"ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting"

An oral history research-creation based on the life stories of

individuals who experienced transracial/intercountry adoption

A research-creation thesis

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Abstract

"ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting[1]"; An oral history research-creation based on the life stories of individuals who experienced transracial/intercountry adoption

Zeina Ismail-Allouche, PHD

Concordia University, 2021

This collaborative oral history research-creation, grounded in Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), amplifies the critical narrative of transracial/intercountry adoption through the life stories of individuals who experienced transracial/intercountry adoption (adoptees), regardless of their places of origin and adoption. An Advisory committee of adoptees guided the research and 22 collaborators (including the Advisory committee) worked together to ensure a co-authored representation of these long-silenced voices. The creative outcome was a Zoom oral history headphone verbatim performance.

The online public event (available at this link: https://storytelling.concordia.ca/projects-item/ineradicable-voices-narrations-toward-rerooting/) revealed complex, intimate, intense and unique pathways with intersections of colonial systems, identity formation, and enduring racism. Search for origins was perceived as necessary for the healing process and Indigenous custom adoption was identified as the best community-based practice in parallel with investing in preventing separation and breaking the vicious cycle of poverty.

The research-creation is timely amidst the tragic discovery of the remains of more than 1000 children buried at different sites of the colonial residential school following the 15 May 2021 release of the Laurent Commission final report on Children's Rights and Youth Protection

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[1] The title was meant to be written in small characters using Helvetica as a font to reflect on the adoption documents that were most of the time falsified and written with a typewriter

calling for reform of the youth protection system in Quebec. Internationally, the implications of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is expected to expose more children to the risk of falling into transracial/intercountry adoption; some 150 million people across the globe will be pushed into poverty by 2021 due to the global recession and the closure of many firms because of the lockdown (World Bank, 2021). Lebanon is of particular concern because of the country's unprecedented economic and political crises. History has proven that transracial/intercountry adoption was practiced as a rescue intervention despite the fact that it has been critically revisited in many writings highlighting its long-term and irreversible psychological challenges (Blackstock, 2011; Brodzinsky, 1993; Cantwell, 2014).

The thesis is a complementary document to the public event. It presents the theoretical framework of the research-creation. The thesis includes my connections to the research subject, a historical perspective on adoption practices and the colonial legacies of forced separation of Indigenous children in Canada, the research methodologies, the impact on audience, my learnings about the methodologies, an analysis of findings and proposed recommendations.

They who write their own story inherit the land of
voice and embody its entire meaning!
　　　　　Mahmoud Darwish, a poet from Palestine
　　　　　　Why did you leave the horse alone?

من يكتب حكايته يرث
أرض الكلام ويملك المعنى تماما!
محمود درويش، شاعر من فلسطين
لماذا تركت الحصان وحيدا؟

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This research-creation would not have been possible without the genuine and generous collaboration of the beautiful people who joined this journey of sharing, listening, learning and creating at time of confinement and troubling uncertainty.

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I am grateful to the Indigenous peoples of these lands who welcomed me and granted me the honor of listening to Creation Stories and breathing in enlightenment at every encounter.

Talon: Thank you for your patience during the time your incredible mother Jennifer Mitchell spent with us on Zoom. You are as proud of her as she is of you. "You know where your smile comes from" as beautifully stated by your mother Jennifer.

Yasmine and Jad

Nothing would have been possible without your support, patience, engagement and love.

A tribute to my mother in law, Insaf (means justice) who left us on the 28th of April, 2021, after one month of struggle with COVID 19. Oum Rabih (the mother of Rabih), you took care of Yasmine and Jad when I was out there in the field working with children without parental care. This is dedicated to you…

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

As the project is collaborative in nature, we had agreed on certain terminologies to be used during the research-creation and the writing of thesis in the line with Indigenous methodologies.

Adoption: the act of providing care to a child that is not one's own.

Advisory Committee: a committee formed of adoptees to govern the research in alignment with the requirements of Indigenous methodologies.

Born under X: known in France as "Accouchement sous X", is a law that allows for any woman to give birth under complete anonymity. It is different from more traditional patient confidentiality laws because no record of the mother's identity exists, thus ruling out any possibility for the infant's natural mother to be identified.

Closed adoption: when information on the birth family/mother is hidden from the adoptee.

Collaborators: individuals interested in working together toward research-creation. These are activists, oral historians, artists, drama therapists and visible minorities. Owners of the stories (based on their interests and choice of exposure) were collaborating on the research-creation.

Custom adoption: the process of providing the child in need with an opportunity to be raised by a person who is not the child's parent, according to the traditions of the community of the child.

Indigenous Residential Schools (IRS): the colonial institutional child welfare system imposed on Indigenous communities in the early 1800s.

Intercountry adoption: it implies the adoption of a child from one country to another.

OCAP™: a structure introduced by the First Nations Information Governance Centre in 2014: Ownership implies that a community or a group owns information collectively in the same way that someone owns their personal information. The principle of control asserts that the stakeholders of the research must control how information about them is collected, used and disclosed. The element of control extends to all aspects of information management, from the collection of data to its use, disclosure and ultimate destruction. Access asserts that stakeholders have access to information and data about themselves. The principle of possession implies a mechanism to assert and protect ownership and impose control over data.

Open adoption: when information on the birth family/mother are made available to the adoptee.

Owners of the stories: individuals who experienced adoption and shared their narratives through oral history interviews.

Sixties Scoop: the taking of Indigenous children from their families and their resulting detachment by placing them into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or bands.

Transracial adoption: the adoption of a child from one race to another.

WHANAU: a supervisory structure introduced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) to resolve outsider-insider research dilemmas associated with colonialism.

Zoom: it is a cloud-based video conferencing tool to host virtual one-on-one or team meetings. It is the online platform massively used because of the confinement imposed by the COVID 19 pandemic.

THE OWNERS OF THE STORIES

Amandine Gay was born under X in France and adopted in 1985 by a white family. She is a filmmaker, Afro-feminist activist, and scholar who divides her time between research and creation. Following *Speak Up*, her first feature-length documentary on European Black francophone women released in French, Belgian and Swiss theaters in 2017 and Canadian theaters in 2018, she is now releasing a second documentary: *A Story of One's Own* is an archival film on transnational adoption from the perspective of five adult adoptees.

Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance was born in China and adopted by a family in Quebec in 1999. She is an artist and has recently finished her BFA in visual arts at Concordia university.

Anonymous was born in Haïti and adopted by a family in Quebec.

Brent Mitchell was born in Winnipeg in 1957 and was taken by Winnipeg child services when he was one year old. Brent was never adopted but was fostered by a couple in New-Zealand.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar was adopted in 1963 from Greater Syria, via Lebanon to the U.S. He is an associate professor of Illustration at the Faculty of Art of the Emily Carr University. He was assistant professor of graphic design at the American University of Beirut (2004–2012). He is also the founder of the artists' collective جمع اليد (Jamaa Al-Yad) and former fellow at Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship in Beirut.

Jennifer Mitchell born in Fort McMurray in 1982, she was adopted by a non-Indigenous family. Jennifer is a mother and an artist.

kimura-byol nathalie lemoine[2] was adopted from South Korea to Belgium. Ze is an established Canadian artist and is known for zer feminist activism and zer critical account of *adoption* practices. Ze co-founded the Euro-Korean League (1991, BELGIUM)..

Krista Visser was born in Lebanon in 1973 and adopted by a Deutch family. She is an elementary school teacher and holds a Master of Education.

Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew was adopted as a child by a non-Indigenous family. She is a cultural/community support worker/helper of Cree/Coast Salish/Métis heritage. Vicky was recently appointed as a board member in the first permanent survivors-led board of directors of the national Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation. In addition to sharing her own story of adoption, Vicky provided key advice on Indigenous methodologies. She also ensured cultural safety throughout the research-creation, especially for Indigenous adoptees.

Advisory Committee: Amandine Gay, Daniel Drenann ElAwar, kimura-byol nathalie lemoine, Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew

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[2] kimura-lemoine prefers that zer name is written without capitals and to be referred to with the chosen pronouns

CHAPTER I

Introduction to the oral history research-creation

Navigating the thesis

This thesis represents the theoretical framework of the research-creation "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting" [3] that was co-created with the collaborators on the project based on oral-history interviews with nine adoptees. The thesis is formed of seven chapters: Chapter I focuses on framing the research-creation and addressing the research questions. I also share my connections to the research questions. Chapter II provides a historical perspective on *adoption* practices and establishes links with colonial legacies. In Chapter III, I describe my preparedness to engage in the research, while in Chapter IV I describe the multilayered methodologies deployed in the research. Chapter V is dedicated to making meaning from the research-creation, and chapter VI focuses on my learnings from the methodologies and the knowledges derived from the public event. Finally, I share my views on the way forward with adoption practices and related recommendations in Chapter VII.

In conformity with Indigenous methodologies that call for the intertwining between the methodologies and making meaning, the analysis of the findings was derived from a process of co-construction (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2012). This process requires collaborators to engage in conversations leading to making meaning together throughout a sustained and cooperative relationship (Borg et al., 2012).

Scholars working within the field of adoption studies use a variety of terms to describe different types of adoption. Transracial adoption specifically indicates the adoption of a person from one racial or ethnic group into another. Intercountry implies adoption of a person from one

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[3] The adoptees have chosen to write the title using Helvetica font and without capital letters to reflect on how their *adoption* files were typed.

country to another. Oftentimes, transracial and international adoption overlap and they are closed adoptions in the sense that information on the mother and origins are hidden. The thesis is concerned with transracial and/or intercountry adoption. It does not discuss domestic adoption unless it is closed and intersects with transracial adoption.

For the sake of simplicity, *adoption* is used across the thesis to refer to *transracial/intercountry adoption* that is closed and entails rupture in any connection with the family of origin.

Contextualizing the research

In 2021, the government of the Netherlands - an *adoption* country - was called upon to temporarily stop *adoptions* based on the efforts carried out by adoptees to document "illegal and unethical practices" in their *adoption* processes, occurring as of the 1970s (O'Leary, 2021). The committee in charge of the investigation flagged corruption, falsification of documents, forcing birth mothers to let go of their newborns. In many instances, child trafficking for *adoption* purposes was also reported (Corder, 2021). Earlier in 2018, Ethiopia, as a country of origin, banned *adoption* ("Ethiopia bans foreign adoptions," 2018), and the government of Canada passed a law granting the domestic adoptees the right to access information on their biological parents (Government of Canada, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2019).

These recent turning points in the history of *adoption* confirm the rightfulness of the long years of advocacy work, led by Indigenous adoptees in Canada to claim back lost identities and stolen lives. In February 2018, Ontario Superior Court Justice Edward Belobaba ruled that "Canada had breached its duty of care to children and found the government liable" (Tasker, 2017). The ruling, though perceived as insufficient, affirms that "*adoption* stole the survivors' languages, cultures and identities".

Charged discourses

Many international reports are calling on governments to implement alternative care that emphasizes the role of extended families and community-based structures as a first resort for children in need for alternative care (Cantwell, 2014; "Hague Conference on Private International Law," 1993; UNICEF, UNAIDS & USAID 2015; UNICEF, 2004). This call for rooting child welfare services seems homogeneous with Indigenous ways of caring that are being revitalized through custom adoption. Whenever a child's rearing is deemed at risk, he/she is offered an opportunity to be raised by a person, who is not the child's parent, according to the traditions of the child's Indigenous community (Arsenault, 2006; Auger, 2001; Keewatin, 2004; Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency, 2001). Yet, *adoption*, as a colonial rescue, is still favored whereby often childless adopters would choose to "save the lives" of abandoned or orphaned children.

Internationally, the refugee crisis and the rising number of people illegally crossing borders seeking safety have increased the number of children falling into *adoption*. Recently, the Beirut blast - a massive explosion that caused approximately 200 deaths and more than 7000 injuries - has put more children at risk of being forced to separate from their families, communities and origins.

According to literature, *adoption* usually concludes with positive adjustment outcomes for adoptees (Bagley, 1993; Bagley, Young, & Scully, 1993; Bagley & Young, 1984; Simon & Alstein, 1992). Most of the available writing considers the implications of this practice on the infant and the child, however few scholars have explored the long-term impacts of being separated from the care of one's biological family and placed in an adoptive family. Meanwhile, a growing number of adoptees all over the world are voicing their discontent with the

arrangements that uprooted them. They are sharing stories of disturbed identities and longing to reconnect with their families, communities, languages and cultures. Jennifer Mitchell, an Indigenous woman adopted as a child by a non-Indigenous family, speaks in "ineradicable voices, narratives toward rerooting" about that urge to reconnect with her roots and unfold her personal story, where she states the following (see Appendix D):

> I can't wait to really reconnect with my culture. I'm starting the process now, but I would like to know my non-Colonized name in my own language. I think it is important that we have our own identity, in our own names in our own language, and I don't have that yet…So, I really wanted to fill that void and I think that is really empowering. When a person can reconnect with or connect with their own history or their family, their nationality and all that stuff…

Poverty as a driving force

As a child protection expert specializing in alternative care, my practice was driven by the United Nations' discourse, highlighting the worldwide collapse of the residential care system, also known under the expression 'institutional care'. Throughout the years, I witnessed the emergence of many reports documenting severe child's rights violations and confirming negative outcomes to the extent that children, who are separated from their families and placed in out-of-home care[4] become "vulnerable and often invisible" (UNICEF, 2006, p. 39). The very disturbing report released by UNICEF in 2006 titled "Excluded and Invisible" emphasized that millions of children are "in effect disappearing from view within their families, communities, and societies,

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[4] Out of home care is a terminology used by many international agencies to speak about any care arrangement that is not the original home of the child. This includes all forms of engagement with the child welfare system such as residential care and foster system. I argue that adoption should be also considered as a form of out of home care.

and to governments, donors, civil society, the media and even other children" (UNICEF, 2006, p. 45). The report argues that children are becoming invisible and excluded by being separated from their families and communities not because of the need for alternative care for children who have lost their parents or need protection measures, but due to poverty (UN General Assembly, 2019). In parallel, I was closely monitoring the narratives of people who were adopted from Lebanon and coming back in search of their lost families.

These encounters have certainly shifted my perception, leading me to engage in a decolonizing process and unsettlement of my world views on child-care. I came to learn that researchers and ultimately practitioners in the field tend to approach *adoption* by focusing on the notion of the abandoned child in need of parents. *Adoption*, as an establishment, becomes a solution by finding a family for the child hence, inviting people with means and power to come in rescue of children. Riitta Högbacka (2016) joins other postcolonial theorists in arguing that the *adoption* system is shaped by unequal power relations between the "Global North and South" (See Chapter III). The focus is solely on the child as an orphan, even though research shows that most of these children have a living birth parent(s) or other family members (Cantwell 2014).

Two main factors led to the increase in the number of children implicated by *adoption* as the following:

- A so-called "orphan" crisis has been highlighted by several UN agencies stating that there are some 143 million orphans worldwide. This number accounted for children under 18, who have lost one parent, and has been used by many international organizations to indicate an emergency to address the needs of those children. The situation implicitly emphasized the urgency of massive *adoption* of children as the best resort, while only 18 million are said to be in real need of alternative care

(UNICEF, UNAIDS, & USAID, 2004). This means that many children were adopted even though they had families.

- Since 2006, many international agencies have pressured countries to commit to doing their utmost to reduce the number of children in institutional care and, whenever possible, to prevent their placement in institutions in the first place, or to reunite them with their families (UN General Assembly, 2010).

Unfortunately, those countries already impacted by poverty and lacking resources, used *adoption* as an escape from the commitment to invest in preventing separation from the family; *adoption* was perceived as a good solution for governments that did not wish to mobilize resources, UN agencies that were focusing on the closure of institutional care, families searching for a child to be adopted and finally for the *adoption* agencies concerned with money making.

Adoption had emerged only in the aftermath of the Second World War and this practice witnessed a tremendous increase in the 1970s, in the absence of any governing international standards (UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). It was not until the year 1993 that an international call to regulate intercountry adoption was launched by the Hague Conference on Private International Law (1993). Even though the aspiration was to ban *adoption*, the Hague convention has contributed to reinforcing the practice by limiting *adoption* to the non-signing countries where children are rendered vulnerable by wars, poverty and natural disasters (Cantwell, 2014; UNICEF, 2006). (The history of *adoption* will be discussed in Chapter III).

Amplifying the critical account of *adoption*

It took a couple of generations until more people, adopted as children, found their own pathways to lead a brand-new discourse: It states that because of the long tradition of positioning

adoption as a solution, there is a general difficulty accepting the possibility that the solution itself could at times be a problem (Drennan ElAwar, 2018). A critical account of *adoption* is coming to light and is a catalyst to uncovering the lack of government investment and fulfillment of obligations towards children. The dominant discourse of portraying *adoption* as a fairytale is being demystified.

In her book "Somebody's Children", Laura Briggs, chair and professor of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, calls for approaching *adoption* as a practice "embedded in the politics of race and poverty, gender and sexuality, and international relations and economies" (Briggs, 2012, p. 5). Isolating the children and disconnecting them from the family of origin, as if they do not exist, is meant to distract us from tackling the structural causes leading the child to become available for *adoption*.

The Lebanese history with *adoption* has indicated that the cost of processing an *adoption* during the war reached up to 100,000US$ per child (Ismail-Allouche, 2015 - 2018). Most of the time, adoptive families had to pay such amounts to the *adoption* agencies to halt waiting period and to ensure required documents are falsified. Similar findings in other countries of origin have been reported in the writings of Graff, Hachey, Selman and Smolin (Graff, 2008; Hachey, 2015; Selman, 2012; Smolin, 2010).

International reports are flagging that the current COVID 19 pandemic has frozen *adoption* processes because of the restrictions imposed on international travels (Neville & Rotabi, 2020). However, such activities are expected to resume as soon as borders open and with a wider scope as the pandemic has increased countries impacted by poverty and deepened its impact on families and children accordingly. The United Nations General Assembly has clearly stated that poverty "should never be the only justification for the removal of a child from

parental care, for receiving a child into alternative care, or for preventing his/her reintegration, but should be seen as a signal for the need to provide appropriate support to the family" (UN General Assembly, 2010, p. 4). In reality, poverty is the major driving factor for *adoption*, as impoverished birth mothers and families lack appropriate assistance to care for their children. The establishment of *adoption* deteriorates the situation of the mothers already impacted by poverty. I need to ask here: What if that money used for processing *adoptions* is instead invested in preventing separation, strengthening the families at risk, supporting the extended families and reinforcing the local community networks? Why is detaching children from their natural context and roots favored over rooting them? How could illegal processes based on transactions be good for the sake of a child?

Critical reports are being undermined and the conversations and scholarly discourses on *adoption* practices are emotionally and ideologically charged. Some narratives position *adoption* as a child rescue whereas others consider it as an interface of child trafficking (Sheryl, 2014). *Adoption* is still perceived as the best solution for children living in harsh circumstances, for women who find themselves with an unexpected pregnancy and for couples who wish to become parents. While many child protection agencies promote participatory approaches and praise listening to the voices of the individuals most impacted by those measures, practitioners are still reluctant to acknowledge the critical account of *adoption* led by the adoptees. Most international agencies are resisting the call to shift the focus from promoting *adoption* to investing in preventing separation.

The research questions and methodologies

In view of the pressing realities that are putting more children at risk, this collaborative research-creation aims at accounting for the voices of individuals who experienced *adoption,*

whose perspectives are often absent in clinical and scholarly writings, and contributing to the public conversations on best practices. Regardless of the places of origin and *adoption*, the perspectives of adoptees are at the center of this research and prompted by the following questions:

1- What are the impacts of the *adoption* experience on identity formation, connection to origins, and the sense of belonging regardless of the places of origin and adoption?

2- Are there any similarities, intersections, or diversions of experiences? And why?

3- Based on the individual experience, how can the *adoption* practice better respond to the need of the child for an alternative family?

The pathways towards realizing the research-creation were grounded in Indigenous methodologies. An Advisory committee formed of Amandine Gay, Daniel Drennan ElAwar, kimura-byol nathalie lemoine[5] and Vicky Boldo/ kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew[6] (who all experienced *adoption*) guided me throughout the collaborative project, starting with framing the research proposal, agreeing on terminologies, developing the research methodologies, designing the posters to call for collaborators, recruiting adoptees and creating the Zoom performance. The conversations with the Advisory committee were maintained during the research-creation until the listening phase when this structure was merged with the collaborators. All the adoptees,

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[5] kimura wishes that zer name is always written in small letters.
[6] Within the standard Cree writing system, words are not capitalized (Vowel 2016, p. 13).

except one who entrusted me with his narrative, have reviewed the thesis and suggested changes that were incorporated in due course.

Although the research did not include a question on the methodologies informing the creative process, these were thoroughly discussed in Chapters III, IV, and VI.

My connections to the research questions

On November the 28th, 2020, the collaborative Zoom research-creation, titled "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting" went public. The narratives revolved around the issues of identity, belonging and connections with roots. Similarities and divergences between the experiences of the adoptees - Indigenous people adopted by non-indigenous families, and others adopted by different countries and by people belonging to other races - were unpacked. Collaborators joined in the research process through online listening sessions. We all worked together to create the performative outcome and the public event. Benefiting from the opportunities offered by the virtual platform, ninety-six individuals from many parts of the world attended the event hosted by the Center of Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University.

Before embarking on the research-creation project and its methodologies, I would like to introduce myself and narrate my connections to the question of *adoption* and to Indigenous peoples in Canada as a way to honor Indigenous methodologies that call for transparency in terms of positionality and relationality to the peoples and the research questions (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

I am an Arab originating from Lebanon, and I have the privilege of carrying Canadian citizenship. Lebanon was colonized for many years and I carry the legacy of the colonial era. I also recognize its impact on my identity and the way I perceive the world around me. I grew up

in Lebanon during times of conflicts, wars and never-ending instability. I am also an immigrant, a settler in Canada, a non-adopted, a mother with children, a visible minority, a former director of a residential care facility with a focus on family strengthening to prevent separation, a child protection expert and, finally, an advocate for the right to access information for adoptees. As someone who has been established in the world of practice, I am trying to connect with my emerging research-creation's voice.

Carrying those multiple identities and traveling through them in different contexts, realities and languages, have taught me a lot about myself and others as well. This complex journey exposed me to many challenging situations. I was always reminded that the more authentic we are in knowing who we are, the more we can reach out to others. Working in times of urgency in Lebanon, Yemen and in other contexts, impacted by wars and political instability, has taught me that becoming a good ally is also about accepting to undergo the same risks as others (Che Guevara in Boal, 1995). I also learned that solidarity is essential to ensure justice and that "an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (King, 1963). Being trained on nonviolence during the outrageous atrocities in Lebanon, I was very much influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi stating that ends do not justify the means (Stern, 1975).

As an immigrant to Canada, I took the time to learn about the colonial history and its legacy on Indigenous peoples. In a very symbolic representation of how Indigenous peoples welcomed visitors on their unceded lands, the first door opened to me in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal was an Indigenous door that allowed me to unpack, unsettle and reconcile. I realized that solidarity is also about delving into Indigenous world views, undoing colonial learnings and embracing Indigenous methodologies to honor the legacy.

Though I am acknowledging my privileges and navigating my vulnerabilities, and despite all my years of work on reforming the child welfare systems in the Arab world and internationally, I am still an outsider speaking on behalf of stakeholders. Linda Alcoff (1999) states that "speaking on behalf of others who are less privileged has resulted - in many cases - in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (p. 7).

In this context, the research-creation comes as the fruit of all those years of self-reflection that I committed myself to undertake. It is a journey toward decolonizing my approaches and, mainly, unsettling the colonial in me. As a non-Indigenous person engaging with Indigenous peoples, I learned to trust the process, approach research in a collaborative way and demonstrate an understanding of the colonial legacy and its perpetual systemic racism.

I spent prolonged years of my life encountering stories of longing and pain. I heard Dida (Majed, 2014), adopted illegally[7] as an eight-day old baby from Lebanon to Switzerland, speaking about that feeling of endlessly climbing a mountain and the earth slipping under her feet. She only learned how to walk when she reunited with her biological mother after 10 years of searching. I walked with Manu (Allingrin, 2018), adopted illegally as a two-year-old child with poliomyelitis from Lebanon to France, in her long journey to collect and put together the lost pieces of her story. She spoke about the hole burning within. Daniel (Drennan ElAwar, 2016a), adopted illegally as a two-month-old child from Lebanon to the United States, spent thirteen years of his life searching for his biological mother, only to find her buried in her crypt. I urged him to knock three times on her tomb, so she would know that he, at last, found her. Only

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[7] I am using the terminology "illegal adoption" because the documentation of the related processes has revealed that they were based on falsified paper work and financial transactions.

then, she might finally be able to rest in peace. I think of the pain that ate her up for all those years, and I wonder: What if it was me in her place?

I started my professional journey in 1994 working with the United Nations Children Funds (UNICEF) in Lebanon and then as international staff serving in Yemen. Afterwards, I was the director of an organization based in Lebanon running residential care facilities for children. I also contributed to regional and international initiatives focusing on preventing separation, including leading interventions to reform alternative care in the Gulf area while incorporating arts-based projects with children and youth in care to convey their voices to decision makers. Moreover, I was involved in drafting the International Guidelines on Children without Parental Care, approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 2009.

These milestones constitute a period of my journey that was highly impactful in terms of learning, witnessing and challenging personal convictions of positioning *adoption* as the best solution for children without parental care. As a professional practitioner in alternative care, I contributed to international initiatives working on preventing separation. I also provided high-level technical support to reform the alternative care sector in many parts of the Arab region.

The realities of my practice indicated that, internationally, forced separation is favored at the expense of strengthening families to care for their children. In Lebanon, it is estimated that 28,000 children - 3% of children in Lebanon – are separated from their families because of poverty (Ismail-Allouche, 2020). It is important to note here that the cost of the child in institutional care is much higher than the cost involved if she/he was to stay within the family (Ismail-Allouche, 2015; Delap & Vraalsen, 2017). This finding is valid in many countries around the world (UNICEF, 2006).

At the regional level, I was engaged in formulating an Arabic contextualization of the international guidelines on alternative care by facilitating a process to develop implementation mechanisms that are culturally sensitive. I was noticing that many countries were not ready to invest in preventing separation for the lack of financial resources to support the families at risk, especially those headed by single mothers. This was combined with a general inclination to follow the Western/colonial model that promotes *adoption* as the best and last resort for a child without parental care. Impacted by wars, poverty and social taboos that criminalize pregnancies outside of wedlock, *adoption* was and unfortunately is still perceived as the most favorable solution.

