them; sometimes even by family members. Identity as a 'two-way social process' as an interaction between 'ego' and 'other', 'inside' and 'outside' is severely complicated (Jenkings 2008, 55). In the case of the adoptee, any interaction between 'inside' and 'outside', only seem to remember them of what they are not on the outside but do feel like on the inside; Dutch. The Other is 'not me', I am 'not that' but at the same time I am 'not nothing either' (Kristeva [1980] 1982, 2). Rested in the unconscious external and internal definitions of identity start to clash. Not me, not that; it seems as if two identities exist parallel of each other. Only made aware of the others existence by glitches in the matrix e.g. when meeting someone new, when looking at yourself and seeing an alien, when someone makes a joke and you are the only one who is not laughing.

It was often stated that when the adoptee wanted to talk to their parents about racism, the conversation was diverted into another subject. In other cases, the subject simply never occurred in conversation. Some parents advised their children to simply 'not to pay attention'. In another case, a racist video send by a family member was addressed in a private conversation set up by her parents. Still, she expressed feeling 'alone in the world'. Though her parents were aware of the fact that she might get negative comments regarding her looks, they never taught her how to cope. Several other interviewees shared the same inadequacy of

knowing how to cope with racist remarks. Which in several cases led to the adoptee not only blaming and hating themselves but also their birthparents and Chinese culture. This led to internal struggles as several interviewees stated that although they started hating their appearance and Chinese culture, they still wanted to get familiar with both. All interviewees relate being Dutch to a certain phenotype inconsistent with their own. How the adoptee deals with the discrepancy presented to them varies. However, interviewees made a differentiation between 'ordinary Dutch' and the adoptee. When asked to clarify, the interviewees described 'ordinary Dutch' as white and themselves as Dutch on the inside. To clarify this distinction, I asked them to describe both a Dutch person and an immigrant. It became apparent that interviewees internalised political identities based on a dominant narrative of a colour-blind nation, drawing differences between a Dutch person and an immigrant solely based on cultural differences. However:

*Interviewer:* *So, for you there are only cultural differences?*

*Emma:* *Yes, that could be, but at the same time with the girl from Africa, dark… I didn't see her as Dutch either. So, it is not just culture because she was adopted too.*

Emma categorised herself as Dutch but did not categorise another adoptee as such, even though she knew the girl was Dutch and there were no cultural differences between them. She solely based her categorisation on phenotype. The example of Emma demonstrates that external definitions of migrants are internalised. Emma was not able to articulate why the other girl did not strike her as Dutch. The unusual migrant does, in most cases, not see themselves as migrant. Raised within white families they internalised Dutch categorisation systems of identity. The adoptee is aware of their own otherness due to their phenotype but at the same time does not entirely classify themselves as the Other. By not being able to

articulate why the other girl in her mind was not Dutch, Emma shows us that she integrated some sort of colour-blindness into her categorisation scheme. Colour-blindness is a crucial factor. The social-psychological consequence when confronted with their own appearance impact, in all cases, social interactions and exemplifies an understanding of the significance of phenomenology on 'being Dutch'. When trying to start a conversation about experienced racism, whether classified by the adoptee as racism or not, the existence of racism is denied by parents, friends or both. In one case the adoptee was told 'she was ruining it for everyone else'. Both parents and adoptees allocate the reason behind racist remarks to lacking intellect. The paradox of being raised within a white environment where race does not exist but simultaneously experiencing racism, obscures the question of accountability. Not able to see colour, not being taught to recognise and confront racism, the adoptee will put the blame on themselves; they are not pretty enough, they are not desirable. Several interviewees expressed that sometimes they wished they were white like their parents as that would have made their life easier. Colour-blindness is a weed with roots seated deep inside our unconsciousness that lets racism bloom, devouring the ability to question the status quo.

*Anneli:* *I wonder, would things have played out differently in China? Would I have felt differently? Would I have felt prettier? You start to ask yourself that kind of questions.*

### *II. The Abject an Object of Desire*

Throughout the interviews a recurring theme was 'feeling abandoned' by their (birth) parents, at sometimes specifically directed towards the mother. Most of the interviewees, at some point in their lives, went either on a 'roots-reis' or vacation to China with their parents.

Though all articulated feelings of recognition when it came to appearance, there was no clear reconciliation between the *internal* and *external* identity. In the interviews a reversed equivalent of Schusters 'symbolic alien' came back. The adoptee was viewed as a member of the nation but felt they were not 'real members' of the nation. The data shows social-psychological consequence of name-calling, Orientalist biases and feelings abandonment on the adoptees willingness and the success rate of merging two cultures.