During the last 15 years, I have witnessed the return of many individuals who were adopted as children during the civil war in Lebanon. They wanted to search for their biological mother and to reconnect with their roots. Inspired by their longing to re-construct their identities, I co-founded Badael-Alternatives, an organization based in Lebanon, to advocate for the right to origins. We documented stories of survivors of forced separation for adoption purposes.

Unfortunately, the findings revealed many violations of children's rights and illegal processes that went as far as the falsification of personal records. Intrigued by the learnings about illegal *adoption* in Lebanon and internationally, I engaged in public discourse to question *adoption* processes as an interface for child trafficking. The organization undertook an advocacy campaign to call for a civil law to govern separation policies, in a country where each religion implements its own personal status law, and where the government has given up its obligation to protect children, a duty now entrusted to non-governmental entities.

In collaboration with witnesses who experienced forced separation, two performances were created to increase awareness of the controversial implications of this practice. Despite the

wide media coverage, we failed to mobilize the government in taking any direct action related to this issue. It was simply not a priority for politicians to shift the focus from charity to rights-based approach. We did, however, manage to gain public support that enabled us to launch a court process against the Lebanese government for its intentional discrimination against poor children forced to separate from their biological families through *adoption* or placement into institutional care.

Going public with the narratives of the survivors of forced separation was very charged and it exposed all collaborators to many risks. This experience has invited me to think thoroughly about the methodologies and the related ethical considerations. I learned that the road towards a transformative change should mirror the values and principles of the desired change (I will be discussing my reflections on the methodologies and related ethical considerations thoroughly in chapters III and VI).

In July 2015, we, as a family, took the decision to immigrate to Canada where the realities of Indigenous peoples were indicating that colonialism has initiated a long pathway of poverty, depredation and deracination in all encountered spaces. This is commonly called intergenerational trauma. I perceive it as intentional systemic violence. Ripping a child away from their mother is an act of deracinating a tree from its land. Both the tree and the land are tortured; they are rendered vulnerable to invasions. The earth's womb, once warm and safe, becomes an endless desert. I heard a testimony by Vicky Boldo/ kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew (Boldo, 2016) sharing her story of neglect and abuse by the family who adopted her. She speaks about that time she spent on roads searching for people who look like her. She found serenity only through reconnecting with her roots. I heard whispered stories of the biological mothers who lived in the pain of being shamed for giving up their children to the child welfare system.

Embarking on my research project was a journey towards reconciling with my twenty-five years of work in the child welfare system. During those long years, I witnessed, made decisions, institutionalized, deinstitutionalized, reunified adoptees with their birth mothers and advocated for the prevention of forced separation. Beyond earning an academic degree, I felt the need to unfold my professional mistakes, including the potential harm I caused by going public with tough stories without ensuring safety for those who entrusted me with their narratives. I found an opportunity to engage in a process of embodiment that disrupts, deconstructs and rewrites truth through the Sufi Dervish's ritual dance that begins with a dot and ends with links, connections, intersections and revelations.

The collaborative Zoom performance was an invitation to encounter individuals who have experienced *adoption* through their life stories with their heart and mind. It was a disarming call to let down judgments and preconceived ideas and embark on this circle of sharing as witnesses and possible advocates. Research becomes a story that honors the owners of the stories, the storytellers and the receivers of the stories.

I started this process during confinement and I was hesitant whether it might constitute a burden for people to unpack, revisit memories and reflect on them. I remember Krista Visser, a collaborator in the research, who was adopted from Lebanon to the Netherlands, telling me that "the moments we share our stories, we establish bonds" (Visser, 2020). Shawn Wilson (2008) says that establishing bonds between people can be used to help uplift others to bring them into circles. The journey toward the research-creation was ceremonious in the sense of establishing bonds between all those who shared their stories and all those who listened, witnessed and delivered sensitive narratives to a larger public. The circle of sharing was widened with the joining of the collaborators who constituted the first witnesses/audience of the life stories of the

adoptees. We all, then, became a part of one bigger circle that co-created the performance. I would like to argue that the public event was also approached as a circle whereby the audience as witnesses joined the collaborative process in the search for new meanings.

So, I am grateful for all the bonds we have established throughout the process and I am so happy with the boundaries that we have deconstructed as adoptees witnessing each other's stories, as non-adopted collaborators witnessing the adoptees' life stories and finally as witnesses attending the public event.

CHAPTER II

Historical perspectives on adoption

Understanding the current meaning and implications of *adoption* requires an overview of the key historical development stages that marked the practice and its variations in terms of motives, processes and challenges. In this chapter, I will revisit the history of *adoption* and describe the pre-colonial ways of caring in Canada. I will also highlight international trends and major shifts in the practice in several countries. The colonial legacy of forced separation on Indigenous peoples in Canada will be discussed. This chapter will try to establish links at the level of the motives and the impacts of this practice on the children and their lives as adults.

A postcolonial adoption theory

Adoption, which entails cutting the ties with a child's birth family and imposing a complete integration in the new family, is still a relatively recent construct, which emerged with the colonial presence in Canada and all other colonized countries. This practice was solidified amid the Second World War and later-on during the US war against China and Japan. It is essential to place this understanding within postcolonial theory because it is, in essence, based on discrepancies in the relation between the "wealthy North" and the "impoverished South". The colonial racial hierarchy and associated prejudices are very much present. Part of this systemic imbalance originates from the worldviews that place the colonial definitions, values and practices as superior, thus legitimizing their imposition on the Global South (Bhambra, 2014; Nieuwenhuys, 2013). Edward Said (1980) considers that the Western thinkers portrayed the Arabic culture as primitive compared to the civilized West. He argues that the consequences of colonialism are persisting in the form of corruption and civil wars.

In the realm of *adoption*, it sounds very relevant to place this practice in the context of this colonial divide, because adopted children are primarily transferred from the Global South to the Global North with the exception that Indigenous children in Canada were most of the time transferred from the North to the South of Canada away from their lands and communities. Hence, it is in the best interests of the adopting countries to maintain or maybe feed in the disparities that are the main driving cause of most *adoptions* (Högbacka, 2016; Bos, 2007; Fonseca, 2011; Giberti, 2000; Roby & Matsumura, 2002). Poverty is used as a pretext to justify *adoption* (Smolin, 2006). In terms of structures, the family model in the Global North is more nuclear, whereas extended families are more prevailing in the Global South where informal kinship is also widespread (Hall, Meintjes, & Sambu, 2014). When colonial world views are applied on the realities of child-care, children seem in need of alternative care (Penn, 2009).

Adoption was imposed on Indigenous communities in Canada and other colonized countries despite the differences in terms of community structures and practices (di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015). Given that shared thread, I would like to argue that the outcomes of *adoption* practices are valid in all *adoptions*, while acknowledging differences in cultures, identities, legacies and individual encounters.

International trends in *adoption* practices

Adoption was intensified in the 1970s in response to the increasing number of children whose parents were impoverished, killed or have disappeared amid natural disasters, forced migrations and wars (Cantwell, 2014; Jones, 2019). Internationally, the first call to regulate *adoption* and set minimal ethical standards was introduced in 1993 (Hague Conference on

Private International Law, 1993)[8]. This convention imposed restrictions on *adoption* practices,

thus limiting *adoption* to the non-signing countries where children are impacted by wars, poverty

and natural disasters (Cantwell, 2014; UNICEF, 2006). Later in 2005, the Committee on the

Rights of the Child noted the need to control *adoption* and respect international instruments for

the protection of unaccompanied or separated children (UN Committee on the Rights of the

Child, 2005). In 2014, and for the first time, UNICEF issued a special report to assess the risks of

adoption and to portray similarities with child trafficking, while questioning the relevance of the

practice in meeting the best interests of the child.

In parallel, many international reports pointed out the fact that a growing number of

children is needed to respond to the increasing demand for *adoption* by the global market, which

is leading to processing illegal *adoptions*, especially in countries of origin. Cantwell (2014)

confirms that most of the adopted children come from poor countries, conflict zones, or through

the illegal movement of refugees and migrants across borders. Since 2004, the annual number of

adoptions has significantly dropped as an outcome of the documentation of many cases of

adopted children abused by the adoptive families in several nations leading to stricter regulations

(UNICEF, 2006). The number of African children sent abroad for *adoption* purposes fell in 2009

after some countries began to either restrict or ban *adoptions* altogether. Liberia suspended

adoptions in 2009 and Ethiopia, as a country of origin, banned the practice in 2018 (United

Nations. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2009). In the same year, the government of

Canada passed a law granting the right to access information on the biological parents to the

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[8] The Convention of 29 May 1993 on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry
Adoption aims at protecting children and their families against the risks of illegal, irregular, and halted *adoptions*
abroad. The convention seeks to ensure that intercountry *adoptions* are made in the best interests of the child and
with respect to his or her fundamental rights. It also seeks to prevent the abduction, the sale of, or traffic in children.

concerned adoptees[9]. These are important turning points in demystifications of *adoption* as the best resort for children in need.

Adoption agencies shifting the focus

The current COVID 19 pandemic has slowed down *adoption* because of the interruption of international flights and the closure of borders. However, the pandemic has severely damaged the world economy leading to increased poverty, putting more children at the risk of falling into *adoption* (World Bank, 2021). *Adoption* agencies, still very active in many adoptive countries, are challenged with the decreasing number of processed arrangements. In this context, some reports are highlighting that many agencies are waiting until travel restrictions are lifted to make a comeback by targeting the most impacted countries (Neville & Rotabi, 2020).

Historically, the involvement of agencies in processing *adoption* had shifted the focus from ensuring the right to a caring family to finding children for families (Fronek & Cuthbert, 2012; Rotabi & Bromfield, 2017). This approach has engendered many illegal activities in countries of origin, especially in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Dubinsky, 2010; Hachey, 2015; Rotabi & Bromfield, 2017). In his article titled 'Intercountry *adoption* after the Haiti earthquake; Rescue or robbery?', Peter Selman (2012) critically revisits the work of agencies in facilitating *adoption* as a rescue, especially in the aftermath of natural disasters and wars. Processes were halted, especially amid the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, providing evidence on the implications of such involvement on the adopted child and their families. Children from Haiti were also transferred by air to Canada, France, Germany and the

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[9] The Adoption Information Disclosure Act, also known as Bill 183, is an Ontario (Canada) law regarding the disclosure of information between parties involved in *adoptions*.

Netherlands in the weeks following the earthquake. Concerns around similar previous incidents linked to *adoption* as a rescue in times of crisis were triggered (Selman, 2012).

Some critical writings on the work of *adoption* agencies highlight that they almost all have similar mechanisms across the globe. They all function with the objective of meeting the increasing demand for babies of the adoptive countries in the North. They all cooperate with actors in the countries of origin who most of the time use a variety of illegal means to access children for *adoption*. Such actors would include independent agents, attorneys, doctors, midwives and orphanage directors, especially those affiliated with the church. Their objective is shared: Identify the best child that meets the interests of the adoptive families and ensure that documents are falsified so tracing back the family of origins is rendered impossible (Dickens, 2002; Hachey, 2015; Hoelgaard 1998; Ismail-Allouche, 2015; Roby & Ife, 2009; Smolin, 2006). Some research work in Lebanon indicated the involvement of local government representatives, security officers, and militias during the time of war in the falsification of *adoption* and related travel documents (Ismail-Allouche, 2020).

Not in the best interests of the child

Wars, natural disasters, epidemics and economic recessions have exposed more children to the risk of separation from the family mainly due to poverty (UNICEF, 2006). The refugee crisis resulting from the ongoing war in Syria has significantly increased the number of unaccompanied children noting that some countries are hosting only children while leaving their families behind (UNICEF, 2015). This issue was associated with an increase in the number of children who were falling into *adoption*. In addition to wars, disasters and poverty, systemic violence combined with rigid cultures and gender-based violence have put more children at the risk of being forced into separation; hence, more children were pushed into *adoption*. During the

1980s, China adopted the one-child policy that was combined with the cultural preference for sons, forcing many families to abandon baby girls (Johnston, 2004).

In India, South Korea, and many countries in the Arab region, the stigmatization of unwed motherhood forced many desperate young women to place their children in orphanages to survive and, hence, avoid social exclusion (Bargach, 2002; Bos, 2007; Joyce, 2013; Ismail-Allouche, 2015). Unwed pregnant young girls[10], with little or no income, are targeted and influenced into letting go of their babies by consenting to a letter of abandonment. Mothers, most of the time with limited literacy capacity and life skills, are shamed and blamed so their ability to claim back their stolen children is weakened. African countries were highly impacted by AIDS, leading to an increasing number of children in institutions or on the streets (Chirwa, 2002). *Adoption* was perceived at that time as the best solution, whereby children forced into separation found a refuge overseas.

The number of children migrating for *adoption* peaked at more than 45,000 in 2004(Selman, 2012). More than 20,000 children were adopted to the United States, up from just 8,987 in 1995. Canada, France, Italy, Spain and the United States account for 4 out of every 5 *adoptions* (Graff, 2008). This number might represent only the tip of the iceberg because sporadic reports highlight that many *adoptions* are not officially registered because they are illegally processed. Two cases were documented where the adoptive mother is registered as the birth mother of the adopted child and this does not count in the adoption registry (Ismail-Allouche, 2020). The Hague Special Commission of June 2010 devoted a full day to the issue of

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[10]In January, 2021, the government of Ireland has released its last commissioned report that uncovered the death of thousands of children in homes for unmarried mothers that were run by Ireland's Catholic Church from the 1920s to 1990s. The inquiry has noted the outstanding mortality rate conveying the brutal living conditions the children were subject to. The government records show that mortality rate for children at the homes was often more than five times that of those born to married parents (Al Jazeera, 2021).

'trafficking' children for *adoption* purposes. David Smolin (2010) reported that his two adopted daughters from India were stolen. Benyam Mezmur (2010), an Ethiopian law student, addressed trafficking in *adoption* in Africa. These concerns are well summarized in the writings of Graff (2008) who argues that "foreign *adoption* seems like the perfect solution to a heartbreaking imbalance: Poor countries have babies in need of homes, and rich countries have homes in need of babies. Unfortunately, those little orphaned bundles of joy may not be orphans at all".

Adoption in ancient times

Jack Goody (1969) writes that the Anglophone understanding of adoption comes from the "ancient Roman society where the English term originated; The root was implying choice/option" (p. 58). In ancient Greece, adoption was mainly that of close kin. It involved a continuation of the worship of the family graves that could not be properly carried out by a foreigner. Nero, the emperor of Rome, was himself adopted by Emperor Claudius and became his successor. Nero acceded to the throne at the age of 16 or 17 (Shotter, 2005). Adoption's practice was also noted in Galba's speech outlining how he needed to adopt a successor and explaining how he decided to return to the adoptive principle. He says: "To be born of emperors is a matter of pure chance and is not valued more highly than that; the act of adoption implies an exercise of unimpeded judgment, and if one wishes, the choice is confirmed by public consensus" (Shotter, 2004, p. 95). Ancient Rome, Egypt, Hindu and Babylonian all had their adoption systems (Pippins, 1997).

Throughout human history, almost all societies deployed their own traditional mechanisms and processes to look after children-in-need to be cared for by people other than their parents. In many instances, such structures were often community-based revolving around the extended family or friends (Van Loon, 1993). Prophet Mohamed was an orphan adopted by

his grandparents after the death of his parents (Bargach, 2002) and became an adoptive father himself. Caring for an orphan child is considered a good deed as mentioned in Quran: "Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter" (Quran, 93: 6). Many verses in Quran praise caring for the orphan child. The Prophet praised those who take care of orphans and promised them that they will be next to Him in Paradise. In the Quran, Kafala replaces adoption to emphasize fostering children in need of care; Kafala forbids claiming adoptive children as blood relatives. Islam also calls for maintaining a legal connection between the child and their birth family, and that the adoptive family should not claim the child as a part of its lineage, either through explicit statements or through the naming of the child after the adoptive father (Bargach, 2002; Kutty, 2015). Though the principles of Kafala seem in conformity with the best practices in caring for children, the practice of Kafala reveals different types of complications that would need thorough unpacking.

The forced separation of Indigenous children in Canada

       The pre-colonial Indigenous ways of caring

During pre-colonial times, Indigenous families and communities in Canada had their own ways to honor their children in accordance with their diversified cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, laws and traditions (Crichlow, 2002). In the Ojibway language, the phrase wenidjanissingin translates to "like one's own child" (Auger, 2001, p. 181). In cases where the child's rearing was deemed at risk, each Indigenous community deployed its own mechanisms to respond to the child in need of care (Ormiston, 2010; Prégent, 2012). Custom adoption was a way to offer the child in need an opportunity to be raised by a person who is not the child's parent according to the traditions of Indigenous community of the child (Arsenault, 2006; Auger, 2001; Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency, 2001). The focus was on reinforcing the existing

relationships in the child's life. Keewatin (2004) notes that "identity was identified as playing a part in custom adoption as children who were part of a ceremony were given special status as Mother Earth's children" (p. 106). This kind of sacredness granted children more safety when entrusted to a family, who is not the birth family, through custom adoption. This type of care arrangement was meant to offer the child in need an opportunity to be raised by a person who is not the child's parent according to the customs of the specific First Nation and/or Aboriginal community of the child (Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency, 2001). The two main principles that guided custom adoption were necessity and suitability[11].

The arrival of settlers into Indigenous communities and the associated colonial imposed policies disturbed the existing traditional structures and ways of child-rearing. Since then and until now, Indigenous peoples have been experiencing social, economic, political and cultural oppression. Colonialism has created devastating poverty and has set the stage for a continued deprivation. The child welfare system came to dismantle Indigenous kinship relations that served as a safety net, in favor of mechanisms that supported the settler-state (Fast, Ismail-Allouche, Boldo, & Drouin-Gagne, 2019).

The colonial institutional child welfare system

The colonial institutional child welfare system, known as Indigenous residential schools (IRS), made its way to Indigenous population in 1831, with the arrival of the first missions in northern Canada (Erasmus, 2004). These practices perturbed the structure of Indigenous

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[11] The principles of necessity and suitability were lately appropriated by the Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children (adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 2009, in connection with the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). The principle of necessity implies that alternative care should considered only as a last resort. The principle of suitability implies that alternative care should be community-based to respect the child's needs to connect with their communities, languages, and cultures.

communities. At that time, European monarchies settled in Indigenous lands and claimed the territories and resources under the Doctrine of Discovery/Terra nullius (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Economic and Social Council, 2010). Racism manifested when the settlers were challenged with understanding the diversity of economic, social organization, language, spiritual beliefs and social values of Indigenous peoples (Eshet, 2015).

The IRS were developed to eliminate the "Indian problem" as stated by Duncan Campbell Scott, the superintendent of Indian affairs in 1920 (Milloy, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Established in remote locations, the IRS aimed to disconnect children from their families as early as possible. Hence, the concept of Terra Nullius was expanded to include children referred to as Filius Nullius (Keating, 2009). The stated goal of these schools was to provide formal education to the children and assimilate them into the European culture (Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde, 2005). The IRSs' system was based on the colonial assumption that the settlers' civilization and religion were more advanced compared to Indigenous culture portrayed as savage and brutal (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2015).

Between 1831 and 1996, the IRS extended to 139 care institutions. Around 150,000 children from successive generations were placed in care under the auspices of the Church and, later in 1966, in coordination with the Canadian federal government (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In 1920, the Indian Act was amended to make attendance at the IRS obligatory for children between the ages of seven and fifteen. Families who did not comply with this act faced legal consequences including imprisonment (McNeil, 2013). Studies on the outcomes of the institutional care system in Canada are evidence that the IRS failed to achieve its primary goal of providing formal education, as only 3% of children lasted to the first grade of

junior high school in 1930 (Fournier & Crey, 1997). However, this model succeeded in destroying the social fabric of Indigenous population and hindering its development. Children were subject to neglect, physical and emotional abuse and sexual harassment (Blackstock, 2011; Carriere & Strega, 2015; Nuttgens, 2004; Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2015). Such maltreatment amounted to murder crime as illustrated by the latest discovery of the remains of 215 Indigenous children at the former site of the Kamloops IRS in British Columbia (CBC News, 2021).

The Sixties Scoop

The 1960s were marked by an Indigenous over-representation in the child welfare system. In the 1950s, the government began phasing out from the compulsory IRS because of the public understanding of its devastating impacts on families (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Patrick Johnston (1983), the author of the 1983 report titled "Native Children and the Child Welfare System" introduced the term "Sixties Scoop" to refer to the scooping of Indigenous children and their detachment from their families by placing them into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or bands.

At that time, many of the social workers did not understand the cultures of Indigenous communities they were supposed to provide care to. In many cases, children were scooped out of their Indigenous families and placed in non-Indigenous contexts because of perceived neglect and poverty rather than their need for alternative care (Blackstock, Brown, & Bennett, 2007). By the 1970s, 10% of Indigenous children were separated from their Indigenous families and communities and placed in non-Indigenous ones where their culture and heritage were disregarded, whereas only 1% of non-Indigenous children were placed into the child welfare system (Milloy, 1999).

Physical and sexual abuse was widespread in the absence of appropriate social support for Indigenous families and their separated children, leading to a long silencing of their voices that obscured the endured injustice(Blackstock, Brown, & Bennett, 2007). Many children experienced multiple placements in different foster homes and institutionalized care. Justice Kimmelman argued that in Manitoba, the placement of Indigenous children away from their families and communities amounted to cultural genocide (Truth and reconciliation report, 2015).

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood published a strong report entitled "Indian Control over Indian Education". This step inspired Indigenous leaders to claim control of other social services. Consequently, the responsibility for IRS had gradually transferred from the religious authority to the federal government. It was only in 1998 that the last IRS in British Columbia closed (Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, 2007, 2008). The First Nations Child and Family Services program (FNCFS) was established in 1991. The administration of child and family services was thus transferred from the provinces to the local bands (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). In 2009, the Canadian government established a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to unfold the legacy of the schools, as response to the long years of injustice practiced against Indigenous peoples. The Commission heard from more than 6,000 survivors of the IRS. The final report, published only in 2015, revealed that children were abused, physically and sexually, and many of them died in the schools (Truth and Reconciliation Committee, 2015).

Regrettably, the impacts of the IRS caused tremendous damage to Indigenous children and their communities. Beyond the assimilation and the disconnection from their identities, Indigenous children endured physical and sexual abuse at the IRS, often by multiple perpetrators, and many for the entire duration of their childhood leading to disturbing damages in the long

term. The personal testimonies of Indigenous people revealed that the child removal policies have had continuous intergenerational negative implications on Indigenous communities, families and children (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). Consequently, Indigenous peoples remain over-represented in all risk-groups related to preventable social and economic problems, such as homelessness, poverty, imprisonment, addictions and violence (Chansonneuve, 2005).

The closure of the IRS, the findings of the TRC and the calls for action failed to put an end to the persisting struggles Indigenous peoples are experiencing. Raven Sinclair (2007) speaks of the "Millennium Scoop" to describe the ongoing apprehension of Indigenous children from their homes and communities at alarming rates. On January 26, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled that the Government of Canada (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada) racially discriminates against 163,000 Indigenous Children. The discrimination results from the inequitable provision of child welfare services on reserves, and the failure to ensure Indigenous Children can access public services without being subject to inter-jurisdictional questioning (CHRT 2, 2016). Six years earlier, the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2012) expressed its concerns about the over-representation of Indigenous Children in out-of-home care and detention centers in Canada.

The last IRS in Canada closed almost twenty years ago, however, the child welfare system is still failing to restore justice. Indigenous children seem trapped in the vicious cycle of the intergenerational implications resulting from the forced separation associated with historical colonialism. In 2008, Indigenous children and youth comprised up to 85% of all children and youth in out-of-home care in Canadian provinces (Jones, Sinha & Trocmé, 2015). It is important

to highlight that Indigenous peoples comprise about 4.3% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Although there is a gap in studies about the experiences of Indigenous children and youth in care nowadays, sporadic news in media and from Indigenous communities highlight that youth leaving care have high rates of suicide, homelessness and substance misuse. Moreover, they experience incarceration, are more likely to have continued involvement in child welfare and have lower educational attainment (Blackstock, Brown, & Bennett, 2007). Reports about youth in care voice that they are experiencing multiple placements, are not adequately involved in their life planning and receive inadequate supports from the state, both while in care and after discharge (Alderman, 2003; Blackstock & Alderman, 2005; Manser, 2004). Pam Palmater (2017) argues that the involvement with the child welfare system in Canada increased the risk of Indigenous girls to be victims of sexual violence by four times and that "in many cases social workers did not report the abuse to police, paving the way for it to continue".

The Laurent Commission's report, released on May 3rd 2021, confirms that to-date Indigenous children count for about 30 per cent of children in the youth protection system, even though they represent only 15 per cent of the population at large (Le rapport de la commission spéciale sur les droits des enfants et la protection de la jeunesse, 2021). The report emphasizes systemic racism within the youth protection system as the main reason behind this over-representation.

Lost identities

Though the emphasis of the TRC's work was on highlighting the legacy of the IRS, little work has been done to tackle the realities of Indigenous children who were adopted transracially

and transnationally (as already mentioned, they account for around 70% of children forced to separate from their biological families). Sporadic reports show a breakdown of 95% in the relationship with the adoptive families by the time the adoptee reaches adolescence (Adams, 2002). Raven Sinclair (2007) speaks about these breakdown experiences as hindering the development of a healthy sense of identity for the adoptee. These *adoptions* failed because the new families were unable to provide environments that embraced positive non-prejudiced attitudes in which adoptees could foster positive self-esteem (Alston-O'Connor, 2019). Many children had difficulties developing attachments to their new parents and were distrustful (York, 1992). In addition to homelessness, some adoptees reported that they were subject to physical, sexual and emotional abuse during their childhood, whereas others mentioned that they were treated as domestic servants (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Allyson Stevenson (2021) states that the 2017 settlement agreement to compensate the Sixties Scoop's survivors is a clear governmental acknowledgment of the drastic implications of such forced arrangement; however, the settlement did not include a proper hearing process or truth commission similar to the IRS Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). She states that "this striking difference leaves many survivors and communities without the opportunity to share their stories, and Canadians without the opportunity to understand the legacy of these policies" (Stevenson, 2021, p. 17). Sean Field (2012) perceives the inability to share one's own story of survival as an act of forced forgetting amounting to a mass violence.

Legal frameworks governing *adoption*

A legal framework to govern *adoption* in Canada was approved in 1983 under the pressure of families who initiated *adoptions* from areas impacted by natural disasters and extreme poverty such as Haiti, China and Ethiopia (Brodzinsky, 1993). The United Kingdom

legislated *adoption* in 1926 (Van Loon, 1993). Similar initiatives by other European nations followed over the next 50 years.

In the U.S. the first legal framework governing *adoption* was recognized in the mid Eighteenth century though it had few standards, mainly focusing on financial sufficiency. In 1851, the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act required a judge to assess and decide whether the prospective adoptive parents had the consent of the birth family. The adoptive family had to provide proof of sufficient financial capacity to provide the adopted child with a suitable education. At that time, the number of children in need of care in different families was still limited (Herman, 2011; Jones, 2019).

Between 1854 and 1929, it is estimated that around 200,000 children from New York and Boston were moved by the "Orphans Trains[12]" to the West to be adopted. Unfortunately, approximately 120,000 children were not adopted by the families but rather trapped in indentured servitude[13] in harmful contexts (Gray, 2011; McAdams, 1999).

The practice became more known in the mid-twentieth century with the influx of children being adopted during the wars where US soldiers were sent overseas to take part in the (Weinstein, 1968). The focus was increasing on children affected by the Korean War, especially with the rise in the number of stigmatized Amerasian children[14] (Cantwell, 2014). Most of the

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[12] During the 1850s, thousands of children were living on the streets of several major cities in the U.S. The children were searching for food, shelter and money. They were just attempting to survive at any cost. The Orphan Train Movement was a controversial social experiment that aimed at rescuing those children by moving approximately 200,000 children from cities like New York and Boston to the American West to be adopted. Many of these children were subject to abuse and neglect (Gray, 2011; McAdams, 1999).

[13] Indenture was a legal means to remove a child from an unsatisfactory home without a long court procedure. The child was not given inheritance rights but rather was serving the family in return for shelter and food (Ibid)

[14] Amerasian children are mainly the sons and daughters of the US soldiers who left them behind amid the latest U.S. wars. Those children have been victims of discrimination, racial prejudice and self-identity issues. Many of them live in the margins of society, in impoverished and temporary communities (Cantwell, 2014).

adopted children were Korean, Vietnamese and European. The first documented cases of *adoption* started to appear (Baden, 1999). With time, the demand for babies for adoption started to exceed the number of children made available for *adoption*. It is then that *adoption* agencies had found a loop to increase their involvement as key actors in tapping new sites and meeting the demands of parents looking for children to be adopted (Pippin, 1997; Van Loon, 1993). From the 1990s, *adoptions* to the US and internationally were almost entirely driven by the adopters' need for children and, thus, were respecting humanitarian considerations to a lesser extent (Young, 2012). Many individuals or couples who wished to adopt a child younger than two years and who did not qualify for domestic adoption found in countries impacted by severe poverty and wars, as a fast-track solution (Ismail-Allouche, 2020; Hachey, 2015; Smolin, 2010). With the increasing influx of children deployed for *adoption* purposes, the United States regulated *adoption* in 1961 through the Immigration and Nationality Act. The focus was to ensure some measure of legality in the receiving country, with little emphasis on the process itself. In addition, the humanitarian nature of *adoption* was never questioned but rather was framed as yielding desirable outcome for the children concerned (Cantwell, 2014). By the end of the 1990s, Guatemala, Haiti, Cambodia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine became sending countries (Selman, 2006). The number of *adoptions* from Guatemala fell dramatically after the country banned *adoptions* in 2008 for almost two years (Selman, 2012).

Adoption from Lebanon

The groundwork of *adoption* from Lebanon was established during the French Mandate period in the late 1800s (Ismail-Allouche, 2015). Research done by Daniel Drennan ElAwar (2016b) points out that some orphanages in Lebanon were established following the model set by the Ottomans to "Turkify" Armenian "orphans" in the country. The point he made is that even

though the concept of orphanage and *adoption* usually evokes ideas of charity and rescue, it implies a history of colonialism and class warfare. It is said that some 28,000 children were placed in institutional care and some 10,000 children were adopted out from Lebanon during the war (Ismail-Allouche, 2015; 2020).

In its concluding observations on the second national report about the status of children in Lebanon, the International UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2017) expressed its deep concerns about the large number of children placed in institutions, a great number of whom are placed there because of poverty. The committee found the prevalence of illegal *adoptions* alarming, while highlighting that those processes are made at the expense of the best interests of the child. Although poverty should not be considered as a direct cause for child abandonment, it is a major contributing factor for families, especially those headed by single mothers. The situation becomes even more threatening when poverty is combined with the lack of basic services and social protection policies and the prevalence of certain cultural expectations.

Despite the limited availability of accurate government statistics, the Ministry of Social Affairs estimated that nearly 90,000 children are at risk of being abandoned during 2017(Delap & Vraalsen, 2017). The absence of accurate statistics is by itself an indication to a lack of proper investigation in the field. In my research work on the adoption papers of some 3500 adoption cases from Lebanon, illegal *adoptions* were documented with a very alarming peak noticed between the 1970s and early 1990s, coinciding with the war in Lebanon[15]. These *adoptions* were mostly halted in the absence of any legal framework that governs this practice and based on

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[15]This research was done for Badael-Alternatives, an NGO based in Lebanon. The report released in 2019 confirmed that almost all the adoptions occurring as of 1970 were illegal and included financial transactions (Ismail-Allouche, 2018).

financial transactions amounting to some 100,000$ for processing one child (Ismail-Allouche, 2020).

Adoption outcomes

International Studies highlight that people who grew up in alternative care have higher rates of arrests and incarceration, lower levels of formal education and higher rates of physical and mental health problems. They are more likely to have addiction issues, be unemployed and experience homelessness (Biehal, Clayden, Stein, & Wade, 1994; Bussey, Feagans, Arnold, Wulczyn, Brunner, Nixon, DiLorenzo, Pecora, Weiss, & Winterfeld, 2000; Hahn, 1994; Iglehart, 1995). Moreover, they are more likely to have continued involvement with child welfare and prove low levels of educational attainment (Blackstock, Brown, & Bennett, 2007). Reports about youth in care state that they are experiencing multiple placements, are not adequately involved in their life planning and receive inadequate support from the state, both while in care and after discharge (Alderman, 2003; Blackstock & Alderman, 2005; Manser, 2004). Though many practitioners portray that placement in the child welfare system is about protecting the child from harm, studies highlight that the involvement with the child welfare system increases the risk of entering in conflict with the law, getting arrested and incarcerated. Furthermore, people growing out of care tend to have lower levels of formal education and higher rates of physical and mental health problems.

I would like to argue that a*doption*, as a form of care arrangement, might lead to similar outcomes even though the symptoms become visible only later in the adoptees' lives when they start unfolding the missing parts of their stories, their birth family and cultural heritage. Dida Guigan, who was adopted from Lebanon to Switzerland, highlights the void gripping her; of

feeling she had no identity, of lacking trust in herself, and of the terrible emotional imbalance

from which she suffered. She states:

> "Despite all the love my adoptive parents gave me, there was a wound that could not be
>
> healed due to the separation from my biological mother and the need to know the reason
>
> why this renunciation happened."

(Majed, 2014)

The narratives of Indigenous adoptees indicate that the *adoption* experience engenders

distrustfulness. Raven Sinclair (2007) confirms that *adoption* breaks down the ability of adoptees

to establish trustful relationships with their environments. In addition to homelessness, some

adoptees, reported physical, sexual and emotional abuses (Lemoine, 2020). Others were even

treated as domestic servants (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Emerging research, dissertations and

theses undertaken with youths who were adopted as children are conveying stories of disruptions

of their *adoptions* (Carriere, 2005; Sinclair, 2009; Nuttgens, 2004). Similar outcomes are being

highlighted in the narratives of adoptees across the world. Abuses are well-documented in many

writings led by the adoptees themselves, launching through that an emerging critical account of

adoption as a rescue practice (Blank, 2018; Davis, 2017; Fronek, 2018; Gibbons & Rotabi,

2016; Rotabi and Bromfield, 2017). Daniel Drennan ElAwar (2016b), born in Lebanon and

adopted to the U.S., speaks to the feeling of being adopted as an experience that he does not wish

even on his worst enemy:

> It took me until my 53rd year on this Earth and 12 years of living in my place of origin to
>
> find out my own truth. Thousands of adoptees are not so lucky, and I would not wish my
>
> experience and what I've discovered about *adoption* on them or my worst enemy. But I
>
> have to ask: Is this for the child's benefit?

Shared thread

Whether in Lebanon, Haiti, South Korea, China, Guatemala or Siri Lanka, Indigenous peoples in Canada, and all the communities of origins regardless of the places of *adoption*, there is a shared thread in all the critical documentation work. Countries already impacted by wars, chaos and colonial presence have become a source of babies for families on the perpetrator side. Regardless of the motivations of the people who are striving to satisfy the desire of having a child, *adoption*, as an establishment, is to be critically reconsidered because it might propose a form of dispossession, displacement and forced migration. Laura Briggs (2013) argues that *adoption* promotes the possibility to imagine that the babies of the impoverished people are simply available to be taken by people with more money.

Acknowledging the tensions concerned with the colonial world views, motives, processes and their outcomes, the voices of the individuals who have lived the experience of being adopted should be listened to and accounted for in designing ethical and socially adapted interventions.

CHAPTER III
Researcher preparedness

Building on my relatively established international engagement in reforming alternative care with a focus on preventing separation, my preparations for this research project focused mainly on establishing links between the history of *adoption* in Lebanon, the international *adoption* practice, and the colonial account of forced separation through residential schools and the Sixties Scoop in Canada. Engaging as an ally with Indigenous communities in Montreal was fundamental for my preparation work offering me the opportunity to learn, undergo the unsettling process, and nurture relationships and connections. As part of my preparation, I needed to communicate my positionality vis-à-vis the world of *adoption* and Indigenous struggle for justice while attempting to reconcile with my identity as a new immigrant to Canada. In this chapter, I will be walking through the multilayered pathways of my preparation to pave my road towards acquiring a certain legitimacy in approaching the research question ethically.

Collaborating on an oral history research-creation with individuals who experienced *adoption*, including the experience of Indigenous adoptees, created multilayered richness and complexity. This situation invited me to consider thoroughly the potential ethical dilemmas at three main dimensions:

- the systemic violence associated with the *adoption* practice and its outcomes;
- engaging ethically with Indigenous adoptees;
- going public with a performance of controversial and difficult narrative.

An additional complexity emerged with the confinement imposed by the COVID19 pandemic that made me adapt the methodologies to accommodate virtual encounters, mitigate associated possible harm and envisage suitable and respectful performative forms.

Kovach (2009) argues that when approaching research that engages Indigenous participants, the reader needs to understand the position and social location of the researcher in the process and content. She calls for an explicit reference to the researcher's personal preparations and transparency with respect to "motivations, purpose, inward knowing, observation, and the variety of ways that the researcher can relate her own process undertaken in the research" (p. 34-35). For feminist researchers, this transparency engenders a critical reflexivity to highlight the political and representational dimension of research and its theoretical standpoints (Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). Reflexivity is also linked to "validity as a means of identifying bias within the research" (Kovach, 2009, p. 33). Clarity concerning the researcher's subjectivity would situate reflexivity as an indicator of the validity of findings (Creswell, 2003).

Autoethnography performance

During my long years of working with children forced to separate from their origins through illegal *adoption* or placement into institutional care, I was always challenged with questions about my interest in adoption. People were keen to know whether I am personally adopted, an orphan or have experienced forced separation. As a way to connect transparently with these identities, I performed my stories through an autoethnographic, work-in-progress series of public events at the Center of Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. These are stories I compiled while working with children separated from their families. I also shared stories from my own childhood that was marked by war and multiple displacements. It was a way "of meaning-making in which researchers add their own stories and connect their experiences to those of others to provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope in relational, group, and institutional life" (Davis & Ellis, 2006, p. 300).

Autoethnography seemed to offer a better understanding of my lived experiences concerning the research question and the voices emerging in the culture/context of the research (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Mizco, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 2001). I always believed that being aware of one's own subjectivity, instead of denying it, would allow a better space for others' subjectivity. For me, the myth of objectivity exists only in the inability of walking in the shoes of others. Ellis (2004) argues that the evocative presentation of self "gives pause for new possibilities and meanings and opens new questions and avenues of inquiry and representation" (p. 215). In this context, validity means representing truth that is very subjective. In that sense, validity implies inviting the audience to witness a genuine journey that is based on a deep investigation into oneself in its relation to the social and cultural context. Seeking validity would be ensured by a methodology that engages the heart in an authentic quest for meanings that defeat assumptions, deconstruct judgments and contribute to enlighten the horizon.

From a decolonizing perspective, autoethnography helped me examine the unquestioned assumptions about gender, race and social class in relation to *adoption* practices (Wilson, 2008). It was also a way to explore performative approaches and experience the meaning of going public with tough stories. I needed to go through the same risks as the adoptees who were going to participate in the research-creation, while staying in line with the calls for the inclusion of story and narrative by both researcher and research participants. The researcher and the participants undergo the same process, undertake the same risks and live through the same exposure (Kovach, 2009).

At the level of inviting the audience to participate in the performance as a way to engage with the stories that were being shared, I asked some invitees to read/perform those stories. The stories were shared with them ahead of time and they were provided with additional context

when requested. Through this participatory staging, people retelling the stories of pain, loss and fear from my world, were connecting with their own silenced voices. Dr. Catherine Richardson/ kinewesquao, the director of First Peoples Studies at Concordia University, reflected on her experience in retelling one of those stories. She said:

> "I believe there is meaning in the person you choose to read. It sometimes seems that we each have a counterpart in other cultures, other cities, someone who could be our sibling. We can recognize a similar spirit across settings."

(Richardson, 2020)

The most important learning from my autoethnography performance experiences was not about finding answers. It was mainly about deepening my research questions in a quest for enlightenment. How can I reach that fine line between authentically delving into life stories without imposing them on the audience? Where does my story end and where does the story of others begin? Am I a part of others' narratives? How would I like to appear there, in others' stories? Do I engage in a process of remembering? Do I remember in Arabic and then translate it to English? How does the language influence the authenticity of the story and its representation of the context? Am I more concerned with the aesthetic aspect of the stories at the expense of authenticity and representation? Is my remembering going to be an intentional exercise? Do I approach remembering chronologically? Do I search for the most dramatic event to share? Am I looking for compassion, empathy or solidarity? Is it something that I am doing for a grade/a degree? Who is eligible to assess peoples' narratives? Do I want to unpack my stories? Am I ready for this? And then, how would those stories that I encountered in my world speak to my current reality of being an immigrant in Canada? Do those stories have any meaning or value in the Canadian context? How can I connect stories from different worlds while maintaining their

individual and unique fabric? How would those stories be received by the audience? What are the ethical concerns evolving around the risk of voyeurism? Why am I reverting to an oral history performance in the first place?

In her article "Do thyself no harm: Protecting ourselves as autoethnographers", April Chatham-Carpenter (2010) responds to the peer-reviews on her first autoethnographic writing about her experience with anorexia. She shares her pathways towards deepening her writing. She states:

> The compulsive voice inside of me, to write about my experiences and to be published, gave me that as a gift. It told me I had to take this risk to be successful professionally, even while the decision to write in this way was potentially harmful to me personally. Would the benefits of a publication to me professionally outweigh the costs to me personally?

> (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p. 7).

Reaching the aspired balance between self-disclosure and intended objectives is not a straightforward exercise. In autoethnography, self-disclosure requires the ability to be exposed to vulnerability. Safety occurs when the endeavor is reciprocal. It is an outreach that is risky and transforming the status quo cannot happen without taking risks.

My learnings from the autoethnography performances were an eye-opening opportunity for me to look back into my memory box and unpack stories that shaped me into who I am. I found out that understanding the pain of children who are forced into separation is, in a way or another, helping me to understand the pain of my losses, fears, struggles and hopes against all

odds. These are stories that shaped my consciousness into a violent world. Freire (1970, p.75)

states that Conscientization refers to:

> "The process in which humans, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a
>
> deepening awareness of both the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives and of their
>
> capacity to transform that reality. To speak a true word is to transform the world"

Then, I came to learn that narrating one's life is "to situate oneself and to be situated in

dialogue with society" (McGranahan, 2010, p. 768) and that there is nothing more aesthetic than

the ethical unfolding and sharing of one's own story. My agency over my voice and the way I

represented my stories granted me safety even when undertaking the risk of exposure to public.

The same agency over narrations and their representations needs to be ensured for the owners of

the stories in the research-creation.

Unpacking representation complexities

As a part of my preparations for addressing representation issues in my research, I

participated, as a student/performer, in Dwellings[16], an immersive research-creation that

addressed the housing crisis of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This experience offered me a

deeper understanding of the current Indigenous struggles while linking it to the legacy of the

residential schools and the Sixties Scoop. Getting exposed to teachings from Indigenous Elders,

being welcomed in ceremonies and listening to sacred Creation stories allowed me to widen my

spectrum of understanding of Indigenous world views. I was honored to witness Kahente Horn-

Miller reciting the Sky Woman Creation story. It was a precious privilege to be able to watch,

---

[16] Dwellings is a research-creation project co-led by theatre professor Ursula Neuerburg, the Anishinaabe artist
Emilie Monnet, and the Cree theater maker Floyd Favel. It addresses the housing crisis caused by the historical
forced displacement separating Indigenous peoples from their lands, identities, languages, and cultures.

listen, learn and cherish the kindness of the values, the depth of the sacrifice and the sacred

connection to Mother Earth.

> This first part of the story teaches us about creating a Sky World on earth,
>
> one where respect for all living things is enacted in daily life. The story teaches us that
>
> Sky Woman has a history, a family, and a place where she belongs. We are reminded that
>
> we come from somewhere and that the Sky World is very similar to the world as we
>
> know it. It is understood in our culture that to be healthy in body, mind, and spirit you
>
> have to have a sense of your own history and identity.

(Horn-Miller, p. 19)

Horn-Miller's words were confirming that applying Indigenous methodologies is about

connecting the epistemology to the road towards knowing while delving into history. The

teachings from the Creation stories point towards the important values and cultural norms shared

in Indigenous culture, a side of Indigenous peoples that has been long distorted through

colonization and their portrayal in the media.

This learning created a tension for me as a performer in Dwellings and gave me a lot to

think about while planning for the research-creation. Attempting to deepen my understanding of

this tension, I undertook an oral history performance project titled "Cul-de-Sac" [17] based on

interviews with the collaborators on Dwellings in the context of the Oral History Seminars, a

course by Professor Steven High. Olivia Siino, a theater student, reflected on how the tension on

Indigenous representation has affected her performance in Dwellings and Cul-de-Sac. She states:

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[17] Cul-de-Sac is my oral history research-creation that was performed at the Center of Oral and Digital History, Sunroom, on the 5th of April 2017, in the context of the Seminars in Oral History taught by Professor Steven High at Concordia University. Four theater students participated in the 12 – minute piece based on the transcripts and audio-recording of interviews with Ursula Neuerburg and Floyd Favel.

Before starting Dwellings, I was really wary of representation and even now, while being

in the middle of this project, I still am. In every rehearsal, I don't always feel sure or

confident if we are crossing the line of appropriation and appreciation. Although I do feel

that this project is very important and that if we, non-indigenous people, are the ones

participating in the project, then at a certain point you have to move past your

discomforts, but still constantly question the project. Honestly, being under Floyd and

Ursula's wings, having done so much research and having participated in workshops,

have made me more comfortable with the issue of representation. Despite all that, though,

I am still non-Indigenous, and I don't know how that will be perceived until the show, a

thought which always makes me nervous.

(Siino, 2017)

The words of Olivia were indicating that any attempt to account ethically for the voices

of the most marginalized is submerged with sensitivities around authority, voice and

representation. Agency becomes a fundamental concern especially at a time when representation

has generated a public debate with the recent controversy around Indigenous representation in

Kanata, created by Robert LePage in the absence of Indigenous artists. When speaking on behalf

of others, Linda Alcoff, (1991) calls for a recognition of the social and privilege location that

"has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize

or deauthorize one's speech" (p. 7).

Shared authorities

In order to ensure shared authorities, Amandine Gay, Daniel Drennan ElAwar, kimura-

byol nathalie lemoine, and Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew formed the Advisory

committee that guided the research, starting with agreeing on axiology, terminologies,

methodologies, research questions, outcomes and the writing of the thesis. This committee

complies with the concept of WHANAU introduced by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that sees in

such "supervisory and organizational structure for handling research" a way to resolve outsider-

insider research dilemmas associated with colonialism. The integration of outsider-researchers or

researchers who are not members of a particular research community is, hence, facilitated by this

complex, organic structure (Zavala, 2013). Collectively, the members of the Advisory committee

oversaw every stage of the research from conceiving the proposal, to recruitment, co-creating the

outcome and going public. In alignment with the Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession

(OCAP™)[18] introduced by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (2014), the role of

such committee comes as "a political response to colonialism and the role of knowledge

production in reproducing colonial relations" (Espey, 2002). Every member of the committee

brought in their individual experiences, perceptions and roles in advocating for the rights of

adoptees. Inviting them to embark on this journey was meant to ensure a diversity of ethnicities

and richness of knowledges. The presence of Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew was a key

pillar for the research as she also ensured cultural safety for all adoptees including those who are

Indigenous. The Advisory committee formed the first circle of sharing narratives and

encountering a dialogue among different *adoption* experiences. Informed by their own life

experiences and their extensive knowledge in the world of *adoption* practices, the thorough

conversations confirmed the establishment of *adoption* as a colonial construct despite the very

individual contexts and stories. All members contributed to the identification of possible

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[18] Ownership implies that a community or a group owns information collectively in the same way that someone owns their personal information. The principle of control asserts that the stakeholders of the research must control how information about them is collected, used, and disclosed. The element of control extends to all aspects of information management, from the collection of data to the use, disclosure, and ultimate destruction of data. Access asserts that stakeholders have access to information and data about themselves. The principle of possession implies a mechanism to assert and protect ownership and control over data.

adoptees to join the project and helped in shaping the questions that guided the oral history interviews. In addition, they opted to share their own narratives of being adopted and collaborated on the creative conception of the knowledge sharing. They also reviewed the thesis and provided comments that were incorporated in due course. During differences in perspectives and approaches, the collective mind guided us towards the best way forward.

Trusting the process

Applying Indigenous methodologies might seem turbulent and uneasy because it requires letting go of the sole authority over the research and its outcomes by giving back space to the owners of the stories. It is mainly about grasping the real meaning of researching that attempts to understand what we do not seem to have lived or experienced. This does not mean that the researcher should silence their voice because silencing is by itself an act of violence. I am also very aware of the fine lines that separate between leading the research-creation, my role as a facilitator of bringing the voices of the adoptees to the front and the denial of my voice. Sara Kindon (Miller, Little, & High, 2018), a feminist social geographer who thinks methodically about methodology, reflects on the complexities of going public[19] with stories of marginalization. She highlights the importance of reclaiming the self while nurturing a respectful relationship between the researcher and the participants in the research.

Undertaking a collaborative research work and engaging with Indigenous and non-Indigenous adoptees necessitates the establishment of a safe space to honor the stories being shared and challenge the world views on *adoption* practices. The aspiration would be an outcome

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[19] Going Public: the art of participatory practice is a book co-edited by Liz Miller, Steven High and Ted Little to reflect on the Montreal Life Stories, an oral history project with people displaced by war, genocide, and other human rights violations. A website on Going Public was established to discuss ethical issues evolving on going public with tough stories. http://goingpublicproject.org/index.html

that contributes to the transformation of the status quo in the realm of research and its underlying structures that have occupied for a long time the space and shaped the narratives on *adoption* practices. In that context, I committed myself to continuously reflect on my motives and intentions behind research in academia. Learning to assume my new identity as a researcher, would require a deep reflection about my legitimacy to invite others to unfold their stories without engaging myself in the same process. I acknowledge that I am still caught in my belief that research should live only in the context of practice. I perceive that knowledge-seeking is relational and reciprocal. While research is offering me the privilege of earning a degree, it should also aim at inviting actions to restore justice for the participants, as implied by Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

Telling one's own story of being forced to separate from family, community and culture through *adoption* is not a painless process. This kind of remembering might entail handling tough questions and revisiting harsh memories. The personal unfolding might affect the relationship of the owners of the stories with both the biological and the adoptive families. It might also be complicated when considering the life stories of other adoptees and their different stages in connecting with their identities. It is not only about the past: It is also about now and what might come after telling one's own story. Remembering might also trigger questions about the reasons for falling into forced separation. Steven High (2014) argues that, in such situations, developing a list of indicators of possible traumas is good, but it does not solve the problem. On the contrary, this "would only serve to dehumanize the interviewee as every silence or emotion would become a symptom of trauma" (High, 2014, p. 268). Sharing a story about loss, separation and identity challenges tends to be emotionally immersive. In such circumstances, both the

researcher and the adoptees might be implicated. Complexities might arise when considering the encounters with the collaborators and later when welcoming the audience into the process.

Embarking on the research at the time of confinement has certainly shaped the research process and shifted the outcome from an in-person performance to a Zoom platform. At that time, research in person was still not allowed for health safety. It also shaped the interviewing process requiring major adaptations and thorough ethical revisiting to ensure the safety of all collaborators (to be discussed in the research process). Trusting the process and genuinely deepening the discussions with all stakeholders were two principles that guided me throughout the research work. It was no more about the "I" who is researching, but about the "we", all of us, who are collaborating on this project and searching, together, for meanings and connections. It became about that Dervish whirling in search for enlightenment.

CHAPTER IV
Research methodologies

The colonial legacy of forced separation, current realities and outcomes impacting identity formation have led to a systemic silencing of adoptees and especially Indigenous adoptees. Ermine (2000) states that the absence of the voices of those who experienced injustice and silencing in "the epistemological assumptions of methodologies and ultimately in the production of knowledge is significant and disturbing" (p. 74). Hence, collaborating with Indigenous and non-Indigenous adoptees on a research-creation would require a deeper unfolding of legitimate tensions and sensitivities especially when I, the researcher, am an outsider; I am not adopted and am non-Indigenous.