Perhaps the most interesting observation is a contradicting desire of the adoptees to connect. This desire became clear in two-fold: (i) a wish to be found by their birthparents; and (ii) learning the language to be able to communicate. Conflicting the desire was: (i) feeling abandoned by the birthparents; (ii) internalised Orientalist biases; and (iii) the difficulty merging two cultures. One interviewee wanted to be found by her birthparents, but at the same time she felt anger and sadness:

*Lisa:* *The thing is, I just started searching for my (birth)parents, but it's more making it possible for them to find me. I don't really have the time to find someone.*

Though she wants to be found, Lisa articulated both a bitterness towards and a longing for acceptance from her (birth)parents. This became clear when we talked about her following two very demanding bachelors at the same time:

*Interviewer:* *Do you also do it for yourself?*

*Lisa:* *No, I find it partly interesting… but sometimes I get the feeling that I have to meet certain expectations. And I want, I want to prove that I am better.*

*Interviewer:* *Better than?*

*Lisa:* *The potential son they did keep. I'm like 'Look, you didn't want me and that was wrong. You've bet on the wrong horse'.*

Meanwhile, it becomes clear the adoptee is looking for something:

*Melisse:* *(..) I've always had the feeling that I'm real Dutch. I was raised very sober, Twents, so you don't really feel foreign or something. (..) at a certain point you encounter pieces of yourself that don't conform with your Dutch identity… but at the same time I didn't migrate when I was ten. I have very Dutch traits, but still, there is a piece of me that's not Dutch and it's hard to place.*

Melisse seems to refer to the third space when she says there is piece of her that she cannot place but that part is not Dutch and not Chinese either. Later on, in the interview she elaborated on this missing piece and how it made her feel:

*Melisse:* *It is fucking painful. I don't believe who I am, what I see, and what is true. It is like you are in freefall but without someone who can catch you.*

The third space then is not only a place of negotiation, resistance, agency and fluidity. The third space is also a place of horror. The uncanniness Kristeva pointed out, is on full display in this quote. The boundaries of existence of the subject distort in the third space, leaving the adoptee out in the open and on their own. Feeling lonely was a recurring theme and it was always linked to situations when dichotomies were questioned. In the case of the adoptee, the third space is not only a place of negation of freedom, it is also a place of pain and loneliness.

When asked what the interviewee hoped to find in their search for their birthparents, recurrent themes were physical recognition, but most of all a 'wanting to know what happened'. For some, not knowing the answer to that question expressed itself in a constant search for approval. The need to know why they were excluded from their biological family proved to be vital.

*Interviewer:* *How does your search for identity look like?*

*Li Tao:* *I'm trying to find my biological parents and I think…finding answers will help because then I'm able to compare myself 'do I look like this person or do I look like that person?'. I just hope I can find them and that I'll get answers to why they gave me up. I think that is a very big part in forming my own identity.*

*Interviewer:* *If you don't find your parents, is there a part of you that you'll never find?*

*Li Tao:* *Not consciously. I think I will always be me, but if I do find them I might get stronger unconsciously… a recognition 'oh that's where I got that from'. When you find your parents, then it's… it's a mix of who you will become.*

Both birthparents and Dutch culture impact the adoptees identity. The 'me that is not me' is sought for and feared at the same time. The parent that is not the parent is still wanted, and consciously or unconsciously shapes the way the adoptee looks at herself and forms social relationships. Li Tao, Melisse and Lisa show us that the 'me that is not me' is not a set identity, it is still fluid, negotiable. We can see how this fluid identity disrupts and unsettles while at the same time, the fluid identity for Li Tao is of importance to know who she will become. Li Tao shows a distinction between the person she is now and the person she might become if she finds her birthparents. For her, those two persons are different and the same; she states that she 'will always be me'. She pulls them close and shields herself from them at the same time. Again, we can hear the echoes of Kristeva 'Not me. Not that. But not nothing,

either' (Kristeva [1980] 1982, 2). By emphasising that she, Li Tao, who she is and what constructs her identity will always belong to her, she seems to be distancing herself from her birthparents while at the same time she acknowledges their influence on her identity. Lisa, who expressed a more resentful attitude towards her birthparents, shows us a significant seemingly inescapable contradiction between not wanting to be Other but being shaped by the actions of the Other that keeps absorbing her. It would be naïve to say the identity of the adoptee is either this of that.

> *Fei:* *(..) You realise to be able to fit in two different cultures, but not fully. Because they both work against each other. Do they work against each other? Yes, in a sense. You cannot have one without losing the other.*

The problem Fei raises is a crucial one. The in-between, the liminal, may not offer the adoptee a safe haven. Both the *inside* and *outside* identity are in flux. In the liminal, abjection, calls the adoptee. 'There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire if founded' (Kristeva, 5; emphasis original). Lisa, Melisse and Li Tao are exemplificatory for what became apparent during almost all interviews. Attraction and retraction are intertwined with each other. Identity and desire both residing in the unconsciousness, pulling and pushing; they undermine and strengthen each other at the same time.