Acknowledging the impact of the colonial legacies, I had to maintain the ethical concerns at the heart of the research. Connecting with my silenced voice as a racialized, relatively recent immigrant to Canada, as a colonized person who endured 40 years of wars and displacements and as an activist uncovering child traffickers involved in illegal *adoptions* in Lebanon, was essential in beading the relationships with Indigenous peoples and with adoptees. In Arabic we say نحيك العلاقات that translates to beading relationships to acknowledge that relationships need time, arts and sensitivity to be framed and nurtured. I am using the metaphorical idea of beading that is grounded in the Arabic culture while acknowledging the importance of this Indigenous cultural practice as an essential form of making meaning through "a collective theoretical framework that fosters individuality within the context of relational accountability" (Ray, 2016, p. 364).

In this chapter, I will discuss the research praxis and describe the research implementation process and the major shifts that required adaptation of the research methodologies.

Research praxis

We founded this research on Indigenous methodologies that account for decolonization, ethics, researcher preparation, making meaning, carrying Indigenous knowledges and, most importantly, giving back (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Oral history as "a powerful way for ordinary people to assert themselves in the public sphere" (Schaffer & Smith, 2004, p. 6) was deployed as a conversational means to connect with Indigenous and non-Indigenous adoptees. Oral history interviews, as a critical performance (Pollock, 2005), were re-told to a larger audience through a headphone verbatim video collage within the framework of a Zoom event, hosted by the Center of Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. By applying a decolonized approach to designing, implementing and sharing the research-creation, I am grounding myself on the principle of acknowledging my own positionality and privilege while attempting to make meanings and contributing to a social change.

In the area of research-creation, I am committed to the calls of the trans-disciplinary artist Floyd Favel (Poundmaker First Nation), who advocates for cross-cultural work based on transparency, accountability and ownership (High, Little, & Miller, 2017). The oral history interview becomes a site of encounter and not a battle over authority. The narratives of the silenced embrace the void of the unheard and unseen. The research-creation is lived as a collective quest to widening the circle and welcoming people to witness the stories of separation, while finding refuge in that intimate, yet not intruding space. Headphone verbatim would, then,

ensure the loyalty of the performance toward the narratives shared by the adoptees, while

mitigating the harm of direct exposure to the public.

Indigenous methodologies

Colonial legacies have drastically impacted research by imposing its model of inquiry on

academia, while repressing different ways of knowing, living and making meaning (Battiste,

2008; Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005, 2012). This type of research disturbs the organic

structures and diminishes opportunities for restoring justice by emphasizing the power dynamics

between the researchers and the researchees. The outcome would likely be knowledge that

reinforces the colonial dynamics and promotes colonial solutions (Espey, 2002).

 In the context of Indigenous ways of knowing, a strong connection exists between

worldviews and methodology. "It is about honoring the primacy of direct experience,

interconnectedness, relationship, holism, quality, and value" (Cajete, 2004, p. 66). Indigenous

inquiry challenges the power of research, academia and education systems that impose universal

interpretations of the world and human development (Battiste, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2005). In

his book "Research is ceremony", Shawn Wilson (2008) invites researchers to be accountable to

Indigenous relations that impact the choices of research topics, the methods of data collection,

the forms of analysis and the way to share the results.

From a decolonizing perspective, undertaking research requires thorough thinking, but

not only of the central inquiry question. It does imply the examination of the unquestioned

assumptions (Wilson, 2008). When the stakeholders become the researchers and not merely the

researched, the activity of research is transformed. Then, questions, priorities, and problems are

defined differently, and people participate on egalitarian terms (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Accordingly, the inquiry would start with a conversational dialogue to establish a relationship (Kovach, 2009). The main outcome of this conversation would be an agreement about epistemology, axiology and methodology that will guide the research (Wilson, 2008). In order to acknowledge the drastic impact of inequalities on experiences, Indigenous scholars have emphasized "decolonizing" as a research praxis, which commits to reciprocal relationships between academics and partnering communities (Wilson, 2008; Smith, 1999). The researcher is called to unsettle the position of the expert in order to witness, listen, learn and contribute to a systemic change. It is mainly a commitment to recognizing the colonial/western influence in driving knowledge and what is privileged in research (Kovach, 2009).

When decolonizing research, the entire research journey needs to be collaborative in nature to authentically convey the perceived problems, needs, and opportunities. This approach would help in establishing a safe platform where the voices of the most underprivileged would be heard, understood and respected. Agency over voices and their representations is a fundamental principle. Wilson (2008) states that since "all knowledge is cultural and based in a relational context, we, therefore, need a methodology and axiology that is accountable to the relationships that we form in our search for enlightenment" (p. 95). Such practice might ensure an open and transparent relationship with the owners of the stories, namely Indigenous adoptees who might be reluctant to engage in research that does not respect the history, understand the legacy and base its epistemology on Indigenous ways of caring.

Noting the shared thread of *adoption* as a colonial practice, I argue that the principles of Indigenous methodologies are relevant to engaging with all adoptees, regardless of their place of origin and place of *adoption*.

Oral history performance

Thomas King (2003) states that "the truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 2). The very purpose of telling one's own story is to capture the diversity of historical experiences directly from the people who have lived them (Sheftel, 2013). Oral history offers a means to "search for a connection between biography and history" (Portelli, 1997, p. 25). It allows the first-person narratives to be acknowledged by conveying a wider range of human experiences. Ronald J. Berger and Richard Quinney (2005) state that in telling the personal story "we remember, we rework and reimagine the past, reflect upon ourselves, and entertain what we have and could become" (p. 4). The narrative, hence, is contributing to a dialogue process that is charged, contingent and reflexive.

Moving toward performance as a way to represent the recorded interviews, would mean taking them to places, groups and communities that do not necessarily have access to research work (Thompson & Bornat, 2017). Performance creation is emphasized as a method favoring social change that comes from within society rather than actually being imposed (Alexander, 2005; Denzin, 2003). It is, at its deepest level, about artistic and aesthetic approaches to addressing social issues (Barone & Eisner, 2012). This methodology allows the unfolding of complex and often subtle interactions by providing a representation in ways that are more accessible to people to feel and understand. The performers, audience and owners of the stories engage in a simultaneous enabling and transformative critique of values, attitudes and practices (Matthew, 2004).

Claire Summerskill (2021) sees in oral history performance, as an applied theater, a platform for establishing personal connections with the audience's personal stories and an invitation to seek new meanings. Because stories are often told in words and actions, performing

stories, hence, offers a tremendous opportunity to generate dialogue, reflection and political action. Steven High (2014) confirms that performance creation can be a transformative process for everyone involved. It offers a space for small details such as voice, accent, gestures, emotions and movements to become suddenly important. It enhances the "creation of possibilities for a new understanding of participants' lives and the opportunity for discussion of those revelations" (Summerskill, 2021, p. 11). Della Pollock (2003) sees in performance a co-creative event that "embodies and makes change" (p. 264). Performed stories contribute an interpretive value that could stand on its own.

Oral history and performance creation, as part of qualitative research, share many ethical challenges, including issues related to representation, subjective interpretation and accuracy. It is believed that performance studies inevitably lead to questions about the validity of the outcomes, including the question of whether they represent memory reconstruction/interpretation versus facts (Clandinin & Connolly, 2004). Validity implies convincing the audience that the findings are genuinely based on the investigation (Silverman, 2010). Denzin (2003) states that a performance authorizes itself not through the citation of scholarly texts, but through its ability to evoke shared emotional experience and understanding, maintaining an ethical responsibility toward the owners of the stories, with the performers and the audience as witnesses.

Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues that critical performance is committed to participation and performance with and not for the community. Performance needs to honor and respect local knowledge and customs and incorporate those values and beliefs through creating a legacy of inquiry (Finely, 2005). It welcomes the unfolding of complex and often subtle interactions by providing a representation of those interactions in multiple ways.

Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest that arts-related research must succeed both as a work of art and as a work of research. Finley (2005) correspondingly raises several questions about what counts as arts-related research and what artistic skill is required by those not educated in the chosen art-form. Whilst the assessment of creative art might be discussed in relation to a range of criteria addressing art-criticism, careful attention to the ethics of the inquiry process is also warranted. This is important, especially when considering how the research might be perceived successful from the perspective of the researcher, the owners of the stories, the performers and the audience (Sinding et al., 2008). In that context, Ted Little (High, Little, & Miller, 2017) calls for carefully approaching ethics in performance so that consent does not hinder creation.

Inviting performance into the interviews, beyond the walls imposed by the various research disciplines, would offer a wider space for narratives in a way that engenders self-revelation, self-disclosure and self-reflection. In the search for meanings, performance suggests alternatives and opens windows to possibilities and opportunities. It "renders the absence present" (Pollock, 2005, p. 80). Oral history performance is also about taking a risk of self-exposure, with the hope of acquiring an audience willing to acknowledge the truthfulness of the story and assume an ethical responsibility to their owners and to the performers.

Because of the historical silencing of the critical *adoption* account, performance creation will help invite others to join in the circle of critical thinking related to *adoption* practices. It enables creative spaces to explore those issues and offers a forum for exchange, thus engaging researchers, owners of the stories and the audience. It is especially significant for minority and marginalized populations of race, gender, age and class (Denzin, 2003). Augusto Boal (1995) argues that performance transforms the oppressed into an artist with an agency.

Headphone verbatim

I was first introduced to headphone verbatim, a recently infused oral history performance bringing interviews to stage, while watching "Untitled", a performance that addresses restorative justice. The performance was created in the context of Oral History Performance, a course taught by Professor Luis Sotelo Castro at Concordia University. Performers delivered selected parts from interviews conducted with a survivor of violence and a criminal offender who wished to engage in restorative justice. The performers were listening directly to the interviews through earpieces and instantaneously delivering what they were listening to, in the presence of the interviewees. Though the performers did not engage with body movement or gestures, there was still a certain magic in observing the interviewees listen to their own words being performed. They were reacting, engaging and nodding with their heads to confirm/disconfirm their stories as being recited by the performers. It felt as if opportunities to assume an agency over the voice were embedded in the performance. I might even say that watching the relationship between the interviewees and the performers reciting their texts was a performance inside the performance.

Headphone verbatim in oral history performance builds on the practice of Derek Paget who introduced verbatim theatre while extensively researching documentary drama based "on tape-recorded material from the real-life originals of the characters and events to which it gives dramatic shape" (Paget, 1983, p. 1). Verbatim theater, as a subset of documentary theater established in Germany as early as 1925, uses transcripts of the taped recording of interviews done in the context of research projects, as its primary source material (Summerskill, 2021). In most instances, the transcripts of narratives with intersecting themes are edited to form a script through a collage that tends to be very hard to craft, as it requires the reduction of many transcripts into one that can be staged (Wake, 2013). This form of theater is based on a

collectivity that removes the difference between the performers and the directors, and the owners of the stories (Paget, 1983).

Over the last years, verbatim theater in oral history performance made use of audio technology such as iPods and mobile phones to guide the actors and their performance. In instances, actors can have access to video recordings of the interviews to be able to study the body movement, gestures and glances during the rehearsals to match the direct delivery of the voice and tone while listening to the narratives and performing on stage (Young & Halba, 2019). The nuance that was introduced by the headphone verbatim in oral history performance was the authenticity in simultaneously delivering exactly what is being received through the earpieces, such as replicating coughs, pauses, hesitations and repetitions (Wake, 2013). Performers are hence expected to be loyal to the voice, tone, speed, pause, hesitation, deep reflection and silence.

Whereas the original voice is provided directly to the performer in performance – through the earpieces – the physical score is remembered. It is essential for the combination of both, the voice and the body score, to decrease the distance between the original narration and the one delivered by the performer. Hilary Halba and Stuart Young[20] (2019) states that headphone

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[20] Hilary Halba and Stuart Young, performing arts directors and university professors in New Zealand, have created a number of headphone verbatim plays about Family Violence, dementia, and immigration:
Hilary Halba, Stuart Young, and others. *Hush*: *A Verbatim Play about Family Violence*. *Applied Drama as Social Intervention in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts*. Ed. Hazel Barnes and Marié-Heleen Coetzee. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013. 117-54.
Hilary Halba, Stuart Young, and Simon O'Connor. *Be | Longing: A Verbatim Play*. Dir. Hilary Halba and Stuart Young, Aotea Centre, Auckland, 22-23 February 2012; Hall Theatre, Dunedin, 1-10 March 2012.
Cindy Diver, Susie Lawless and Stuart Young. *The Keys are in the Margarine: A Verbatim Play about Dementia*. Dir. Cindy Diver and Stuart Young. Fortune Theatre. 19-29 June 2014.
Hilary Halba, Stuart Young, and others. *Gathered in Confidence: A Dunedin Documentary Play.* Dir. Cindy Diver, Hilary Halba, and Stuart Young. Allen Hall, University of Otago, 11-14 September 2008.
Kiri Beeching, Alayne Dick and Jakub Green. *Passages*. Directed by Hilary Halba and Stuart Young. Allen Hall Theatre, Dunedin. 22-25 August 2012.

verbatim in oral history performance is to make the absent from the scene present on stage and that "the technique of closely replicating both the verbal and physical scores of the participants means that this distancing is strangely combined with a heightened form of realism".

This type of mediated recreation of the stories seemed like a relevant approach to mitigating tension around representation, especially in encountering the life stories of adoptees. It was also a technique that would offer safety to the adoptees who felt not wanting to be on the front line delivering their life stories given the tension that their testimonies might create when received by a larger audience. Loyalty to the voice is not enough to ensure ethical representation because it needs to be directed to convey the intention behind the voice. Clare Summerskill (2021) argues that beyond loyalty to the original voice, an ethical representation in creating verbatim oral history performance would require a clear aim that is approved by the owners of the stories to avoid any misrepresentation. The collage of testimonies should reflect on this collective aim.

Research process

In this section, I will explain the implementation of the research and walk through the different spiral paths leading toward the research-creation. The process started with the oral history interviews, listening sessions with the collaborators, joint creation and designing the public event. I will also highlight major shifts in the performance creation to adapt to the collaborative process, especially at the time of confinement when work in person was not possible. Flexibility in deviating from the designed methodology was essential to accommodate a process that is contingent, fluid and unstable (Roberts, 2008).

Oral history interviews

A call for participation in the research was shared with entities concerned with intercountry/transracial adoption namely:

- Native Montreal, The National Indigenous Survivors of Child Welfare Network, Canadian Roots (organizations based in Montreal serving Indigenous peoples).

- l'Hybride and RAIS (organizations based in Montreal working with individuals who were adopted into Canada from China, Ethiopia, Dominican Republic).

- Badael-Alternatives (an organization based in Lebanon working with individuals who were adopted from Lebanon to the International)

A poster was also shared on different social media platforms. I received approximately a hundred of responses to participate in the research project. This was an indication of the pressing need to share one's own story of *adoption*, despite the hardships imposed by the pandemic. In consultation with the Advisory committee, we agreed to ensure representation from diverse places of origin/adoption to connect those stories together and explore intersections. In addition, we needed to guarantee a solid representation of Indigenous voices among the adoptees. The objective was to work with ten adoptees (with at least three Indigenous people adopted by non-Indigenous families) who would be willing to go public with their narratives, without being obliged to be directly exposed with the possibility of sharing their stories. Based on these criteria, I connected with all those who came forward and got replies from around twenty adoptees. I made initial online exchanges to provide information on the project, its structure, objectives and methodologies. In consultation with the Advisory committee, fourteen adoptees

shared their narratives following the open-ended questions that were developed also in collaboration with the Advisory committee.

The interviews took place between March and July 2020, and they were audio- or video-recorded based on the preference of the adoptee. The video/audio recordings were edited and cleaned to remove any issues related to a bad internet connection. The edited interviews (audio or video) were shared with the adoptees for final approval before moving to the second circle of the research-creation, when the interviews would be shared with the collaborators. During the interviewing process and prior to the research-creation work, I lost contact with three adoptees. It might be that they became less interested or time is not convenient to go public. In consultation with the Advisory committee, we chose not to move forward with their narratives. The objective was to respect their will to be away and silent or maybe they just got busy with their own lives. The agency over the representation of their voice was a key element to the process and this agency cannot be ensured in their absence. However, one adoptee had given me permission to use their recordings without additional consultation.

At first, my inclination was to get all the interviews video-recorded with the aspiration that they can be used in the research-creation. I also had in mind to be absent from the video recording. My concern was mainly derived from an aesthetic perspective. However, not all adoptees were comfortable doing the video recording. A couple of adoptees changed their level of exposure over the course of the project; they opted to move from video to audio recording. This was mainly related to that interconnection between being confined because of the pandemic and exposed because of sharing one's own life story. One adoptee has chosen to feature as anonymous, especially after verifying the video recording. It was a conversation that required a

level of flexibility to adapt to the different choices of the adoptees by determining their safest level of exposure.

During the interview with Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew, something came up that shifted my learning on shared authority in the interview space. We started the interview by having her camera on while my camera was off. Suddenly, Vicky stopped talking and asked me to put on my camera because it sounded weird for her to be speaking in the void of darkness. This experience made me think thoroughly of my approaches, especially that of inviting others to put on their cameras when I was not really comfortable recording myself. Suddenly, I came to realize that sharing authorities is not only about designing structures and processes, but also mainly about reminding oneself of ethics being the core of the research project. Flexibility and adaptability to the evolution of the research-creation was a key milestone that needed continuous reinforcement. One would wonder whether such flexibility might reflect on a lack of self-grounding. I would like to argue that learning has no limits and leaning back and coming forward need to be approached as an art of being and living rather than a battle over authority.

The challenges of the online platform

Undertaking the interviews on an online platform at the time of confinement represented a major technical challenge, with the problems of connection impacting the flow of the interview. There was an interview that we had to reschedule a couple of times because of internet issues. I also had to repeat another one three-times because either I forgot to record it, or the adoptee had other priorities to which they needed to attend. I am inclined to argue that we were able to walk through those challenges by nurturing the relations that were being reinforced and deepened. Because every challenge comes with an opportunity, the online platform allowed for interviews to occur in Paris, Vancouver, the Netherlands, Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec City.

Another encountered challenge was the safety of the adoptees, especially given the possibility that the interview might trigger memories or suggest questions about individual circumstances and hardships. This challenge was extensively discussed in my research proposal. The experience of being adopted is not the fairytale story that is often portrayed in the media. Some experiences were harsh to the extent that one adoptee expressed their inability to sleep for the three days leading up to the interview. Their choice was to write a chronological sequence of the drastic event they went through as a child and then, as an adolescent, while opting to share other parts of their story in the interview space. Concerns over their safety were serious and support was provided by Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew, in her capacity as a cultural support helper, and in alignment with the safety protocol already elaborated in the research proposal.

We were all confined, living under unpredictable circumstances, and the pandemic was still a mystery. Establishing trust was undertaken as an individual process, while paying attention to all considerations. Steven High (2014) suggests that "sustaining conversation would seem very important to allow time to establish trusting collaborative relationship" (p.269). Even though I had strong connections with the world of *adoption* throughout the long years of practice, I should not take anything for granted. As a researcher, it was very important to clarify my positionality and relationality to Indigenous peoples in general and to the *adoption* experience specifically, while mitigating the outsider/insider complexity. This ensured a level of transparency in line with Indigenous methodologies. It was equally important to keep on revisiting that positionality by deepening the unsettling process and peeling off the multilayered connection to my own story and to the subject matter being researched. This was an exercise that

I had to do each time I encountered an adoptee, by welcoming questions about my story, my connections to the project and the methodologies deployed in the research.

The prelude to interviews seemed to me a dance that formed its own individual rhythm, tone, tempo and depth. This exercise required humility, humbleness and willingness to be vulnerable while establishing trust. Ensuring cultural safety became an ethical responsibility to nurture a trustful exchange without hindering depth. The pathways were not always simple, and this was perfectly legitimate. The reference to the Advisory committee and the role it played in governing the research was very helpful in terms of establishing trust with the adoptees. They felt that questions were meant to respect the history, legacy and the ongoing struggles.

At the personal level, I was gaining more confidence in the interview space and was able to convey that confidence smoothly while progressing in the interviewing process. It was obvious that by the time I reached the last interview, I was far from being the same person in terms of understanding the diversity of backgrounds and the individual *adoption* pathway. My awareness of the outcomes of *adoption* on identity formation got deeper while reflecting on this awareness in navigating my identities. I was always intrigued by the vulnerability of revealing oneself. It means that nothing disclosed can be taken back and implied an open, insightful and imaginative interpretation of what others share. Pamela Sugiman (2009) states that "the feeling of vulnerability is a remnant of traumatic events in one's own past or in the personal history of members of one's family" (p.192). The retelling of such events might reproduce physical and emotional distress (Klempner, 2006). This self-disclosure becomes more difficult "when one includes the stories of those who are part of one's life as well" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 738). Things tend to get more complicated when there is a possibility that those stories could trigger current reactions and related risks. It was obvious that telling one's story of *adoption* would

touch upon the stories of others (the mother, the adoptive family, the orphanage, the *adoption* agency, the perpetrator…).

Consenting to being vulnerable and unveiled is not an easy venture, especially when it is not only about the past. Composing one's own story of *adoption* is not a fluid process given that these stories are, most of the time, incomplete or falsified. Sugiman (2009) argues that agency, dignity and self-respect are pillars to composure yet "these are also mixed with insecurity and vulnerability" (p.210). Above all, it was a reconciliation journey with the stories that do not want to be forgotten.

Collaborative research-creation

The call for collaborators to join in the research-creation went out in August 2020. A poster was shared on social media platforms. The intention was to invite artists, activists, oral historians and people who are interested in learning more about *adoption*. Such diversity would enrich the co-creation and would add different perspectives while benefiting from the skills and artistic input. The intention was also to bring in people who might be willing to embark on the change process while participating in the creation process. Undergoing the change process while creating would be a clear indicator on whether the intended objective of oral history performance as a transformation venue is being achieved. The original thinking was to invite collaborators based in Montreal to work together, through a series of workshops, toward a final creative outcome. At that time, the pandemic was still in development mode with a lot of uncertainty on whether any in-person creation work might be possible. The collective inclination was to move forward and adapt to the evolving situation.

Once more, the online platform offered an opportunity to open the circle to artists from Lebanon and the US to join in the creation process. The owners of the stories were also invited to collaborate on the research-creation as a way of ensuring agency over voice, mitigating tension over representation and exploring artistic expressions. I had a thorough individual conversation with all those who expressed their interest in joining the collaboration process, to explain objectives and methodologies.

Major shifts in the process

The first meeting for the collaborators took place on Zoom at the end of August 2020. In that meeting, we were eighteen individuals, including four adoptees who already shared their stories. After the land acknowledgment and a brief self-introduction of all those who were present in the meeting, I explained the research praxis and related creation process. It was mainly based on listening to the individual interviews, creating a collage joining all of them together, and then collectively elaborating on the creation format. There was a lot of uncertainty about whether we would be able to do an in-person event with an audience.

The first meeting was tense. The collaborators had differentiated understanding of *adoption* as a colonial practice and for some, listening to the land acknowledgment was a first. The cultural safety that was established during the one-to-one oral history interview was shaken. Despite the conversations I already had with the collaborators, the multilayered fluid collaborative research methodologies seemed confusing. The online platform also added complexity to organize the exchanges and synchronize the voices.

The adoptees expressed serious concerns about losing their agency over their voices, especially that the collaborators had different ethnicities, backgrounds and understanding of the

colonial legacy. They asked to have a consultation meeting with all the adoptees who shared

their stories to clarify stances, approaches and expectations. They called for a kind of manifesto

that would guide all collaborators throughout the creation work. There was also a concern about

the safety of adoptees, especially when the circle of exposure started getting wider with the

inclusion of collaborators. This concern seemed to be increasing in depth when envisaging going

public with a general audience.

Though the concept of co-creation was appreciated, all collaborators were not sure about

their roles in the research-creation. They were also inclined that I come back with a refined

process that they can revisit, build on, amend, or adopt. At first, I needed time to process all the

sharing and I had to react to the tension that was building up. It took me a few minutes to step

back and confirm to myself that this tension is legitimate and that every additional step toward

going public would need a deeper conversation with all the concerned adoptees, not only the

Advisory Committee. In such circumstances, Steven High (2014) proposes a set of questions to

which researchers need to attend when envisaging a performance creation. The main question

revolves around "how to ethically tell stories of violence in the context of theatrical

performance" (p. 277). He calls for thinking thoroughly about the obligations of the audience

toward the life stories. Beyond being moved, the question is what to do next. At this level, the

collaborators, who are not adoptees, needed to assume their roles as the first circle of audience,

engage with unsettling the popularist appreciation of *adoption* as a rescue practice, and then co-

create. Wilson (2008) calls for establishing a common ground so that research can turn into a

story honoring the readers, the storyteller and the researcher:

"The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. We cannot remove ourselves from our world to examine it."

(Wilson, 2008, p.14)

Joining the circle of research and approaching it as a ceremony to be co-led by all stakeholders (the researcher being one of them) would help in addressing the insider/outsider boundaries and tensions, while honoring the stories and the storytellers. Because Indigenous worldviews are egalitarian, relational and support inclusion, "established bonds between people can be used to help uplift others to bring them into circles" (Wilson, 2008, p. 81). In parallel, it was perfectly legitimate that I assume my guiding role without undermining the importance of consultation. It was after all my responsibility to move ahead with the project.

This meeting marked the journey of the creative process; I was, once again, reminded that building trust should be always approached as a quest. The days that followed the first meeting were intense. I had to refine my processes, while taking into consideration the comments made during the meeting. It was also hard for me to define the shape of the outcome. The online creation process seemed different and required adaptations of approaches. Indeed, collaborating through an online platform required a different dynamic than the techniques used in the theater world. We needed to create a routine that was appropriate for the new limitations and associated opportunities. It became evident that beading connections and building trust within the larger group could not happen instantly, especially that the meetings were taking place online at the time of confinement.

Refined process

Holding to heart the teachings of Shawn Wilson (2008), guided by Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2009; 2010) and in line with the principles of Augusto Boal (1985; 1995), I revisited my research-creation process while maintaining the ethics at the core of my work. The following definitions were used to clarify the nature of the individuals who would be on-board and how the process will move gradually to ensure safety:

Owners of the stories: Individuals who experienced *adoption* and shared their narratives through oral history interviews.

Collaborators: Invited individuals interested in working together toward research-creation. These are activists, oral historians, artists, drama therapists and visible minorities. Owners of the stories (based on their interests and choice of exposure) were also collaborating on the research-creation. Seven out of the nine adoptees participated in the listening sessions and the creation phase. Eight of nine adoptees were present in the public event.

Listening sessions: Collaborators attended Zoom listening sessions. Each session was dedicated to one interview. These sessions were considered as the first site of performance, with the collaborators being the first group of audience attending to the narratives. It was a way for adoptees to listen to each other's stories, and for collaborators, who are not adoptees, to delve into the *adoption* narratives. While listening, collaborators were asked to reflect on three questions: What stood out for you? What was the biggest learning? What parts of the narratives should be kept for the final performance?

Headphones verbatim: The adoptees were paired with performers who would recite their stories. Some of the adoptees entrusted me with the choice of their pairing and for others it was very important that they make the choice. However, all the adoptees verified the recording of their respective headphone verbatim before doing the final editing. Every performer was

provided with the video recording to study the body score and eye gazes. MP3 audio recording of the interview in addition to a timed transcript of the selections that they will be performing. It is important to note here that the transcripts were also reviewed by the owners of the stories and some changes were incorporated. The performers were asked to follow the transcript while recording their parts. Sine all the interviews took place on Zoom, the performers were also asked to record via Zoom to replicate the setting of the original recording of the interview. The recordings were then shared with the respective owners of the stories for verification and final approval.

Safety protocol

Being aware of the possible tension that might arise while proceeding with the creation process, we agreed on the following safety protocol to govern our collaborative creation:

- The owners of the stories were consulted in every single step with regard to their stories.

- Warm-up exercises were facilitated at the beginning of the listening sessions to set up trust among the group. Jen Cressy, a collaborator and theater director, helped us enter the listening circle by facilitating breathing exercises. Jen's role in facilitating this transition to the Zoom space granted the group a sense of belonging and connectivity.

- A sharing circle followed every listening session to help release feelings. The adoptees would speak first. Collaborators expressed their own feelings regarding the stories. I facilitated the sharing circle while also expressing my feelings and views.

- Active listening support was provided when needed. This support was meant to offer a space for individual exchanges and to respond to emerging unease in navigating the collective sessions.

- Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew, in her capacity as a cultural support helper, ensured the safety of adoptees in case they needed an active listener. She attended a couple of listening sessions, and I was always reminding the collaborators and adoptees that they can connect with her in case they need support. She had a thorough exchange with Indigenous adoptees and connected them to services when needed.

- Dr. Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao, in her capacity as a counselor specializing in violence prevention and recovery, was contacted to provide additional support when needed. Both Vicky and Catherine were present during the public event to accompany the collaborators and the audience in their safe exiting of the performance space.

Prior to the listening sessions, individual meetings with the adoptees were organized to consult on the process and the safety measures. Small-group meetings were undertaken with the collaborators and adoptees for the same purpose. These meetings were very important in strengthening the connections between the collaborators, understanding the multilayered process and paving the road for trustful exchanges. The process was fluid, allowing space for collaborators to join in whenever they could. However, we tried to maintain the rule of having at least one adoptee present in each session. Some adoptees had chosen to be present while listening to their own interviews while others had opted not to join in. The conversations that were exchanged in the presence of the concerned adoptees were the deepest and most delicate. The owners of the stories unfolded additional aspects of their experiences. In return, the collaborators engaged in self-reflections and shared their own perceptions on *adoption* and the shifts being experienced after listening to the adoptees' life stories.

We witnessed collective moments of sharing laughs and tears leading to a profound unsettling of preconceived ideas about *adoption*, while linking the dots that connected the

practice to the colonial history. We all felt that the oral history interviews, as a first site of performance, conveyed the critical *adoption* account to the first circle of audience/collaborators. We were able to ask questions and engage in a self-reflection process. One of the collaborators mentioned that she was planning to adopt a child, and while listening, got to understand the critical account of *adoption*. Wissal ElAssaad reflected on her collaboration on this research-creation:

> This journey was very enlightening and has completely changed my conception of transracial adoption. Listening to the adoptees' stories and learning about their long-life struggles made me realize how little I knew about this global practice.
>
> (See Appendix C)

The Circle, a practice that is deeply rooted in Indigenous culture (Wilson, 2008; Tafoya, 1990), created a sacred space for exchange where we felt respected and equal. We were speaking and listening in a heartfelt and respectful way, even though we were revisiting stances and world views. Navigating differences, difficulties and painful experiences was facilitated in the circle because it allowed for mutual understanding and the establishment of a sense of community that fosters healing by deconstructing the barriers (Mehl-Madrona & Mainguy, 2014). While listening, we were encouraged to unsettle our ways of thinking and we fostered honest communication based on mutual trust and understanding (Wing, 2002). Some of the exchanges were so personal and intimate to the extent that honoring them would require that they would only live in that circle. These moments shaped the collective work on creating the collage and what followed in terms of moving to headphone verbatim smoothly, with a full consent granted by the adoptees to the performers.

During the listening sessions, an adoptee had chosen to withdraw completely from the research for personal reasons and after listening to her interview. There was no disagreement but they felt that they needed more time to be able to fully engage in the research-creation. The name and related interview were entirely removed from all documentation. Moreover, we collectively decided not to move forward with another narrative that we thought it might put the owner of the story at risk. Consequently, we created the collage with nine narratives.

Creative phase

The hardest part of the research-creation was to reach a script that honors the narratives, respects the individual experience and reflects on the intersections, while maintaining the uniqueness of the circumstances. The complexity was heightened when thinking of the script as a performance. Each individual story would stand on its own, yet we needed to reach a collage that would convey the shared experience despite the uniqueness of the pathways. During the listening sessions, all collaborators were noting the parts of the narratives that needed to be in the performance.

I took the responsibility of creating the script based on the selections provided by all the collaborators. My selections were also included in the editing process. It was very challenging to navigate the authority that was delegated to me. I felt the urge to honor the trust by compiling a script that would represent each story in a manner that would make their owner ready to be exposed and represented. I transcribed the selections made by the collaborators, shared them with their respective owners and then tried to move with the collage to a certain synchronized flow. I relied on the flow of questions that guided the oral history interview and created thematic clusters to reveal the intersections in the perceptions of the owners of the stories towards their own experiences of *adoption*. My intention was to invite the stories to speak to each other by

confirming or adding nuances. A choir voice was introduced to disturb these conversations or to transition between themes. The music, composed by Jad Chami, was meant to amplify the voices that were meant to be "ineradicable". Throughout the process, the owners of the stories assumed the full agency over their voices and they verified the selections from their own interview.

Matching the performers with the owners of the stories was also a very demanding process that required conversations with the adoptees and their respective performers. Some adoptees have entrusted me with the matching exercise, while others had chosen to select the performer of their story. Again, the fluidity of the whole process was meant to accommodate such a differentiated approach toward the creation process. All adoptees approved their representation in the headphone verbatim and final editing.

While conceiving the video, we decided to mimic the Zoom platform since all the interviews took place over Zoom. Consequently, the performers studied the recorded videos of the interviews and then recorded their texts over Zoom while wearing the earpieces. It was very important that the presence of the performers over Zoom be as close as possible to the respective adoptees. We also used photos and documents provided by the adoptees to be inserted as visuals in the video editing.

The title of the research-creation was adopted collectively, based on a suggestion made by Daniel Drennan ElAwar who also proposed the visual representation of the research-creation. Daniel developed a statement on the critical *adoption* narrative to be included in the public event. kimura byol-nathalie lemoine edited the outcome and also codirected the Zoom edition of "ineradicable voices: narratives toward rerooting".

Accommodating the audience as witnesses

While doing the editing work, we started to realize the heaviness of what was being shared. Although our intention was to invite the audience to witness the stories, we wanted to accommodate them within a circle that fosters sharing. In line with the teachings of Thomas King (2003) about the significance and importance of featuring animals and elements from nature such as the moon, earth, trees and water, we reverted to nature to incorporate videos that might help the viewers/witnesses escape a bit and come back. We were conscious that we might have adoptees among the audience, and we did not want to create an atmosphere that might turn shocking or emotionally loaded. We were concerned that this heaviness might lead to disconnection, which was the opposite of the intended effect. While Grotowski (1968) argues that shocking the audience would lead to a transformation, Ben Chaim (1984) notes that spectators might not endure a lasting emotional response. They might retreat from that disturbing feeling through switching into a rational thought process or focusing their attention on the theatricality of the experience. Brook (1995) believes in the importance of providing a common ground for all witnesses to prevent distance and evasion. Incorporating elements from nature helped us to be grounded while still being able to travel away and come back without disconnecting or disengaging.

The public event

We agreed that the Zoom performance would not stand alone as a video art piece. It was a headphone verbatim performance created within the context of a confinement imposed by the pandemic. The presence of an audience and the direct encounter was essential to our work. This is how we conceived the Zoom performance to go live in a context of an event that would invite a debriefing and reflection in a sharing circle. We were aspiring for an audience that would

witness it "as an act of presence and testimony, of authentication and memory-making, of evidence and seeing" (Prendergast, 2008, p. 95). We collectively thought that going public through the Center of Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University would be the most appropriate venue to honor the life stories and the collaborative endeavor. The flow of the event was carefully designed to reflect on the nature of the decolonizing process that was built on trust, reciprocity, relationality and respect. The research-creation, hence, was approached as a ceremony, as evoked by Shawn Wilson (2008).

CHAPTER V

Learnings from the life stories; Making meaning

Indigenous methodologies call for making meaning that acknowledge the legacy and give back to Indigenous peoples. They also imply the intertwining between the methodologies and the knowledge through a shared authority blurring the line between the researcher and the researched (Kovach, Smith). In this chapter, I will explain the theoretical framework of making meaning employed in the co-authored "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting" [21]. I will also describe the thematic clusters following the techniques described by Ryan and Bernard (2003) and based on the guiding questions of the oral history interviews, share the adoptees' views on *adoption* practices and integrate my perceptions and reflections on the findings.

Knowledge embedded in the stories

Kovach (2010) highlights that the stories should not be decontextualized because their meanings would be distorted. Hence, making meaning and sharing knowledge should be undertaken as a collaborative process and in a relationship between all those who have contributed to the research (Borg et al., 2012). In the initial design of the research-creation, the collage of the stories to form a performative script was meant to reflect on a collective agreement on intersections between the narratives of *adoption*, while acknowledging the individuality of the pathways, the related circumstances and their specific impact on the identity formation process. We based our approach on the assumption that knowledge is grounded in the lives and experiences of the adoptees and their ways of surviving, resisting, healing and resurging. The meanings are derived, then, from a process of co-construction (Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2012). This process requires co-researchers to engage in conversations leading to making sense together

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[21] The citations employed while making meaning are all derived from the compiled text available in Appendix C.

throughout a sustained and cooperative relationship (Borg et al., 2012). Thomas King (2003) confirms that this conversation is relational in essence.

From a critical account of *adoption*, the research-creation was meant to help us "develop new forms of affectively and politically charged knowledge dissemination" (Chapman & Sawchuk, 2015). The understanding of the critical account was reflected upon in the choices we made while co-creating "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting." The collective thinking process and the Sharing Circles we experienced, while co-authoring the script, implied that knowledges were embedded in the collage of the narratives of the adoptees.

Intersections in the life stories

Nuttgens (2013, p. 14) notes that adoptees share seven narratives including "disconnection, passing, diversion, connection, reconnection, surpassing, and identity coherence." Those narratives do not occur in a linear sequence, they rather unfold spirally (Ping, 2016; Richardson, 2021).

It seems important to mention here that every adoptee spoke from their personal account and there was no assumption that their stories represent their fellow adoptees from the same place of origin/adoption. There is also no assumption that the adoptees were telling THE *adoption* story. However, placing those stories in the spectrum of the history of *adoption* and its evolution and widespread as a post-colonial practice would inevitably indicate to a certain critical narrative that was kept silent in the shadows.

Individuality vs collectivity

Amandine Gay perceives the narratives of adoptees as unique and different. She notes, however, that all non-white people, adopted by white families, share similar questions on the

connections to origins and the biological family. Despite the unique encounters and pathways, the issues of class, racism and the relationship between the global North and the South seem to be recurrent narratives. She states:

> Les histoires sont tellement différentes, ça dépend où les enfants ont grandi… et aussi c'est très différent si les enfants adoptés sont blancs ou non blancs… alors que pour moi toutes les personnes qui ne sont pas blanches; ils avaient des questions sur le rapport avec les origines, du racisme… c'est vraiment difficile de voir une similarité évidente même si effectivement il y'a cette question de rapport aux origines qui revient. Il y a la question de rapport de classe aussi qui revient beaucoup, la famille d'origine, la famille adoptive et si jamais, il y avait des retrouvailles, le rapport de classe revient, les rapports Nord Sud reviennent, question géopolitique.

> (The stories are so different. It all depends on where the kids grew up… and also it is very different if the adopted children are white or not white… However, for me all the people who are not white had questions about the relation to origins, racism... etc. It's really hard to see an obvious similarity even though there is indeed this question of relation to origins that comes up. There is also the question of class relation which pops up a lot, the family of origin, the adoptive family, and if ever there was a reunion, the relation between classes returns, the North-South associations come back, a geopolitical question par excellence.)

kimura byol-nathalie lemoine emphasizes the fact that ze is speaking from personal experience, yet ze establishes links between the *adoption* of children from South Korea and the forced separation of Indigenous children. kimura-lemoine states:

Pour moi, c'est une expérience personnelle, c'est certain… mais aussi on est à peu près 200.000 adopté.e.s de la Corée. Ce n'est pas juste mon histoire, il y a des meilleures histoires, il y a des histoires qui sont plus positives…Moi, je ne pense pas que mon histoire soit nécessairement négative…mais c'est vraiment à partir du moment qu'on ne veut pas considérer l'adoption internationale en masse, je dis bien EN MASSE… ça veut dire, on nie le fait qu'on était manipulé… comme… c'est un génocide culturel. C'est comme si on niait les pensionnats, c'est comme si on niait le scoop 60 et comme si on niait les histoires des Aborigènes en Australie… C'est une sorte de déportation volontaire et ça prend le pays adoptant et le pays d'origine. On ne peut pas que blâmer la Corée… It takes 'two to tango'…

(For me it is a personal experience, for sure ... but also, we are about 200,000 adoptees from Korea. It is not just my story. There are stories with better outcomes, there are stories that are more positive… As for me, I do not think my story is necessarily negative… but it really all starts from the moment when one chooses not to consider that mass international adoption exists, and by that I mean in significant numbers… That means, we deny the fact that we were being manipulated… like… it's a cultural genocide. It's as if we were denying the orphanages, it's as if we were denying the scoop 60 and the stories of the Aboriginals in Australia… It is a kind of a voluntary deportation. The adopting country and the country of origin have a hand in what happens due to those adoptions. We cannot only blame Korea… It takes 'two to tango'…).

It seems to me that the urgent call for individualizing the experience is legitimate at times when statistics and figures are objectifying the adoptees, denying their unique pathways and the hardships they had to endure in silence. This reminded me of my early attempts back in Lebanon

when I was working on a database concerning *adoption* from Lebanon. This was a project undertaken by Alternatives-Badael, the NGO I co-established to advocate for the rights to origins and the reform of the child welfare system. Adoptees from Lebanon were reluctant to engage in the project because they were first concerned with tracing back their families of origins and thought that a database is just a derivation from their essential need. They were also afraid of revealing information on those concerned by their *adoption* mainly because they do not want to upset them while the latter might give information on who could be their birth mother. Furthermore, those implicated in processing *adoption* turned out to be people in power who would use their means to silence the adoptees and even threaten them. It is worth noting that many of us, adoptees from Lebanon and allies, received threats from those implicated in processing *adoptions* from Lebanon.

From an NGO's perspective, compiling a database and conveying findings on numbers, trends and corrupted processes was essential to put *adoption,* as a colonial rescue, at the forefront of public agenda. Such a positioning would allow us to work on preventing the fall of more children in the *adoption* system. Parallel to prevention, such findings might help us unveil the mechanisms employed in processing *adoption* to facilitate tracing. By 2019, some 3500 adoptees entrusted us with their *adoption* documents. The analysis has confirmed that all the documented *adoption* processes were falsified and almost the same circle of people was involved (Ismail-allouche, 2020). It was a real discovery for the adoptees to learn that it was not only them who were adopted but some 10.000 children were adopted out from Lebanon and through the same mechanisms and people. In some instances, adoptees were transferred to the same neighborhoods in the adoptive countries (Ismail-Allouche, 2020).

Linking the experience of Lebanon to the Indigenous legacies and the worldwide

adoption establishments seems essential to build a sense of a community with the hope of

national and international advocacy efforts to destabilize the status-quo. Unfortunately, we did

not manage to establish that collectivity back then. It seems again that finding one's own story of

adoption was not perceived as a collective endeavor and it is a perfectly legitimate approach,

while acknowledging that collectivity is essential in advocacy work.

The connections established by Amandine and kimura-lemoine imply that learning about

the history of *adoption* is essential to connect the dots while maintaining a respectful space for

the individual encounter with *adoption.* The additional remark made by kimura-lemoine (it takes

two to tango) highlights the implicit role of the adoptive countries in facilitating the transfer of

children for *adoption*. Noting that many international reports and critical writings emphasize that

adoption processes entail falsification of documents in the country of origins, the question that

we need to ask is "How can a country legalize the *adoption* of the child while being aware that

the records are falsified in the country of origin? The truth is that there is an implicit conspiracy

in facilitating the arrival of a child to the adoption countries. The question is whether this is in

the best interests of the children being detached from their birth mothers, families, communities

and origins.

Self-identification

McAdams (1993) argues that identity is formed in the dialogue between the story and the

social world surrounding us. Disturbance occurs when we cannot access parts of the story.

Similarly, Richardson (2021, P38) confirms that "knowing where you come from is the basis for

human identity." The same idea was shared by Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew who

said in an interview I did with her in the context of a research project on Indigenous Healing

Knowledges[22]. She said, "we need to know where we came from to know in which direction to go" (Boldo, Kephart. Ismail-Allouche, 2021).

The question of self-identification seems embedded in the experience of *adoption* where the adoptees navigate multiple identities derived from the void of the unknown, the place of origin, the place of *adoption* and other emerging identities. A simple question about the birth name and the birthdate could be problematic. Nothing could be assumed to be correct when documented on the *adoption* records.

Anonymous from Haiti noted that one should be very careful in reading the information provided in the *adoption* records because they might be falsified.

Jennifer Mitchell speaks of the ambiguity of the information in her *adoption* documents:

I don't say my name is Jennifer. I guess my colonized name would be Jennifer Mitchell. I don't know my indigenous name yet. I'm in the process of trying to get all those pieces filled... I was born in Fort McMurray in 1982 and I was adopted out. Uh, when I was three and a half, I don't… I have the exact date and what not that I was adopted by my adoption package, but I'll just quickly check and see if it's here. And maybe like my dad. This one document states that my dad signed the kids away!!!! With the understanding that all three of us were going to be adopted together on July 12th of 1986, so that was 1986, so I wanted to, uh, that says. I was four years old. I'm not. I was told I was three and a half. I'm looking, and I'm not sure that I know the adoption papers in here. November 17, 1985. That sounds more… more right?

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[22] Indigenous Healing Knowledges is a project funded by SSHRC under the leadership of Professor Catherine Richardson/ Kinewesquao. This research aims to enhance the understanding of Indigenous worldview and epistemology in relation to healing and well-being, by presenting the teachings of various healing practitioners including those of the Cree, Métis, and Haudenosaunee.

kimura byol-nathalie lemoine speaks of the complexity to access the name given at birth or even the accurate date of birthday because of the falsification of documents. Ze emphasizes that this falsification is meant to complicate the search for origins if not rendering it impossible (kimura byol-nathalie lemoine, 2020). It is only when ze found back zer mother that ze got to realize that ze was three years younger than the age given to zer. kimura-lemoine confirms that the age was altered to match the preferences of the adoptive family who was interested in adopting an older child.

> Moi, j'ai été adopté e de Corée du Sud en Belgique à la fin des années 60… Mon nom de naissance que je n'ai pas connu pendant 25 ans était kimura byol. Mon nom d'adopté.e coréen.ne était Cho Mihee et mon nom d'adopté.e Belge est Nathalie Lemoine. Officiellement, j'ai été adopté.e à 4 ans et demi mais j'avais un an et demi. Donc, on m'a donné 3 ans en plus. Ma date officielle d'anniversaire est (19) 65 mais ma date réelle biologique est (19) 68. C'est en 1991 quand j'avais 23 ans que j'ai connu mon âge réel."

> "Me, I was adopted to Belgium from South Korea at the end of the 60s… My birth name that I actually didn't know for 25 years was kimura byol. My adopted name is Cho Mihee which is Korean, and my Belgian adopted name is Nathalie Lemoine. Officially, I was adopted at four and a half years old but I was actually a year and a half. So, they made me three years older. My official birthday is (19) 65 but my actual biological date is (19) 68. It was only in 1991 when I was 23 that I found out my real age.

Being three years younger than zer attributed age made them raise a lot of questions and, more specifically, made them face significant challenges because ze were expected to live as an older child when they were only still a baby. We can all imagine what this issue means in terms of growing up and maturing, while the body is still three years younger.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar highlights the changes in the date of birth in his *adoption* records. He confirms the fact that such alteration in the date of birth was meant to accommodate the desires of the adoptive parents for a newborn baby. He states:

> I was born in 1963. I was told my birthday was in August, but later when I found my story, we realized I was older than what the nuns at the orphanage had told me. My birthday is more likely in mid or late July. I'm from the Awar family. And through DNA research and some fortuitous circumstances, I was able to find my story. I don't know my original first name, but I do know my family name is ElAwar…I remember looking at the pictures of my arrival in Abadan, Iran where my adoptive father was working at the time and I kept saying to both my adoptive parents: "I wasn't a newborn." I was… I was big. I wasn't a tiny little newborn baby.

It was only when he was able to trace back his story that Daniel was able to know that he was two months old when he was taken away for *adoption* purposes. It is his cousin Jamal who confirmed to him that his mother breastfed him and tried to keep him as long as she could.

Krista Visser mentions that even her passport, used for transferring her from Beirut to the Netherlands, was falsified. She states:

> I was born on 6 December 1973, in Beirut Lebanon and I live in the Netherlands. I was adopted by Dutch parents. Um…On my Lebanese passport, it does say or state that I was born in Beirut but the adoption lady told my parents… my Dutch parents, that I am really born in Tripoli… Um... in Lebanon… but that for government reasons or for reasons to get the passport for the baby, it was, eh, documented that I am born in Beirut. I always believed that it was a real passport but I have been told that it might be a fake passport

because on a real passport you see an expiration date and on my passport that I was given

when I was a baby there is not an expiration date. Therefore, people believe, and they

have told me that it might be a fake passport. But I am not sure because… um… no… I

am not sure.

In the line with these statements, I note that the falsification of birth documents was a

common trait to the 3500 adoption cases we analyzed back in Lebanon (Ismail-Allouche, 2020).

When investigating these falsifications in the orphanages responsible for a number of *adoption*

processes, the nuns explained to me that changing the name of the birth mother, the date of birth

and even the place of birth was meant to hide any information that might yield to tracing back to

the birth mother. This was possible before the era of DNA that sped up the processes of

reunification between the adoptees and their birth mothers or members from the birth family. The

same falsification in the birth date was noticed in many orphanages and care institutions in the

Arabic region. In some instance, the children were named after the director of the orphanage or the

nun in charge and the date of birth was altered to make it easier for the administrators of the

orphanages to manage the files. When interrogating this practice with the directors of those

institutions in the context of my field practice, I noticed a marginal awareness of the possible

implications of falsifying the birth records and date of birth. This feeling of being a number in a

mass was reinforced by this practice.

Racism

All adoptees shared a narrative of being confronted with racist behavior either in their

smaller circles, at school, or later at work. The experiences varied in terms of severity and

manifestation. Racism, however, has certainly marked the lives of the adoptees at various levels.

Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance shares her experience with racism as the following:

Micro-aggression, like when I think about school, it wasn't that much present, but when I think back, it's outside of the school that the micro-aggression were more present because of maybe… And I think this affected me more than being in the private school and because we are more like… uh, like the rules are more strict, so it's more respectful in a way, but outside of that at plenty of… like, I think this was more my experience of Micro- aggression, especially in the streets or in my first job as a teenager so that it really made a difference of how I perceive myself. I feel especially in doing social jobs like being a cashier in the grocery store and doing some clothes selling with tourists.

Jennifer Mitchell's experience took a different path. The impact of racism on her was so profound to the extent she found herself homeless. She states:

People started to take notice that I look different from them and then they brought it to my attention through racism and picking on me. So, what I can remember is like being in junior social studies class, then the subject of Native Americans came up and they all kind of like turned to me and looked at me and I couldn't understand, because they like expected me to know all of this history and what not, but I had no idea of anything. I just was clueless… I just didn't really understand. I just knew that the tone was very hateful.

It is only when living on the streets that Jennifer got to realize that it was not only about her; it was mainly about being disconnected from her Indigenous roots and assimilated into a non-Indigenous family. On the streets, Jennifer shared with many other Indigenous adoptees the same pain and hurt. Yet, she also discovered that "they kept their sense of humor and I heard their stories and I realized I didn't have my own story".

Daniel Drennan ElAwar speaks about the first time he was made aware of his skin color and the meaning of being brown in a white context on his first day of first grade. It happened when one of his classmates came towards him and asked him "why you are brown." Daniel confirms that this incident marked his life forever. He states:

> Now I know that this was the beginning of a lifetime of trying to fit in, with that pressure to assimilate, and this is shared by many immigrant groups. Those questions of racism and discrimination that dogged me growing up were still part of my life in terms of job advancement and that kind of thing.

Amandine Gay perceives the issue of being black as more challenging for her than being adopted. A study conducted by Tobias Hübinette (himself a Korean adoptee in Sweden) and Carina Tigervall (2009) argue that adoptees of color are culturally raised white by their white adoptive parents. Cultural stereotypes are then imposed on their non-white bodies to be assimilated. This issue, in turn, makes them doubt whether the discrimination and harassment that they face constitute instances of racism. The inability to identify racism can be considered as an additional barrier to be faced by adoptees.

kimura-lemoine shares zer observations of other adopted South Korean children who lived in zer neighborhood in Belgium. Ze states that those who were adopted at an older age still remembered their own language. Yet, they were not allowed to speak their own language and were punished when attempting to do so. kimura-lemoine emphasizes the connection between what ze experienced as a child and the colonial assimilation of the Indigenous children in the residential schools and later in the 60s scoop.