## *III. Living Relics*

Identity theory teaches us that identity is never set, always moving. Interviewees revaluate their identity throughout their lives. Some interviewees reflected upon being interested in Chinese culture during their childhood, others are just now beginning to explore. Noteworthy was the positive affirmation with a Chinese cuisine several adoptees attributed to their heritage. Food here serves as a bridge between the individual and a self-ascribed identity that even those who emphasised not feeling connected or a lacking interest in Chinese culture were keen to incorporate in their diet. When asked about how the adoptee tried to get acquainted with other sides of Chinese culture, complications became clear. Apart from being conscious of a language barrier, interviewees showed a critical awareness of being exposed to European influenced Chinese culture, but not 'real' Chinese culture. Some adoptees ran into difficulties regarding a changed narrative concerning the *One Child Policy*. Two adoptees disclosed material difficulties; one adoptee disclosed her place of birth was 'reduced to rubble'. Another adoptee had learned that her orphanage had been teared down. Only one adoptee, who was severely bullied for years up until the point she feared going outside, refused to identify herself as Dutch. Those who described themselves as actively researching Chinese culture did so within limits:

*Interviewer:* *Would you have liked to have learned from an early age on about Chinese culture?*

*Fei:* *Yes. When I was little I followed Chinese courses, so I did get the chance to learn a little bit but it's still different I guess. Partly because you don't get to learn about it at home. Or, at least, you don't get to learn it from your parents. So, it takes a lot of energy and time to understand.*

For parents too, trying to get their children acquainted with their cultural heritage, is difficult. Interviewees described dinners in Chinese restaurants, learning how to eat with chopsticks, parents buying books for them or offering extracurricular education. I remember a conversation I had with my mother regarding Chinese food. She told me:

*Mom:* *The Chinese restaurants here, that's not how it [the food] tastes. It has been modified in order to be accepted for European taste.*

One interviewee described her awareness of being able to relate to 'a' Chinese heritage, but she made a differentiation between a culture she is able to familiarises herself with and the inaccessibility of what kind of culture she should have inherited. Another topic that became clear during the interviews was a feeling of 'being on their own':

*Anneli:* *I notice that… I notice that sometimes I want the extreme. I want to be fully Dutch or fully Chinese, there is no middle for me. But now I'm trying to find a nuance, a grey area or however you might call it. But that's hard.*

*Interviewer:* *What makes it hard?*

*Anneli:* *[silence] You don't really have an example. It's each their own path. And at the same time the people around you say things like 'You're our child, period'. Or a friend told me 'Sometimes I don't see your looks anymore which make me think of you being a hundred percent Dutch'. Even though they mean well, it doesn't make it easier for you to decide.*

When asked if they make decisions between cultures, all stated in different ways that it was not really a process of decision making. It was Lisa who was most vocal about being unable to reach some sort of understanding of her cultural heritage:

*Lisa:* *I can learn Chinese, Mandarin, but then I would feel like an imposter. I'm like 'they will kick me out, so why would I bother trying?'*

*Interviewer:* *Is that difficult for you?*

*Lisa:* *Yes, sometimes it makes me sad, but I can't change things. I'm very aware of the fact that the Asians I'm exposed to… that's a very privileged group, they made it. And the area I'm from is a really poor area, so I know that the person I'm supposed to be is someone who would work their whole life in a factory or who lives in a rural area. (..) So I can try to be Asian, but my roots are not, because my parents are probably very poor and then I feel like I have to let go of the illusion.*

Here Lisa directs our attention to three critical problems. First, even contact with others who were raised within a Chinese family; this might not be a resemblance of what life would have looked like if they were never adopted. They are children with two sets of parents and the adoptee is critically aware of that fact. The problem here is that they don't know who their birthparents are, which makes it hard to imagine what life could have been. When I was younger I would often ask my mother what my birthmother looked like. My mother would tell me that the answer could be found in the mirror. It was possibly the only answer she could give me, and I would stare intensively into the mirror. But the problem is, the mirror does not talk back, it shows an image, it's static. There were no answers to be found in my own reflection, I just saw me. You get to see the frontpage of a book, but when you open it, the book itself is empty.