Il y avait des Coréen.ne.s adopté.e.s qui se parlaient Coréen dans la cour. Ils n'ont pas oublié leur langue. Mais ils le faisaient en cachette parce que quand ils parlaient coréen à la maison, ils se faisaient taper dessus. C'est comme les pensionnats. C'est la même chose…on était comme des esclaves émotionnels… on devait rendre nos parents heureux. C'était ça notre but…c'était ça notre raison d'être. On devait leur faire plaisir… sinon, on risquait d'être renvoyé.e.s dans les poubelles en Corée… Quand le racisme est dans ta maison… c'est encore plus difficile.

(There were Korean adoptees who spoke Korean to each other in the yard. They haven't forgotten their language. But they did it on the sly because when they spoke Korean at home, they were hit. It's like residential schools. It's the same… We were like emotional slaves… We had to make our parents happy. That was our goal… that was our reason for being. We had to make them happy... Otherwise, we risked being sent back to the trash in Korea... When racism is in your house... it tends to get even more difficult).

When asked about whether they were able to discuss these types of micro-aggressions and act of racism with their adoption parents, all the adoptees confirmed that it was difficult for them to convey those feelings and speak about them with their adoptive parents. Amandine confirmed that even when her adoptive family was good to her, there was a kind of inability to recognize that she was subject to racism.

In his article titled "The "Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power": Recognizing the Structural Violence of Deindustrialization as Loss", Steven High (2021) addresses the structural violence of deindustrialization and the resulting urban losses. He argues that such violence is made invisible and too localized to be noticed. He joins Edward Said and other thinkers that call

for "interrogating the "normalized quiet of unseen power" when violence becomes largely invisible to us"[23].

It seems to me that the racism endured by adoptees was rendered invisible to the eyes of the adoptive parents mainly because they are not subjected to it. The adoptive parents were unable to detect that the adopted child, who is of a different skin color, might be suffering, unable to speak up and ask for help and support from the ones who should be there to protect them. Even though race and culture are central to the experience of *adoption*, these two parameters were not well researched, internationally, in the evaluation of *adoption* outcomes (Hollingsworth, 1997; Lee, 2003).

Awareness of being adopted

While most adoptees mentioned that they had always been told, in a way or another, that they were adopted, there were key instances when they realized the real meaning of being adopted and what such realization might engender in terms of questions about the unknown and what was left unsaid about their life before *adoption*.

Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew speaks of her complex relationship with her older brother. He was also adopted, and he was the one who informed her about being adopted.

When I was young like… he… used to say things like, "Oh, you're not my real sister" or. Um…And I think I was about 9 years old. And I… remember the instance vividly. Where I think that's where… I really understood because I still remember that we were… At that point, we were living with Frances because the courts kept giving her custody. And, um...

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[23] Edward Said quoted in Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 6.

We were sitting having dinner. Pork chops. And lots of ketchup and… I remember him saying distinctly… saying that time of like… You're not my real sister anyhow, you're adopted. And me getting off my chair. I still remember kind of holding on to the table leg. And… I don't know, kind of maybe not really wanting to believe it or something. I was having a reaction. I don't remember exactly what that was, but I, I remember kind of that changed… It changed something in me, you know?! It wasn't a safe place.

Jennifer Mitchell was always aware that she was adopted but thought that this is a common thing and that all children are adopted. It was tough for her to understand the real difference between being adopted and being the biological child. This sounded child's perspective was changed when the awareness of being adopted was combined with the racism directed toward her as being Indigenous adopted by a non-Indigenous family. Jennifer speaks about that urge to connect with people who she looks like to be defined as a human being.

kimura-lemoine shares a same thread, she adds that she managed to define herself as a human being only after the arrival of her adoptive sister who is also a South Korean.

Through those stories, I got to understand the experience of racism from a totally new perspective. During our listening sessions, Montreal was hit by an anti-Asian racism wave associated with COVID 19 (Rowe, 2020). kimura-lemoine shared zer own feeling about being targeted, which led to launching a whole discussion on the experience of the adoptees with racism. It is obvious that racialized Indigenous individuals, Arabs and people of color are targeted by racism. However, the experience is different when one feels connected to a family and a community of the same color. There is a sense of solidarity that helps, supports and allows for collective and subtle forms of resistance. The adoptees are deprived of that safety net,

especially when the adoptive family seems totally disconnected from the culture of the place of origin or when the enemy is at home as stated by kimura-lemoine.

Disturbed relationship with the adoptive family

Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin: iskwew speaks about enduring neglect and maltreatment. She states that her adoptive parents were facing troubles as a couple:

> Yeah, in my adoption file I guess it indicates that there… It was… There was some trouble, I think in the… in the couple and so. I think one of the reasons for adopting another child was to, I don't know bring improvement to that relationship or bring something else to the family. Um… But it's also interesting to know that there was another little girl who had been placed with that family prior to my placement, but she had been removed. Um… for questionable neglect.

> Vicky mentions that she had always been told that her *adoption* happened mainly because her birth mother was not good enough to keep her. It is only when she reconnected with her mother did she learn that she was a good person and that the worst thing she could have ever done in her life was probably smoke a cigarette.

kimura byol-natalie lemoine confirms having been treated as a commodity in the adoptive family:

> Alors moi depuis toujours, depuis …ils me disent que je suis chinoise, des gens arrêtaient mes parents adoptifs dans la rue et demandaient combien j'avais coûté… moi, je me considère comme un chien en fait, c'est tout. Parce qu'on achetait un chien, on achetait un chat, on achetait un.e asiatique. Je n'étais pas humain.

(So, for me, ever since… they told me I was Chinese, people would stop my adoptive parents on the street and ask them how much I had cost them… I considered myself like a dog actually, that's all. Because one could buy a dog, one could buy a cat, one could buy an Asian. I was not human).

Krista Visser thinks that the complexities in the relationship with the adoptive parents can take other subtle forms. She states:

I asked my mom: Did you save what I was wearing, because I was not naked when you got me? And… um… I saw that it was very tough because she told me she did not save, eh, what I was dressed or wrapped in, or anything, and my mom saved everything her house is packed from bottom till up with stuff. So, she saves everything and why she didn't save... what I was dressed in when she got me, and I think that it is very hurtful that she didn't. When I ask her about it she thinks that it is very hurtful because I am pointing at something she didn't do well… But I think that this is really hurtful; it was the only connection that I have... because someone must have dressed me that morning before sending me off to be adopted. You know. So, it is the only connection that you have with your past. So, for me it would be very, umm, I am thinking of the word… meaningful, let us call it meaningful, to have that, that first whatever it was that I was wearing. You don't have to save the dirty diapers. Ok, you know what I mean… but the baby cloth, the outfit, the blanket I don't know…

Vicky Boldo/ kisêwâtisiwinyôtin: iskwew explains the problem with *adoption* as a practice and the complex relationship with the adoptive parents as the following:

It always made me uncomfortable and I found it awkward because there's something

about the savior…that you're saving these children or something, and… not enough

thought put into that. I don't think people are looking critically enough at how deeply like

emotionally, psychologically, spiritually like at a soul level… What… that does to

individuals when they… when they grow up being so different than from who… they are,

who they were intended, as a spiritual being who they were intended to be. And, um. I

think. I think people need to… be made more aware that if they are going to adopt a

child… that it's them and the family unit that needs to adapt and not the child that they're

bringing into their environment. And I don't think that's told enough to people.

There… there's this idea of like… It's the child again who's going to assimilate.

So, I think whenever… Whenever I see. Whenever I see those interracial adoptions of

families…. Yeah, that's a child of another culture, another color…

I just… I notice that and I always kind of send… lots of love to that child.

Reflecting on the above-quoted testimonies, I think that there is an indispensable question

that I have to ask from a child protection perspective. This question evolves around the

preparedness of the adoptive parents to address those subtle forms of systemic violence, being

faced within the family or/and within the adoptive community. When the declared intention

behind *adoption* is offering a child in need with a caring family, I wonder about the training

programs and accompaniment that should be available to the adoptive families prior and during

adoption so they are ready to tackle such situations. Those programs should be made compulsory

to respond to the emerging needs of the child who is adopted. It sounds a bit weird that such

programs are mandatory in the instance of domestic adoption but are undermined when *adoption*

is considered. It might be one of the reasons why adoptive families seek *adoption* in the first place because processes are halted, requirements are compromised and follow-up is almost non-existent.

The connection to roots and the mother

The questions revolving around roots, birth identity and the mother are very present in the narratives of the adoptees. The pressing importance and urgency varied depending on the age of the adoptees and where they are in their attempts to find answers. While the youngest adoptees expressed, at times, less urgency in terms of unfolding the unknown parts of their stories, the older ones shared narratives of access to information. Those adoptees who were able to connect back with their roots and find the missing parts of their stories indicated that this issue was an essential milestone on their journey towards healing.

Anonymous from Haïti indicates that she tried to search for her origins, but it was a complex process mainly because the information on her origins is missing from her *adoption* documents that were kept for a long time with her adoptive parents. She states:

> Par rapport à mon nom d'origine je n'ai pas cette information-là, quand j'ai commencé à faire mes recherches sur mes origines, parce que j'ai effectué un retour en Haïti. J'ai récupéré tous mes papiers d'adoption que mes parents avaient gardé depuis cette époque-là, et c'est beaucoup beaucoup de documents que j'ai fichés… une vingtaine de fois et il n'y a pas l'information sur mon nom d'origine… mais j'ai... dans l'information que j'ai, je sais que ma mère, c'est dans les papiers. Donc, parfois il faut faire attention parce que parfois les informations qu'on a dans les papiers d'adoption, surtout à cet époque-là… mais ce qu'il y avait dans les papiers c'est que ma mère aurait accouchée au centre de

maternité et elle aurait quitté le centre de maternité trois jours après avoir accouché sans

son bébé… donc sans moi…

(Regarding my original name, I didn't have that piece of information. I started to research

my origins when I returned to Haiti. I recovered all my adoption papers that my parents

had kept since that time, and it's a lot of documents that I filed ... twenty times and there

is still no information on my original name… but I have… in the information that I

gathered from those, found something regarding my mother. So, you have to be careful

because sometimes the information found in the adoption papers, could be inaccurate,

especially at that time ... but what was in the papers is that my mother had given birth at

the center's maternity ward and had left the maternity center three days after giving birth

without her baby… so without me…).

Krista Visser traveled back to Lebanon many times with the hope of finding answers

about her origins and mother, with no success. She speaks about the pain derived from being

unable to unfold her story:

> I think it is very hard that you don't have anything, any memory, any special thing in
>
> your life that reminds you of your birth family. There is basically nothing that you can
>
> touch or that you have…therefore... and I think that it is very hard, very tough… um… I
>
> came up with the idea one day, that even when I don't know how my biological mother
>
> looks, it doesn't mean that she is not there and therefore, it doesn't mean that she doesn't
>
> deserve a picture frame!

Krista Visser explains how the perception of her mother has changed over time. She states:

> Now, (laughing), I am 46, so I think about it a bit different, eh, than I did when I was 18
>
> because when I was 18 I did believe, don't laugh, I did believe that a biological mother

could give birth to a baby, give away a baby, and forget that she had a baby…. and… eh…. like a dog…given away its puppies... um… and after I became a mom myself, I realized... (laughing)... that is impossible… you cannot forget that you have given birth to a baby. So, after I gave birth myself, my idea about adoption, um, did change and I did realize that even when our contact has been broken… between the mom and the baby…the mom and me, eh, our bonds didn't break. Because you cannot do that…you can cut the contact, but you cannot break a bond because it is there... it's… you can't cut it…

Jennifer Mitchell says that finding her roots and being able to connect with her family and community helped her fill the void within her. She also highlights the importance of accessing photos of herself as a baby and of being able to identify resemblance between her and her brothers and sisters. She states:

And it's been like, oh, a void filled 'cause I was like I've never had a baby picture and then also my Dad gave me a younger picture of him. This is me in the crib with my brother Reyburn and my dad. My dad's smile is the same as mine. Finally, I have another piece filled! I KNOW where my smile came from!

Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew states that after finding her family and connecting with her relatives, she was able to access photos of her uncle from the paternal side. She says:

When I looked in the mirror, all of a sudden it was like… like, I wasn't just bleeding out. I think before that, that's what it was like there was no real definition when I looked in the mirror. And this particular day was like… like, all of a sudden, my face really kind of

took a new form…in my eyes and my nose and I was just like oh! …. because all of a sudden, it's like I had origin. I've never had the origin before.

Kimura-lemoine confirms that it was very important to find zer birth mother. However, this was even more important to zer birth mother who was also searching for her disappeared baby. It was a big relief to the birth mother as much as it was a big relief to kimura-lemoine.

Pour elle, ma mère, c'était un soulagement que je l'ai retrouvée. Parce que pour elle, on a volé son enfant. Alors du jour au lendemain elle ne me voit plus… c'est ça… mais c'est vrai que lorsqu'on s'est rencontré.e.s, on s'est rendu.e.s que ça nous faisait du bien parce qu'on avait été séparé.e.s involontairement.

(For her, my mother, finding her was a relief because for her, her child was stolen from her. So, overnight she could no longer see me ... that was it ... but it's true that when we met, we realized that it was doing us good because we had been separated involuntarily).

Amandine Gay emphasizes the total absence of the voice of the birth mothers from the conversations on *adoption* and their implications. She states:

Je pense qu'un des points aveugles dans toutes les discussions c'est comme en fait c'est très stigmatisé de se séparer de son enfant, on n'entend jamais les mères, donc on ne sait pas quels sont les impacts long terme sur elles, psychologiquement, physiologiquement… d'être séparée de son enfant et pour moi c'est un grand souci.

(See Appendix D)

(I think one of the blind spots in all the discussions is like it's actually much stigmatized to separate from your child. You never hear from the mothers, so you don't know what

the long-term impacts are on them, psychologically, physiologically... to be separated from your child, and for me it is a big concern).

Vicky Boldo/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew confirms the importance of reconnecting with her Indigenous culture. She states:

Waiting for years and years right… to get… to get my name. My friend asked me: Oh, if you knew your name, what would it be? And I wanted it to be something really powerful. Right? Like Thunderbird woman or… She, who rides on the back of the Thunderbird because I'd have dreams of riding on the back of Thunderbird with all this fringe and... then I guess I don't know, maybe just a month later… and that was only in 2013. But maybe like a month later, I'd gone to the conference in Winnipeg, and we were out on sacred land with one of the Elders and he smoked his pipe and came out of pipe ceremony… looked at me and said I've got your name…

and that was it, Gentle Wind/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin: iskwew … and… I was a bit hysterical. I laughed and I cried. I fell on the rocks and… I had this beautiful, beautiful Torres Straits woman with me… a spirit sister…Venita… and she just kind of sat down beside me and you know, had her hand on me… Um… Just there to care for me in this really special way… like that was a pretty sacred moment right? Yeah…one of those defining moments that happen in life. Elders… already for years… because I've been chasing all the time… of like… who am I? Where am I from and… and, I had some of those answers by then and had the relationships with my biological family. Like… Um… In place and everything… But there was something about… Yeah… those real spiritual connections and… receiving that name, it just… having all of those elders all those years…

Who... repeatedly said to me "Stop running, stop looking" and putting their hand on my
heart…You know who you are…You know who you are…You know who you are.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar confirms the importance of reconnecting with his roots as if
the life of an adoptee starts with that search for the missing parts of their story. He states (see
Appendix D):

When I hit 40, I had a bit of an identity meltdown and made the decision to go back to
Beirut and found my job at the American University there. When I talk to people about it
now—and I'm comfortable talking about this now—I avoided thinking about it for a
while, but I really feel like my life started at 40 years old. Like everything before that was
me attempting to make something of the half-baked identity I was given by being
adopted.

Amandine Gay shares her own experience with the search process, indicating that it took
her 17 years between the time she tried to learn about her mother and the time she received a first
sign about her. She states:

Quand j'étais petite j'avais des informations que mes parents avaient eu des assistantes
sociales. Donc mes parents savaient toujours que ma mère était marocaine. En tout cas
moi j'ai l'impression d'avoir découvert ça dans mon dossier quand j'avais 18 ans. Mais
enfaite ma mère m'a dit qu'elle me l'a déjà dit en fait, mais bon… je ne sais pas… euh…
mais à part ça il n'y a pas beaucoup d'information que mes parents avaient et en fait moi
je voulais voir mon dossier toute seule parce que c'était mon histoire et moi j'avais envie
d'aller découvrir mon histoire toute seule. Entre le moment que j'ai déposé la demande

pour ouvrir mon dossier en 2002 au moment que j'ai eu des réponses sur ma mère biologique 2019, ils se passaient 17 ans.

(When I was little, I had some information that my parents had received from social workers. So, my parents always knew that my mother was Moroccan. Anyway, I feel like I discovered this in my file when I was 18. But in fact, my mother told me that she already told me before, but hey… I don't know… uh… but other than that there is not a lot of information that my parents had and in fact, I wanted to see my file on my own because it was my story and I wanted to go and discover my story on my own.

From the time I applied to open my file in 2002 to the time I got answers on my birth mother 2019, 17 years had passed!)"

Daniel Drennan ElAwar confirms that searching for the birth mother is not evident for many adoptees. He mentions that he was confronted with criticism when he went back to Lebanon. He states:

I mean the irony is, as an adoptee from Lebanon to the United States, I evoke the Lebanese dream of leaving the country and becoming acculturated in a different culture. And so, coming back to many was just seen as aberrant. Like why would you even want to do that?

These statements reminded me of our struggles in attempting to assist the adoptees who were constantly going back to Lebanon to search back for their birth mothers. We were confronted by the lack of reliable information and most of all with the risks of unveiling corruption while having to accommodate the pressing need of the adoptees to find answers as fast as possible. Meanwhile, TV programs in Lebanon and all over the world are investing

millions of dollars to produce shows that connect adoptees with their birth mothers and communities. Unfortunately, these programs are accessible only to a minority of adoptees. Most of the time, reconnections are made with minor ethical considerations for both the adoptees, their mother and family. Instead of those sporadic and sometimes harmful opportunities, we were emphasizing that states should ensure the right to access one's own origin. As all reform processes, time, perseverance, and funds are essential to induce changes.

Views on *adoption* practices

All adoptees had critical perspectives on *adoption* practices that entail cutting the connections with the family, community, language and origin. These critical perspectives varied in terms of language and expression but were all favoring solutions that are rooted in communities.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar calls for finding different terms to speak about *adoption*. He states:

Adoption to me is functional to rupture and dissolution of family, whereas kinship care and these other ideas are about extending community and family, and I see a huge difference there. I see an ideal within the foster care system that is along these lines as opposed to thinking. I need to rupture all ties of this child with their origin and bring this child into my family structure. This is quite different from a foster care ideal which would say on behalf of the community and on behalf of this family: I'm going to take care of this child and I am going to hope that the day will come when this child will be able to be taken care of by their source and original family. I find it difficult to speak of adoption in terms of family creation because, within the Anglo-Saxon tradition, it didn't start this

way. It didn't have anything to do with family creation. It was about indentured

servitude.

Kimura-lemoine questions the reason behind the *adoption* practices and whether they

are ever meant to help the child. Ze states:

Oui, les enfants ont besoin d'une alternative mais pourquoi l'adoption internationale est

nécessaire ? il y a toute sorte d'adoption. Il y a l'adoption plénière, il y a l'adoption

ouverte… moi, je ne suis pas contre l'adoption ouverte… Ça veut dire (quand) on ne

sépare pas la culture de l'enfant. Ça veut dire qu'on ne ment pas sur son passé, on ne

ment pas pour faire plaisir à l'adoptant… C'est qui qui paie ? Ce sont les parents

adoptifs… C'est eux qui font marcher le marché… C'est l'adoption plénière qui est le

problème pour moi… l'adoption en elle-même, c'est un bon geste pour moi… mais c'est

comment c'est fait qui est le problème pour moi.

(Yes, children do need an alternative but why is inter-country adoption necessary? There

are all kinds of adoption. There is full adoption, there is open adoption… I am not against

open adoption which means (when) we do not separate the culture from the child. It

means that we do not lie about our past, we do not lie to please the adopter... Who is

paying? It is the adoptive parents… They are the ones who make the market work… It is

full adoption that is the problem for me… The adoption itself is a good gesture for me…

but the problem for me lies in how it is executed.)

Jennifer Mitchell criticizes the way media portrays *adoption* practices and highlights the

importance of keeping the child in the community where access to language and culture is

preserved. She states:

I think of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt… like, do they think that their kids are like accessories. Like one day I want one from Zimbabwe. So, let's go order up a Zimbabwe child like I… I think people need to be brought up with the people that know their root language and culture to pass on. They have to know the history, the culture, everything about where they're from. Otherwise, you're just going to be lost or living life with identity issues.

Brent Mitchell criticizes the practice of removing Indigenous children from their homes and community. He asks for apologies, not only for what he has undergone and for the abuse he was subject to, but for the effect of such a practice in terms of the decimation of his tribe and family. He states:

I know it's silly, but it's those little things that we missed out on. We missed out on a mom. I never got to see her… I know she wasn't perfect, but it is still mom. It doesn't matter what anyone says, yeah? Uh and where they lived, but it would have been difficult, but... Um? I know she would have tried her best. It's a little that they had, but yeah, they took that away from me. I haven't even got another… I never got a hug from her, a Kiss from her…

Insightful conversations

Despite the unique pathways, experiences, contexts, stage of awareness of the history and related legacies, and connection to roots, it seemed to me that there are many shared stories even if expressed differently. In addition to the interviews and the compiled text, we had very insightful exchanges with the owners of the stories during the listening and creation stages. In one of those sessions, kimura-lemoine flagged to me the issue of accent when we were editing the artistic outcome. Ze said that most adoptees have lost their native accent by being

acculturated to their adoptive country and language. It was the first time that I ever reconciled with my Lebanese accent while speaking in English or French. My native accent suddenly became a privilege. We agreed that I flag this issue during the public event, and which I did in my opening note.

Along the same lines, Daniel Drennan ElAwar, Jennifer Mitchell, and kimura-lemoine suggested to end the video with them speaking in their own native language. It was a powerful statement on the right to access the language that was stolen from them. Daniel spoke in Arabic, Jennifer spoke in her Cree native language, and kimura-lemoine spoke in Korean. The most important learning happened when we all decided that the final statement on the critical account of *adoption* practices should be developed and delivered by Daniel Drennan ElAwar. This step was a confirmation that expertise lies in the minds of those who have lived the experience.

While all the international organizations advocate for the importance of listening to the views of those most concerned by any intervention, having Daniel deliver his own views on *adoption* practices was a clear sign for all of us: We cannot avoid those voices anymore if we are keen on respecting the views of the most concerned. These voices are "ineradicable". It seems very essential to close the chapter of making meaning with the below words of Daniel Drennan ElAwar as they seem to conclude the essence of the critical account of *adoption* shared by the owners of the stories. Professionals, decisions makers and activists need to listen carefully to this critical account instead of reinventing the wheel that created a legacy of neglect, maltreatment, discrimination and disconnection to roots and languages. Daniel states:

> For this state of affairs, we are told we should be grateful; that we are better off; that our
> adoptions were God's will. Such remarks come easily to those whose lives remain a
> continuum, with or without us; for those with ancestry, and genealogy, and history with

or without us; whose lives have continuity backward and forward, with or without us. In stark contrast are our lives halted. Interrupted. Ruptured. And so, we exist as the discontinuous and the uprooted. And so, we are denied agency, political embodiment, civil validity, as well as base humanity.

CHAPTER VI

My learnings from the research-creation

Indigenous methodologies imply that the research circle is not completed without giving back and acknowledging Indigenous knowledges (Kovach, 2009). Closing the circle is mainly meant to offer new perspectives and engage in a transformative process that goes beyond the academic wall following the spiral evolving path (Richardson, 2021). The whole journey of this research-creation was conceived following the whirling/spiral search for deep understanding and impactful revelations.

The learnings derived from the research-creation, starting with the oral history interviews, the road toward the creative format and the impact of the public event on collaborators and audience as witnesses, have revealed significant knowledge at the methodologies and the critical account of adoption levels. In this chapter, I will share my learnings related to the methodologies and the impact on the audience.

Insights on the methodologies

I came across research-creation following long years of arts-based practice with children and youth in the alternative care sector, both in the Arab world and internationally. My practice was focused on creating platforms for those children and youth to voice their own views on alternative care, with an attempt to reform the sector. This approach was very new to our Arab context. Having children and youth participating in any reform process within the alternative care sector could be perceived as revolutionary. Arts-based participatory research proved its effectiveness in conveying meanings that were inaccessible to high level decision makers. Avoiding tokenism, mitigating harm and focusing on giving back the power to those most concerned by the child welfare system were my major concerns and guiding ethics. We managed to induce essential transformational processes at the level of quality of service, perceptions

towards children without parental care, and funding for projects supporting reunification with the families and communities of origins. However, such approaches require sustainability that is not maintained, due to the more consistent influence of the colonial minds promoting *adoption* as the best resort for children. At the end of the day, the alternative care sector is charged with politics and conflicts over matters that surmount the best interests of the child.

We always need to remember that the mind that established the residential schools and, later on, the Sixties Scoop was aiming at decimating Indigenous peoples, as declared by Duncan Campbell Scott, Superintendent of Indian Affairs (Milloy, 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

Collaboration or sailing together

In the past, right before immigrating to Canada in 2015, we co-created performances as an integral activity of an advocacy campaign, in support of survivors of forced separation through adoption or placement into residential care in Lebanon. As a collaborative storytelling venture including witnesses, survivors and performers, these experiences were loaded with tension. Collectively, we managed to voice a narrative of oppression that was silenced for years on end. For the first time ever in Lebanon and the Arab world, survivors of child trafficking through illegal adoption and of sexual abuse in residential care shared their stories of pain and suppressed identities. The encounters were rich, stressful, risky and, mainly, charged with conflicts over authorship, agency and representation. Some of us received death threats and some of those who shared their stories felt that the concern was more on aesthetics, whereas they only wanted to be heard. They eventually opted to quit the process. Of course, I was surprised at that time, not wanting to accept undergoing a self-reflexive process. I was focusing more on the advocacy efforts to launch a reformative change in the child welfare systems. I was also more

concerned with the counterattack of the politicians involved in this same system. They employed all their resources, including unethical approaches, to distort the realities shared by those most impacted by forced separation. They were spreading rumors about our work and propagating offensive personal remarks against me and those who shared their stories.

When I left Lebanon and immigrated to Canada, a kind of guilty feeling kept haunting me. What went wrong? The question resonated in my mind and in my heart. I needed to unpack those hidden voices within me that were pointing to some mistakes at the levels of the methodologies and the understanding of the experiences of being detached from one's own natural land, history, culture, language and mother. I felt the responsibility to give back to those children, youth and adults who experienced forced separation through placement in residential care or through illegal *adoption*. Engaging in my doctoral studies and researching methodologies were essential for me to attempt to find answers to those questions, and eventually give back.

Boal (1995) finds that within the aesthetic space of the theatre, the alternative narratives should be communicated and witnessed in a collective context. It needs to be an enabling process that is aligned with the principles of "empowerment, participative democracy, and social transformation (Grummell, 2007, p. 6). This methodology allows for transmuting feelings, thoughts, and images into an aesthetic form (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Opportunities for the owners of the stories to reflect on their own realities and experiences are optimized, hence, windows open up for transformation. In that context, the authority is shared and all stakeholders in the process become collaborators in the performance. Such a matter would shift the emphasis from the director to the collaborators, and the culture of dialogue would prevail with the aspiration of reaching a smooth exchange (Boal, 1992). Embedded in Indigenous methodologies,

conversation as a form of dialogue is deemed essential and takes the form of "sharing story as a means to assist others" (Kovach, 2010, p. 1).

My major challenge in the research-creation journey was to find an alternative virtual space that substitutes the theater as a point of encounter between the adoptee' narratives and the collaborators. The main focus was about establishing the relationality between the personal encounters of collaborators and the *adoption* practices within the colonial history, without preaching nor dictating. It was meant to be a genuine process that conveys a covered and unseen reality.

Louise Bédard, the well-known Quebec-based choreographer and performer, speaks about her journey in the project, reflects on her participation as a collaborator on the research-creation, she states:

> Je me considère vraiment privilégiée d'avoir pu prendre part à ce projet dont le sujet est l'impact de l'adoption transraciale et transcontinentale. Il n'est pas facile d'écouter et d'entendre ces témoignages, ces histoires personnelles vécues au plus près de la moëlle du corps, du cœur et de l'esprit, mais c'est absolument essentiel. Chacune de ces histoires touchantes est riche d'informations et surtout d'enseignements dont il ne faudrait pas passer à côté. Nous ne pouvons que nous incliner devant cette force et ce courage qu'ont ces personnes adoptées de vouloir changer les choses en les dévoilant et en nous les révélant.

> (See Appendix C)

(I consider myself truly privileged to have been able to take part in this project, the subject of which is transracial and intercountry adoption. It is not easy to listen and to

hear these testimonies, these personal stories lived as close as possible to the marrow of the body, the heart and the spirit, but it is absolutely essential. Each of these touching stories is rich in information and especially lessons that should not be overlooked. We can only bow to this strength and courage that these adopted people have in wanting to make a difference by revealing them and revealing them to us.)

Jen Cressey, an artist and theater director, speaks about the connection of the research-creation journey to her own pathways, she states:

When Zeina invited me to participate, I knew almost nothing about the topic of *adoption*. My ignorance has been replaced by a nascent understanding of the many injustices and great suffering heaped upon children severed from their mothers, families, communities and cultures only to be subjected to racist abuse in their new "homes". This project has brought my attention to my own roots, and how much I have to learn about my origins. I am humbled and grateful to all who generously shared their life experiences.

(Sees Appendix C)

Headphone verbatim, as a representation technique in oral history performance, seemed very relevant to conveying the voices of the owners of the stories while avoiding decontextualization and misinterpretation. It seemed to us, collaborators, that there was a bonding that was established between the owner of the stories and their respective performers. There were moments of enlightenment shared by both the owners of the stories and the collaborators that facilitated the learning and consequently the transformation process.

Ibtissam El Assaad, a collaborator and a recent immigrant to Canada, states:

Little did I know about transracial adoption. What started in my mind as a project took a

completely different path. It has become a journey of enlightening and of compassion.

Am in awe!

(See Appendix C)

The whole journey was a real-life opportunity to trust the people and negotiate my

authority over the project. I came to learn that shared authorities start with the world views, and

the conception of the project and its frameworks; It should not be confined to the interview

space. The choice of the methodologies constituted a solid foundation to sail on the boat of

learning. Whenever tension was rising, I reminded myself of what is core for the research.

Ethical representation was the essence.

Eventually, sailing on a boat with many captains required harmony that was not at all

times evident. It implied taking a risk which I felt ready to deal with because of my preparedness

and, mainly, because I trusted the people and the methodologies. The research-creation was not

about me directing a performance and nor about stretching out artistic muscles. It was simply a

genuine attempt to make relevant and accessible meanings in a respectful way. I also learned to

embrace my activist hat while deploying all the competencies I acquired during my long years of

practice in strategic planning and arts-based enabling techniques, to help amplify the voices that

were the least heard.

We would certainly ask ourselves the question about the role of art. Should it educate,

inform, organize, influence, invite an action, advocate, or should it merely be confined to the

aesthetics? In a world of oppression, performance allows us to tackle untouched emotions and

share a story of truth. Thomas (2008) calls for telling stories because they are part of us and we

cannot move past them if they are not told and shared. In telling a story, Thomas asks to avoid preaching and to address the truth by triggering imagination that is respectful, authentic, risky, and emotional.

Carrying all those teachings and moving with them throughout the research-creation allowed for a construction of a safe platform for the adoptees, the collaborators and then for the audience as witnesses. I found myself sailing on the boat of knowing while learning to lean back, make turns, and move forward with the sharing and the derived meanings. I observed myself floating on that decolonized wave of learning. At times of conflict or non-understanding, I would take a distance and observe myself, while negotiating my tendency to fall into the trap of authority. Then, I would remind myself that I do not know it all. If I did, then there would no reason for me to do the research in the first place.

Unsettling my colonial legacy

Going back to my earlier question about what might have gone wrong in my previous experiences in Beirut, I strongly believe that the answer lies in the colonial part of me that needed further unsettling and unpacking. My authentic attempt to undergo the process of self-decolonization through the researcher's preparedness allowed me to authentically delve into Indigenous methodologies. The methodologies were not approached as means but mainly as an egalitarian world view that places knowledges in the hands of the persons who actually experienced them. In that sense the adoptees would be considered as the most knowledgeable about their experiences and their narratives, as described by Nuttgens (2013). My role in the research journey was to unpack, understand, establish links and pave the road toward a shared journey of a collective revelation. Once again, research was lived as a ceremony that respects the

story and their owners, while accommodating the collaborators to convey meanings that could destabilize the audience without running the risk of losing them (Chaim, 1984).

The impact of the public event

The co-organized public event seemed a natural unfolding of the stories to connect people, reach out to those who might be willing to listen and engage in an auto-reflection about their own beliefs and practices. Our aspiration was to impact the public/professional views on *adoption*. All the feedback shared during the event or communicated verbally or by email after the event were very appreciative of and indicative to a shift in the perception of *adoption* practices. Dr. Toby Long[24] and Dr. Neal Horen[25] shared their views on the performance (Horen & Long, 2020):

> Wonderful in so many ways. Congratulations for the instructive, enlightening performance. Toby and I had done some work with Alaska Natives for quite some time and have heard from many of them of their experiences of colonization. The presentation really brought us back to the stories and the issues raised around culture that continued to impact folks we met fifty years later. The presentation was not what we thought it was going to be, we were pleasantly surprised and felt pulled in immediately. Really interesting and important work.
>
> Alasdair Roy[26] (2021), a child's rights specialist, commented on the performance:

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[24] Toby Long, PhD, PT, FAPTA, is a Professor, the Director of Training at Georgetown's Center for Child and Human Development, and Faculty Director for the Certificate in Early Intervention.

[25] Neal Horen has a PhD in clinical psychology and is the Director of the Early Childhood Division at the Center for Child and Human Development, at Georgetown University and the Director of the HOYA clinic in the Department of Psychiatry. In that capacity he oversees the Center's efforts in early childhood including work in professional development, technical assistance, research and evaluation and clinical services.

[26] Between 2008 and 2016, Alasdair Roy was the Children and Young People Commissioner in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), and between 1997 and 2008, He was the Deputy Community Advocate for Children and Young People in the ACT.

Some of the segments that have stayed with me since watching. It includes When Jennifer Mitchell says that she now knows where her smile came from. When Krista Visser asks why her mother did not keep what she was wearing when she was 'collected'. When Daniel Drennan ElAwar commented that we need another word for adoption - that adoption is not just a well-meaning act, and that it has a profound impact on individuals. When Catherine Richardson commented that 'they,' all the adoptees, have stories about not having stories.

Performative arts seemed rather relevant to the world of adoptees who have been assigned roles in the theatrical life. It is in that space, where people who did not have falsified identities yet harbor aspirations to reconnect with their kin, could open their heart and mind to the narratives of those whose identities were detached from them. It is that metaphoric travel in between falsification and reality that offered insightfully authentic learning for the adoptees, the collaborators, the audience and I, as witnesses of each other's stories.

CHAPTER VII

Concluding thoughts

In the context of Indigenous methodologies, sharing knowledge means deriving lessons learned from the colonial legacies with forced separation and its ongoing perpetuation of systemic violence. Most of all, they imply taking actions to restore justice by preventing separation and providing culturally sensitive alternatives as a last resort. The most popular motivation for *adoption* is believed to be centered on saving the babies from abuse, neglect and maltreatment by offering them a chance to grow up in a loving and safe environment. However, the fact is that very little is being done to investigate the motivation behind *adoption* and the readiness/suitability of the prospective adoptive parents to take care of a child (Ismail-Allouche, 2020; Hachey, 2015; Smolin, 2010). The critical account of *adoption* highlights that this practice needs to be placed within a broader political framework where the best interests of the child is not informing decision making. In this chapter, I highlight the realities based on the meanings derived from the critical account of *adoption* and I share the recommendations for actions to restore justice.

Current realities

Ongoing systemic forced separation

In Canada, racialized and black children seem to also be targeted by the child welfare system when compared to their proportion of the general population in Canada. In 2015, a study revealed that 40.8% of children in the child welfare system in Toronto are African Canadian yet made up only 8.5% of Toronto's population (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2015). Just on May 3rd, 2021, the Laurent Commission Report on Quebec Youth Protection (2021) confirmed what was already flagged by many Indigenous advocates: The higher percentage of black children in the system indicates a continued systemic racism and lack of resources and funds to

provide preventive measures. At the international level, racialized children account for almost all adoptions (UNICEF, 2006; Cantwell, 2014). To date, Indigenous children are over-represented in the child welfare system (Caldwell & Sinha, 2020; Sinha, V., & Kozlowski, A., 2013).

Though *adoption* has declined because of the restrictions on international travel, this practice is expected to build up as soon as airports resume normal activities (Neville & Rotabi, 2020). Recent international reports are indicating that some 34 million people worldwide are already facing emergency levels of acute hunger ("UN agencies call for urgent action," 2021). History has taught us that the *adoption* agencies will consider the most affected areas as a base to undertake illegal processes and facilitate *adoption* as the most suitable/easy rescue intervention, instead of funding projects in those most impacted settings (Rotabi & Bromfield, 2017; Hachey, 2015; Cantwell, 2014; Selman, 2012; Dubinsky, 2010). Hence, more children would be exposed to the risk of being detached from their mothers, families, communities, culture and language, to be deployed for *adoption* as a rescue practice.

Just a couple of days ago, while writing the thesis, a Facebook post was promoting *adoption* from Lebanon - a country currently witnessing one of the worst economic and political crises ever. A recent article published in the Financial Times has reported that "the Lebanese government statistics recorded a 400 per cent year-on-year rise in the average prices of food and non-alcoholic drinks for December, and the World Bank estimates that 45 per cent of the population are now living under the poverty line" (Cornish & Szalay, 2021). The Facebook post displayed the photo of a newborn. Furthermore, the publishers guaranteed to those interested in the baby that they will facilitate the process and the issuance of papers, to safely transfer the newborn to the United States. They even mentioned that there is no need for the adoptive family to travel to Lebanon to accompany the baby. Some ten people showed interest in adopting the

newborn without even learning about the circumstances leading the latter to be placed for *adoption*. This same pattern of *adoption* process was documented during the war in Lebanon (Ismail-Allouche, 2015, 2018, 2020).

Promoting children for *adoption* via social media is not limited to the Lebanese context. Historically, children's advertisements were undertaken through newspapers and telegrams, as documented by a recent study in Canada. This study analyzed 4,300 advertisements of children for *adoption* purposes, featured in the Toronto Telegram and the Toronto Star between 1964 and 1982. The analysis concluded to the fact that some children were promoted as gifts for exchange during parties, especially those who were labeled as "hard to adopt" (Hepburn, Bendo, Spencer, Sinclair & Bennett, 2020).

On March 28th, 2021, the US State Department told CNN they "have made clear" to China "the importance of resuming intercountry adoptions as a high priority and as soon as health conditions allow" (Neus, 2021). This is a very deliberate sign that the practice will soon resume back to recreate the wheel of deracination, detachment and assimilation in the unknown that historically proved to not be serving the best interests of the child. Human rights and specifically children's rights advocates need to deploy intervention strategies to ensure that children do not fall in the same trap that already proved to be wrong.

Healing through reconnecting with the missing parts of one's own story

Despite the clear governmental acknowledgment of the long-term irreversible implications of the Sixties Scoop through the settlement agreement for the survivors, Allyson Stevenson (2021) emphasizes that such settlement is incomplete because it did not include a proper hearing process or truth commission similar to the IRS Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (TRC). This act deprived thousands of survivors from their right to reconstruct their own stories and validate the pain they had to endure while being disconnected from their roots.

Intensive research work and documentation carried out by Indigenous researchers indicate that many adoptees felt excluded. They note that reconnecting the adoptees with their roots and earning back their sense of belonging to a community and culture is an important aspect in their healing process (Fast et al., 2019; Carrière & Richardson, 2009; Froman, 2007; Carrière, 2005; Lawrence, 2004; Nuttgens, 2004; Sinclair, 2009).

The reality indicates to the fact that millions of adoptees are not being able to connect back to their roots because of lack of awareness around the importance of this reconnection vis-à-vis the healing process of adoptees. Adoptees need to have safe platforms to convey the untold stories of their adoption experiences. Dr. Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao (2021, p. 35) confirms that the path "to reclaimed and strengthened cultural identity" is challenging. She highlights that resurgence occurs through telling one's own story because "the feeling of a sense of connection to community, to culture, to meaning is an antidote to sadness, anxiousness, and isolation" (p. 38). Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao (2021) emphasizes that telling one's own story of having been exposed to violence is a form of resistance.

In light of the shared thread of *adoption* as a colonial practice (already discussed in the historical review) and the narratives of the adoptees in the research-creation that indicate many intersections, I argue that the findings of the important research work previously carried out by Indigenous scholars, are valid for all adoptees, not only those who are Indigenous.

Research to inform decision-making

We all know that research informs practice. We also know that research needs funds to be carried out. Unfortunately, funds are more invested in research work that confirms the world

views of the funders. As a result, many international organizations and government agencies do not provide essential funds to initiate or support programs that would accompany adoptees in their reconnecting with roots and claiming back their stolen identities. Nevertheless, some very solid experiences are carried out by the adoptees themselves, especially those who are Korean who are pioneering advocacy work led by the stakeholders (Bergquist, Vonk, Kim & Feit, 2013). In addition, the hard work done by the adoptees from Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia and Sri Lanka has led to forcing the Netherlands to halt *adoption* in 2021 (O'Leary, 2021).

In Canada, the National Indigenous Survivors of Child Welfare Network formed a National Coalition of Indigenous People (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) to offer support and advocacy for those affected by the legacies of systemic removal of Indigenous children. The network aims to focus on the needs of survivors and to provide cultural teachings, emotional support, a safe place to share their narratives and guidance in finding needed resources (National Indigenous Survivors of Child Welfare Network, 2020). However, those initiatives require sustainable funding in order to ensure continuous support while to-date Indigenous children in Canada are approximately twelve times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be placed in out-of-home care, at the completion of a child welfare investigation (Sinha, V., & Kozlowski, A., 2013).

Despite the concerns expressed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding the over representation of Indigenous children in the welfare system in Canada (United Nations, 2012), the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled, on January 26, 2016, that the Government of Canada racially discriminated against 163,000 Indigenous Children, as a result of the inequitable provision of social services on reserves and the failure to ensure their access to public services without falling victim to inter-jurisdictional questioning (Fontaine, 2016). This served as a

confirmation of the continuous systemic violence and not of the mere reflection of colonial historical legacies. Unfortunately, the same lack of funding was noticed in many other countries. In Lebanon, I had to freeze the work of the Non-Governmental Organization that I co-established with pioneers such as Daniel Drennan ElAwar back in 2014, mainly because of the lack of resources. However, funds may be accessible for groups and organizations that do not voice the critical account of *adoption*.

Other factors prohibiting the adoptees from reconnecting with their roots, families and mothers are linked to the falsification of documents, rendering the reconnection as a mission impossible. This is added to a lack of supporting groups in the countries of origin to assist adoptees in their search process and the unreadiness of some adoptive families to help in the search process.

For many years, millions of dollars were invested in research work that emphasized inefficient solution. The collapse of the Youth Protection System in Canada during the COVID19 pandemic is additional evidence that solutions should be based on local world views and knowledges as recommended by the Laurent Report (2021). Knowledges and maneuvers are available. It is the political will that does not seem ready to invest in solutions that proved opportunities to make a difference. We will need to keep on asking the same question: is this for the best interests of children?

Recommendations

Addressing the legacies of forced separation through *adoption* and placement in residential care in concerned countries requires a holistic strategic plan engendering immediate, short-term and long-term reform processes. It also requires the commitment of the countries of origins and the countries of *adoption* to safeguard the best interests of the child and the adults

who were adopted as children. Intercountry and transracial adoption would not have been possible without the acceptance of the country of *adoption* to legalize the status of families who are adopting transracially and/or internationally. This is happening without questioning whether the process of *adoption* was legal or based on financial transactions and the falsification of birth records. It is a process of legalizing what is illegal and amounting to child trafficking.

The right to roots

Priority should be given to ensure the right of adult adoptees to share their stories, to access information on their origins and to be supported in their reconnection processes. Adoptees should be granted their legal right to access their native citizenship without jeopardizing their current one. For example, Korean adult adoptees have conducted incredible work in advocating for legislative reform to access dual citizenship in South Korea. They also organized national and international conferences, created professional journals, and established community-based and on-line forums for adoptees to meet and exchange (Freundlich, 2002). However, the rules that govern gaining back the lost Korean identity is not easy especially that most adoptees do not have access to their language. The words of kimura-lemoine describing the complexities associated with citizenship and identity are so expressive of the gravity of this dilemma like situation:

> J'ai fait tous les efforts possibles pour devenir canadien.ne, pour ne pas devoir être enterré.e en Belgique parce que c'est en rapport avec mon adoption. C'est quelque chose qui serait comme un échec pour moi d'être enterré.e en Belgique. C'est identitaire ça. C'est une démarche identitaire… comme on ne peut pas être enterré en Corée parce qu'on est considéré étrangers avec la loi coréenne.

(See Appendix D)

(I made all possible effort to become Canadian, so that I wouldn't have to be buried in Belgium because it had to do with my adoption. It's something that would be like a failure for me to be buried in Belgium. This is related to identity. It's an identity process ... like you can't be buried in Korea because you're considered foreigners under Korean law).

It is also a call for adoptees to join efforts, regardless of their places of origin and *adoption*. A global movement to voice out the critical account of *adoption* seems essential to convey the impact of the colonial legacies and its ongoing perpetuations on the countries and peoples who were the most impacted by them.

Rooting care

The UN Guidelines on Children without Parental Care (2010) states that every effort should be made to maintain the child within the family and community and whenever separation is deemed necessary, alternative community-based solutions should be put in place. States and international agencies should invest in preventing separation through strengthening the families at risk. Any reform needs to consider the broader underlying social complexities leading to forced separation such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination, stigmatization of unwed mothers and barriers to equal opportunities in education and social protection services.

Noting the shared thread of colonial legacies, outcomes and healing processes, Indigenous ways of caring seem the most aligned with those guidelines, as they foster Indigenous alternative care rooted in the communities of origin. In terms of chronological sequence, I argue that the UN guidelines are derived from the Indigenous ways of caring. Best practices are emerging in Indigenous communities and are proposed as an alternative to a system that is not delivering as expected (Fast et al., 2019). Pioneering programs led by the Yellowhead

Tribal Services Open Custom Adoption (YTAS), which ran between 2000 and 2010, highlight

the importance of connectedness to family, community culture and language. Whenever

separation was unavoidable, the program ensured that the adoptive family would share tribal

culture and history with the child. There was no room for secrets or lies about the child's origins.

Open custom adoption offered opportunities for children to develop a sense of relationality,

family belonging and community ties. From 2000 to 2010, YTSA placed over a hundred children

in adoptive homes without any breakdowns (Peacock & Morin, 2010). Unfortunately, the

program closed down because of lack of funds. This is a system that succeeded compared to a

colonial system that failed and is still failing Indigenous children and with them all the children

impoverished and marginalized by the same colonial mind. Rooting care seems very relevant to

Arab region where countries are still caught in the institutional form of care that failed in

providing the children with the care and support, they were perceived in need for (UNICEF,

2006). It is also important to highlight that rushing into *adoption* practices, as a way to copy the

international will not solve the root causes of separating a child from their family. In parallel,

most governments and organizations are inclined to copy models implemented elsewhere,

especially in the perceived modern world, without being informed that those models are yielding

to unsatisfactory outcomes.

  As a child protection expert, I provided support to many Arab countries in reforming the

alternative care sector. In my experience throughout more than twenty years of work in the field,

the best models, that worked and proved sustainable outcomes, were made locally by the

concerned people with the participation of children and youth in care. It seems important to call

upon experts in the field, me included, to be true to their commitments to safeguard the best

interests of the child as implied in the UN Guidelines on children without Parental. Promoting

adoption as the best solution for children without parental care will only create additional

complexities to the children, their birth mothers, families, and communities.

Breaking the vicious cycle of poverty

The vicious cycle of the continued colonial legacy will be irreversible unless poverty is

addressed at a global level. Many international agencies, as mentioned in Chapter I, have

pressured countries to commit to doing their utmost for the purpose of reducing the number of

children in institutional care and, whenever possible, prevent their placement in institutions in

the first place, or reunite them with their families (UN General Assembly, 2009). Unfortunately,

those countries, already impacted by poverty, found in *adoption* an escape from the commitment

to invest in preventing separation from the family.

Beyond employing pressure, the international organizations have the obligation to favor

community-based solutions while addressing poverty rather than promoting *adoption* as the best

solution for child protection issues. *Adoption* is not a solution for the child; it is only a

postponement and a shift in the focus from investing in impoverished families, especially those

headed by single mothers, to promoting the saviors. Meanwhile, in the process, we miss out on

the opportunity for a radical transformation by addressing the root causes of separation where

poverty seems a crosscutting factor.

Listening to the narratives of birth mothers

While emerging research work is attempting to account for the critical voice of adoptees,

we also need to realize that behind every single *adoption* story, there is a mother waiting there, in

the shadows and the pain of the blame and the unknown.

The voice of the birth mother was kept silent for many years. The mothers disappear from

the lives of their missing children. While adoptees may access documents and means to trace

back to their families, the birth mothers are totally absent from the scene. Research projects need to offer spaces to listen to these missing voices and their narratives of being separated from their newborn. This seems an essential step to unpack an untold story of invisibility.

Closing the circle

> It's yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now.
>
> (King, 2003, p. 119)

As the research is coming to end, I would like to close this insightful journey of knowing and learning by inviting the readers of the thesis and the viewers of "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting", to engage in a transformation process. Sharing my learning pathways on the methodologies and the critical account of *adoption* was an invitation to recognize that, sometimes, we need to unsettle our normative way of knowing to be able to perceive new realities that were veiled and uncovered.

In an open letter addressed to Concordia community, Dr, Catherine Richardson/ kinewesquao asks researchers claiming the use of Indigenous methodologies to be accountable to their relations to Indigenous communities and to "articulate how you are pushing back on colonial structures, creating new space and how this makes life better for Indigenous communities" (Richardson, 2021). We, researchers and practitioners, have the obligation to honor the voices of the adoptees and support them, as allies, in claiming back their rights to their languages, roots, lands and cultures. We can no longer deny that we, sometimes, engage in promoting colonial solutions for colonial made problems. We need to be true to our commitments to safeguard the best interests of the child that cannot be ensured without learning

about the colonial legacies that started back in the early 1800s with the establishment of the

Indigenous Residential Schools in Canada and in all colonialized countries and later with the

Sixties Scoop and its ongoing intergenerational systemic violence and racism.