As most interviewees noted, even some 'small' villages consisted of roughly one million people. Chinese culture is far from homogenous. This bring us to the second problem: you simply don't know. You don't know anything. If you're lucky, you're left with a note that

stated your date of birth. The city you were found in can give you some idea of what kind of environment you might have grew up in. But it is definitely not a given. As the documentary *One Child Nation* showed there are numerous cases of children being left on markets, streets, that were picked up and 'sold' to orphanages. If your certificate, like mine, states 'found in front of an orphanage; the chance that you were in fact left somewhere else is severe. It might be that you were never left but taken by police forces. Again, you don't know. The not knowing here seems to resemble what we encountered earlier on; parallel identities. Two lives; first the beginning of their life with their birthparents; second the life they live now. The first life is a briefly lived life but clearly not forgotten. Their lives as children of their birthparents, has never ended. There is a life unlived, open ended. It is not closure that the adoptee is after; it is the answer to a question. 'How do I merge who I am now with who I could have been'? When Lisa says 'I feel like I have to let go of the illusion' she seems to refer to this unlived life. She stated that she recently saw a video of a Chinese man who took his young daughter to work and it made her sad. When Lisa sees her Chinese flatmates with their Chinese parents sitting around the kitchen table; it makes her sad. Lisa wants to let go of the illusion, but can she? Then there is a third problem: A changing narrative.

*Interviewer:* *Was there a comment that hurt you the most, that really stayed with you?*

*Anneli:* *There was a Chinese person, online, who said I was a disgrace for China.*

*Interviewer:* *Why did he say that?*

*Anneli:* *I was engaged in the search for my parents and he said 'Why are you looking for your biological parents? You got parents!' he told me in Chinese, I translated it. 'Why would you do such a thing to your adoptive parents?'. (..) That really stayed with me.*

Several interviewees noted a changing perspective towards adoption from the Chinese government. Every interviewee, who expressed interest in their cultural heritage, found it hard to affiliate themselves with 'the Chinese government'. Some expressed anger towards all of those responsible for executing the one child policy, which was ended in 2015[6]. Lisa described herself as a 'living relic'. The adoptee, as Lisa sees it, has no place in post-one child nation China. Anneli experienced this first hand, many others felt it when visiting. The pursuit of culture is challenging, demanding even. Though several interviewees were supported by their parents in their quest, they often did feel, or still do feel, alone. Sometimes the search became so overwhelming that the interviewee sought out professional help from a therapist.

It can be concluded that when trying to familiarise, the adoptee encounters several difficulties that are not dealt with easily. Bhabha was right when he described the third space as '(..) a challenge to the limits of the self in the act of reaching out to what is liminal …' (Bhabha, 10). The question is 'what is liminal?'. Can we really speak of a liminal state when the options are limited by what you know, or think you know? The third space is a place of negotiation (Bhabha 2011, 9), but to negotiate there needs to be knowledge of both sides. As the data shows in the case of the adoptee, a lack of *knowledge* that leads to an inaccessibility of a desired reconnection with their ethnic background.

[6] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/29/china-abandons-one-child-policy visited 15-05-2021

## Discussion

As demonstrated, for adoptees their identity process is shaped by a complex struggle between identity and desire. I have demonstrated the value of a critical awareness towards the implications of race on the identity formation of female adoptees from China in the Netherlands. As an unusual migrant the adoptee is underrepresented in political science literature on migration. With adoption as an ongoing global process the implications of adoption migration deserve and need to be understood and analysed thoroughly.

Post-colonial identity schemes shape the way how Dutch citizens view migrants (Lucassen & Lucassen 2015, 85). Drawing a distinction between Dutch citizens and citizens of foreign descent, proved to be inherently based on racialised categorisation systems that place one citizen above the other (Jones 2016, 613) (Bonjour & Duyvendak 2007, 897). The adoptee, like the migrant, fails to meet the desired Dutch phenotype (white). Therefore, borders and foreign identities follow them inside the nation (Bosniak 2006, 4 in Bonjour & De Hart 2021, 3). Regarded 'non-ethnic', the adoptee is unable to recognise and challenge racialised systems of categorisation (Wekker et al. 28).

Introducing theoretical concepts from different disciplines proved to be vital to show the consequence of politicised identities on the lived experiences and identity constructions of the adoptees examined in this thesis. Kristeva's abject uncovers how the superego produces Otherness, as the superego protect its boundaries through abjection of the Other (Freud 1992/1993, 72 in De Oliviera 2008, 696) (Kristeva [1980] 1982, 2). When confronted with the Other, with the abject, boundaries start to distort, and an uncanniness emerges (Barclay 2010, 5). The adoptee is unable to deal with the uncanniness as it threatens the very boundaries of its identity. Yet the adoptee is drawn to the abject. The abject holds the answers to unanswered questions of identity and belonging. Homi Bhabha's third space, a place of

recognition and negotiation where identity is fluid, where 'language of enmity' through negotiation can become 'language of proximity' (Bhabha 2011, 8-9) has its limits. This research shows how the third space cannot serve as a vehicle of recognition for the adoptee. Borders and foreign ascribed identities follow the adoptee in the nation and in the third space. The boundaries that protect the superego from the abject, follow the adoptee into the third space, powerfully preventing the adoptee to fully embrace a dual or merged ethnic identity. For future research on migration and identity construction in adoption literature as well as in political science, the integration of psycho-analysis and post-colonial theory may be helpful in providing a better understanding of the subject.

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