And thus, the charge that we leave you, to think radically about *adoption*. Because the most radical statement one can make in reaction to the destructive slow-motion violence inherent in adoption practices is as follows: '*Adoption* is not acceptable; I no longer accept *adoption*.' Everything that is the basis for communal hope unfolds from this bold remark; from this stark truth; from this, a small yet decisive step forward toward justice.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar (Appendix C)

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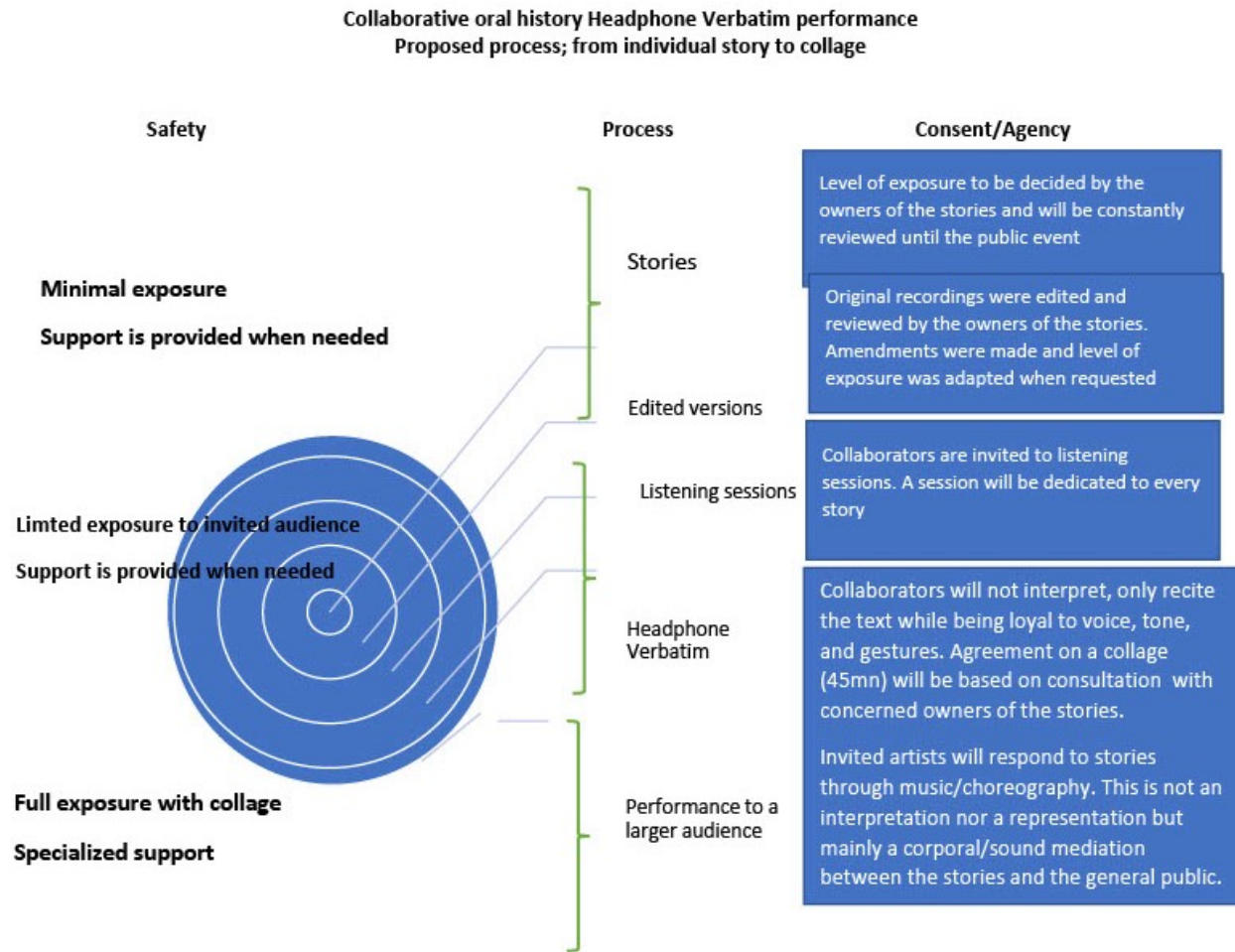
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Appendix A

Collaborative oral history headphone verbatim performance: Proposed process; from individual story to collage

Collaborative oral history Headphone Verbatim performance
Proposed process; from individual story to collage

Appendix B

Schedule of events

1- **Oral History Interviews**	**Day**
- kimura byol-nathalie lemoine (adopted from South Korea to Belgium)	March 25, 2020
- Anonymous (adopted from Haiti to Quebec)	March 26, 2020
- Krista Visser (adopted from Lebanon to the Netherlands)	April 10, 2020
- Amandine Gay (adopted by a white family in France)	April 22, 2020
- Jennifer Mitchell (Indigenous adopted by non-Indigenous family)	April 27, 2020
- Brent Mitchell (Indigenous fostered in a family in New Zealand	June 1, 2020
- Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance (adopted from China to Quebec)	June 30, 2020
- Daniel Drennan ElAwar (adopted from Lebanon to the US)	August 1, 2020
- Vicky Boldo (Indigenous adopted by non-Indigenous family)	August 17, 2020
2- **Listening Phase**	
- Krista	Sept. 7, 2020
- Anonymous	Sept. 9, 2020
- Amandine	Sept. 13, 2020
- Kimura-lemoine	Sept. 16, 2020
- Daniel	Sept. 20, 2020
- Jennifer	Sept. 21, 2020
- Annie	Sept. 23, 2020
- Brent	Sept. 26, 2020
- Vicky	Sept. 28, 2020

3- **Headphone Verbatim**	**Day**	**Time**	**Expected outcome**
- Impro. 1	Saturday Oct.3, 2020	3:00 pm to 5:00 pm	The collaborators will try to recount their selections to form text using the headphone verbatim technique.
- Impro. 2	Sunday Oct. 4, 2020	10:00 am to 12:00 pm	
- Impro. 3	Saturday Oct. 10, 2020	3:00 pm to 5:00 pm	
- Impro. 4	Sunday Oct. 11, 2020	10:00 am to 12:00 pm	

4- Exploration	Day	Time	Expected outcome
- Exploration	Sunday Sept. 20, 2020	10:00 am to 12:00 am	Ways of responses and interpretation (individual or collective) will be explored. This can be done online
- Workshop 1	Saturday Oct. 17, 2020	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	Respondents will get together physically and create while merging with text
- Workshop 2	Sunday Oct. 18, 2020	10:00 am to 1:00 pm	

5- Outcome	Day	Time	Expected outcome
- Closed presentation	Sunday Oct. 25, 2020	5:00 pm	The process will continuously be verified by the participants. The outcome will be presented first to a group of individuals who experienced adoption. Amendments will be made based on feedback
- Open presentation	November 28, 2020	5:00 to 7:00 pm	

Appendix C

Brochure

ineradicable voices: narrations toward rerooting

We gratefully acknowledge the licensing of the above photograph ('untitled' from "Up in the Sky", Tracey Moffatt, 1997) via a Creative Commons non-commercial/non-derivative license (CC BY-NC-ND 3.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/) by the Tate in London, England. All rights to this image and its use are reserved by the Tate, London. Link to image: https://www.tate-images.com/preview.asp?image=P78109

A collaborative oral history research-creation project
Based on the life stories of individuals who experienced transracial
and/or intercountry adoption
Zeina Ismail-Allouche, Individualized PHD (INDI), Concordia University.

Self-Care and Safety

The narratives of transracial and or intercountry adoption reveal harsh circumstances; Self-care is recommended.

Dr. Catherine Richardson and Vicky Boldo will be ensuring cultural safety as part of their commitment to psychological and cultural safety. Their presence will help people enter into a "flow state" of the collective experience and then to transition out of it back to equilibrium. If anyone needs support in processing this experience, they can debrief with Dr. Richardson and Vicky Boldo right after the performance.

[Dr. Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao](#) is a counselor specializing in violence prevention and recovery. She is the director of the First Peoples Studies at Concordia University.

Vicky Boldo is an Elder of Cree/Coast Salish/Métis heritage. Vicky is a registered energy medicine practitioner (ANQ). She was recently appointed as a board member in [The first permanent survivors-led board of directors for the National Sixties Scoop Healing Foundation.](#)

The Collaboration Process

"ineradicable voices: narratives toward rerooting" is an online oral history performance, the outcome of an Individualized Ph.D. research-creation of Zeina Ismail Allouche, INDI program, Concordia University, under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Fast, Dr. Steven High and Dr. Ursula Neuerburg.

The research-creation process is informed by Indigenous Methodologies where authority is shared and approaches are decolonized. Based on oral history interviews with individuals who experienced transracial and/or intercountry adoption, 17 persons collaborated to create a special Zoom edition performance that carried the ethics at the heart of the process. The creation process was informed by the listening sessions to the individual's story that aimed at holding a safe space for deep discussions.

All our decisions were made collectively and the voices of those who shared their life stories of being adopted guided us towards the best ethical way to represent their perceptions and views.

It is not a story; it is their real-life experiences that were not sufficiently heard.

While acknowledging both the limitations and opportunities of the online platform, we are happy to present to you our Zoom format of "ineradicable voices; narratives toward rerooting".

Ph.D. Supervision Committee

- Dr. Elizabeth Fast, Concordia University Chair in Land-Based Learnings and Indigenous Pedagogies, Associate Professor, Department of Applied Human Sciences
- Dr. Steven High, Professor, Department of History
- Dr. Ursula Neuerburg, Associate Professor, Chair Department of Theater

Advisory Committee

- Amandine Gay
- Daniel Drennan ElAwar
- kimura byol-nathalie lemoine
- Vicky Boldo

Zoom Visual Design:

Zeina Ismail-Allouche and kimura byol-nathalie lemoine

In collaboration with:

Amandine Gay, Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance, Brent Mitchell, Daniel Drennan ElAwar, Jennifer Mitchell, Haiti (Anonymous), Krista Visser and Vicky Boldo (Individuals who experienced transracial and/or intercountry adoption).

Emma Haraké, Ibtissam El Assaad, Jad Orphée Chami, Jen Cressey, Louise Bédard, Mona Merhi, Victoria May, Wissal El-Assaad and Yasmine Chami.

Dramaturgy for Zoom

Zeina Ismail-Allouche with the support of Mona Merhi

Performers (Audio-Verbatim)

Chloé Germentier (kimura-lemoine)

Emma Haraké (Annie)

Hiba Sleiman (Brent)

Ibtissam El Assaad (Krista)

Jad Orphée Chami (Daniel)

Jen Cressey (Vicky)

Sandy El Bitar (Amandine)

Sarah Atallah (Jennifer)

Yasmine Chami (Anonymous)

Embodied Response

Jen Cressey

Louise Bédard

Stella Sylvest

Victoria May

Original Musical Theme

Jad Orphée Chami

Photo Credits: Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance, Brent Mitchell, Daniel Drennan ElAwar, Jennifer Mitchell, kimura byol-nathalie lemoine and Zeina Ismail-Allouche

A Word from Collaborators

Amandine Gay, collaborator, adoptee, filmmaker

As an adoptee born in 1984 in France, I grew up with little to no representation or stories about adoption from the perspective of adoptees. I think that it's precious to share our paths and experiences, for the next generations, in order to improve adoption practices and the lives of all adoptees.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar

I was adopted by 1963 from Greater Syria, via Lebanon. In 2004, I returned to my country of birth and after 12 years, found my story and family. I consider myself to be an adoptee "rematriated", to borrowing a neologism from Indigenous North American activists. I see adoptees as sharing in the willful displacement, dispossession, and disinheritance that much of the planet's population faces, and I vow on behalf of them that my existence is resistance against such forces of uprooting and extirpation.

Hiba Sleiman, performer, collaborator

I have always been passionate and enthusiastic about creating and collaborating on artistic representations of real and personal stories. What a big responsibility to honor someone's story while creatively sharing it with others. As soon as I saw Zeina's call for collaborators, I showed interest to be part of this project. I know so little about transracial and intercountry adoption, I have definitely learned through the process and the stories and am yet to learn. I am humbled and honored to be a medium through which these stories are to be heard.

Ibtissam El Assaad, collaborator, friend, consultant

Little did I know about transracial adoption. What started in my mind as a project took a completely different path. It has become a journey of enlightening and of compassion.
Am in awe!

Jad Orphée Chami, collaborator, composer

How do we become a microphone for otherness? Amplify another person's life story? How can oral history performance contribute to the preservation and transmission of testimonies of adoption?
I am immensely thankful for the opportunity to listen to these essential narratives and to learn and grow as an artist, an immigrant and an identity-seeker.

Jen Cressey, collaborator, witness/listener, artist

When Zeina invited me to participate, I knew almost nothing about the topic of adoption. My ignorance has been replaced by a nascent understanding of the many injustices and great suffering heaped upon children severed from their mothers, families, communities and cultures only to be

subjected to racist abuse in their new "homes". This project has brought my attention to my own roots, and how much I have to learn about my origins. I am humbled and grateful to all who generously shared their life experiences.

Jennifer Mitchell, adoptee, collaborator, artist, entrepreneur
For so long I didn't know my story, it has taken my whole adult life to try to put the pieces back together. My paternal grandmother has shared her story and my aunt has also shared hers (both of which are published); I feel it's time to share mine. Aboriginal adoption has been basically told by the mainstream which is not by the people who have experienced it. It's time the people know "the lived experience" not the "they need to be saved" narrative which unfortunately has been the main view told by the people trying to assimilate us.

kimura byol-nathalie lemoine, collaborator, adoptee, artist, activist, archivist
kimura byol-nathalie lemoine is an abc (Asian belgo-canadian) a-gendered Asian adopted abroad artist, activist and archivist.

Krista Visser, adoptee, collaborator, teacher (MA)
The question I did hear most often is: Aren't you happy that you were adopted? I did participate because I hope to be able to give people an understanding of how it has been for me to be adopted and that it has nothing to do with being "happy to be adopted". This is important to me because I would like to create awareness for people who are considering adopting a baby.

Louise Bédard, collaboratrice, chorégraphe et interprète
Je me considère vraiment privilégiée d'avoir pu prendre part à ce projet dont le sujet est l'impact de l'adoption transraciale et transcontinentale. Il n'est pas facile d'écouter et d'entendre ces témoignages, ces histoires personnelles vécues au plus près de la moëlle du corps, du cœur et de l'esprit, mais c'est absolument essentiel. Chacune de ces histoires touchantes est riche d'informations et surtout d'enseignements dont il ne faudrait pas passer à côté. Nous ne pouvons que nous incliner devant cette force et ce courage qu'ont ces personnes adoptées de vouloir changer les choses en les dévoilant et en nous les révélant.

Mona Merhi, writer, theatre maker, collaborator
Listening to those stories is a blessing. Going back to our pasts and redeeming the missing parts - not by letting go of one's identity but by embracing the need to know: Where do I come from? Why was I abandoned? What systems endorsed and encouraged transracial adoptees to be adopted? To reckon all these processes and narratives from a distance as a listener and as a writer makes me indebted to the owners of those stories: They made me an inch closer to the Humane - as an act of reparation and recognition.

Sandy El Bitar, performer, artist, collaborator

I am grateful for this experience where I had the chance to witness the process of transformation from real life stories to a collective performance.

I am also grateful for the different stories and the different experiences of the adoptees. Wow! How vulnerable and how courageous they are to share these parts of their lives! They have widened my range of thoughts and emotions. Now, I know a little more, I know a little better; I feel connected to others a little more and I grew a little more.

Vicky Boldo, collaborator, adoptee, cultural support worker

I was born in 1966, a time when Canada had a very clear agenda to assimilate tens of thousands of "Indian" infants and children. I carry a vivid memory of being six years old, growing up in a racist time and environment that lacked nurturing and safety. I made a promise to myself then…" that I would help others one day" … Today as a mother, sister, auntie, friend, and proud grandmother I find some peace in knowing that I have arrived at that marker.

sawêyimik kahkiyaw nitôtemak mîna niwâhkômâkanak (Bless all my friends and relatives)

Wissal El-Assaad, Ph.D., collaborator, researcher

I am grateful to have embarked on this journey with all collaborators. This journey
was very enlightening and has completely changed my conception of transracial adoption. Listening to the adoptees' stories and learning about their long-life struggles made me realize how little I knew about this global practice.

Zeina Ismail-Allouche, INDI Ph.D. candidate, advocate

On November 21st, 2014, I collaborated with a couple of individuals who were adopted illegally from Lebanon on a performance based on their life experiences. At that time, the objective was to advocate for the right to access information. I certainly made mistakes by focusing on the objective at the expense of safety. Today, and after 5 years of my Ph.D. studies at Concordia University, I am revisiting the ethics of going public with life experiences that are emotionally and politically loaded.

Informed by Indigenous methodologies, I learned to trust the process by ensuring a shared authority and a collaborative pathway towards listening and creating. I discovered that nothing is more aesthetic than the authentic endeavor of encountering life stories with a commitment to holding a space for the voices of the silenced to be heard.

My sincere and deepest gratitude to:

- Every beautiful individual (who experienced transracial and/or intercountry adoption) who entrusted me with their life stories yet ongoing struggle.

- Candid collaborators who dedicated time and endured the encounter with the untold and unshared.
- The Advisory committee that kept on reminding me of what is core; ethical representation.
- The supervisory committee, I would not have been able to endure the learning process without their support.
- The INDI program, Concordia University.
- Indigenous peoples of Canada for welcoming me on their unceded lands.
- The brave Indigenous women who embraced me and welcomed me in their circle.

Daniel Drennan ElAwar' statement on intercountry and/or transracial adoption

We remain the repulsed, splinters, expelled from the body; the corpus surrounds us, englobes us, drives us out; it then returns to a state of "as if" we had never existed. When we dare attempt return, we do not notice that the immune response starts yet again, only at this point we are incapable of understanding its reasonings and explanations. Thus is primed our rude awakening.

For this state of affairs, we are told we should be grateful; that we are better off; that our adoptions were God's will. Such remarks come easily to those whose lives remain a continuum, with or without us; for those with ancestry, and genealogy, and history with or without us; whose lives have continuity backward and forward, with or without us. In stark contrast are our lives halted. Interrupted. Ruptured.

And so, we exist as the discontinuous and the uprooted. And so, we are denied agency, political embodiment, civil validity, as well as base humanity. And so, adoptees are historically faced with the existential contradiction of adoption into classes and nation-states otherwise bent on their very destruction and their wholesale eradication.

This annihilation is not staunched by the adoptive act. It continues apace, contrary to mythologies of salvation and chosen status. The dominant culture's adoptive actions have thus always correlated with extirpation, with social death, with inscribed eugenics, and with intentional genocide: a predestined, lifelong, and societally imposed "final exit".

Such a vaguely bestowed "existence", premised in notions of our merest survival, is a great and totalizing violence. In this light, the only valid response is a revolutionary one, premised upon an awakened "radical popular consciousness". Paulo Freire defines the radical as one who "is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled". Angela Davis states that radical means deep understanding; literally "'grasping things at the[ir] root'".

Davis further states: "I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change; I am changing the things I cannot accept." Here, in the face of the logical conclusion of our attempted eradication, the idea of "radicalization"—a revived rootedness—can be seen as the obvious and only antidote. For in fact the bare minimum of our existing day-to-day proves us to be "ineradicable": unable to be uprooted.

And thus, the charge that we leave you, to think radically about adoption. Because the most radical statement one can make in reaction to the destructive slow-motion violence inherent in adoption practices is as follows: "Adoption is not acceptable; I no longer accept adoption." Everything that is the basis for communal hope unfolds from this bold remark; from this stark truth; from this, a small yet decisive step forward toward justice.

Appendix D

Script[27]

ineradicable voices; narrations toward rerooting

ACCAPALA

My name is Daniel, I was born in Lebanon, My name is Annie, I was born in China

Je m'appelle kimura, je suis né.e en Corée, (*My name is kimura, I was born in Korea*), My name is Jennifer ...

Je m'appelle Amandine, je suis née sur X en France. (*My name is Amandine, I was born as X in France*) My name is Vicky, I was adopted… My name is Brent, My name is Krista, I was adopted from Lebanon.

Je suis née en Haïti.

Jennifer: I don't say my name is Jennifer.

I guess my colonized name would be Jennifer Mitchell.

Annie: My current name is Annie Lafrance, as for my artistic name, I use my Chinese name, which is Tóng Zhòu and I also put my French name which is Annie Lafrance, Annie Tóng Zhòu Lafrance! I was born in Tongling, at least that's what it says, in the province of Anhui and I was adopted by 1999, but my day of birth was the 8th of August in 1998.

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[27] Amandine, Anonymous and kimura-lemoine expressed themselves in French. The translation to English is provided in *Italic*

Brent: My name is Brent

Vicky: I was born Shelley Lynn and then, raised as Vicky Lynne. I was born in New Westminster, in British Columbia.

Amandine: Donc, bien moi je m'appelle Amandine Gay et j'ai été adoptée en 1985 en France, mais donc je suis née sous le secret, née sous X comme on dit dans le langage courant et donc je suis née en Octobre 84, et les informations que je vais te donner moi je ne les ai pas eus tout de suite pendant mon enfance, je les ai maintenant parce que j'ai fait une demande d'ouverture de mon dossier au conseil national pour l'accès aux origines personnelles (CNAOP) qui est un organisme qui était créé en France en 2002. Donc ce que je sais de mon histoire c'est que ma mère de naissance était marocaine. Elle est arrivée en France elle n'avait pas la nationalité française en situation irrégulière. Elle est tombée enceinte d'un homme Martiniquais et ne pouvant pas garder l'enfant pour des raisons qui étaient les siennes dont je ne connais pas…elle a donc décidé d'accoucher sous le secret…

(*So, well my name is Amandine Gay, and I was adopted by 1985 in France. Therefore, I was born in secret, born under X as we say in everyday language in October 84. Also, the information that I am going to give you wasn't acquired immediately during my childhood. I have them now because I made a request to open my file to The National Council for Access to Personal Origins (CNAOP) which is an organization that was created in France in 2002. So, what I know about my story is that my birth mother was Moroccan. She arrived in France and did not have French nationality which put her in an irregular situation. She got pregnant from a Martinican man and could not keep the child for some personal reasons that I do not know... So, she decided to give birth in secret...*)

Krista: I think it is very hard that you don't have anything, any memory, any special thing in your life that reminds you of your birth family. There is basically nothing that you can touch or that you have…therefore... and I think that it is very hard, very tough… um… I came up with the idea one day that even when I don't know how my biological mother looks, it doesn't mean that she is not there and therefore it doesn't mean that she doesn't deserve a picture frame!

Amandine: La question des archives est tellement centrale pour les personnes adoptées ; ce qu'on a et ce qu'on n'a pas. C'est une façon pour raconter l'histoire qui dit quelque chose sur nos parcours de vie.

(The issue of archives is so central to adoptees; what we have and what we don't have. It's a way of telling the story that says something about our life journeys.)

Jennifer: I don't say my name is Jennifer. I guess my colonized name would be Jennifer Mitchell. I don't know my like indigenous name yet. I'm in the process of trying to get all those pieces filled... I was born in Fort McMurray in 1982 and I was adopted out. Uh, when I was three and a half, I don't… I have the exact date and what not that I was adopted by my adoption package, but I'll just quickly check and see if it's here. And maybe like my dad. This one document states that my dad signed the kids away!!!! With the understanding that all three of us were going to be adopted together on July 12th of 1986, so that was 1986, so I wanted to, uh, that says. I was four years old. I'm not. I was told I was three and a half. I'm looking, and I'm not sure that I know the adoption papers in here. November 17, 1985. That sounds more… more right??…"

kimura: Moi, j'ai été adopté .e de Corée du Sud en Belgique à la fin des années 60… Mon nom de naissance que je n'ai pas connu pendant 25 ans était kimura byol. Mon nom d'adopté.e coréen.ne était Cho Mihee et mon nom d'adopté.e Belge est Nathalie Lemoine. Officiellement,

j'ai été adopté.e à 4 ans et demi mais j'avais un an et demi. Donc, on m'a donné 3 ans en plus. Ma date officielle d'anniversaire est (19) 65 mais ma date réelle biologique est (19) 68. C'est en 1991 quand j'avais 23 ans que j'ai connu mon âge réel.

(Me, I was adopted to Belgium from South Korea at the end of the 60s… My birth name that I actually didn't know for 25 years was kimura byol. My adopted name is Cho Mihee which is Korean, and my Belgian adopted name is Nathalie Lemoine. Officially, I was adopted at four and a half years old but I was actually a year and a half. So, they made me three years older. My official birthday is (19) 65 but my actual biological date is (19) 68. It was only in 1991 when I was 23 that I found out my real age)

Krista: My name is Krista Visser. I was born on 6 December 1973, in Beirut Lebanon and I live in the Netherlands. I was adopted by Dutch parents. Um…On my Lebanese passport, it does say or state that I was born in Beirut but the adoption lady told my parents… my Dutch parents, that I am really born in Tripoli… Um... in Lebanon… but that for government reasons or for reasons to get the passport for the baby, it was, eh, documented that I am born in Beirut. I always believed that it was a real passport but I have been told that it might be a fake passport because on a real passport you see an expiration date and on my passport that I was given when I was a baby there is not an expiration date. Therefore, people believe, and they have told me that it might be a fake passport. But I am not sure because… um… no… I am not sure.

Anonymous: Par rapport à mon nom d'origine je n'ai pas cette information-là, quand j'ai commencé à faire mes recherches sur mes origines, parce que j'ai effectué un retour en Haïti. J'ai récupéré tous mes papiers d'adoption que mes parents avaient gardé depuis cette époque-là, et c'est beaucoup beaucoup de documents que j'ai fichés… une vingtaine de fois et il n'y a pas

l'information sur mon nom d'origine… mais j'ai... dans l'information que j'ai, je sais que ma mère, c'est dans les papiers. Donc, parfois il faut faire attention parce que parfois les informations qu'on a dans les papiers d'adoption, surtout à cet époque-là… mais ce qu'il y avait dans les papiers c'est que ma mère aurait accouchée au centre de maternité et elle aurait quitté le centre de maternité trois jours après avoir accouché sans son bébé… donc sans moi…"

(Regarding my original name, I didn't have that piece of information. I started to research my origins when I returned to Haiti. I recovered all my adoption papers that my parents had kept since that time, and it's a lot of documents that I filed ... twenty times and there is still no information on my original name… but I have… in the information that I gathered from those, found something regarding my mother. So, you have to be careful because sometimes the information found in the adoption papers, could be inaccurate, especially at that time ... but what was in the papers is that my mother had given birth at the center's maternity ward and had left the maternity center three days after giving birth without her baby… so without me…)

kimura: Alors nous, nous n'étions pas endormis avec des médicaments, on était vraiment infernaux dans les avions et ça criait de partout. 4, 5 rangées rien que des bébés adoptés. Il y a des films sur ça. Des bébés ou des enfants parfois plus âgés aussi.

Ha… et je pense que le voyage était traumatisant parce que c'était 24 heures de voyage. Ce n'est pas juste un 5 heures (de vol).

Mais en tant qu'enfant tu savais que tu quittais… je ne sais pas comment t'expliquer, mais moi j'ai vomi, j'étais malade. Je ne pense pas vraiment que j'étais en mauvaise santé... des sensations c'est ça…on ne peut pas expliquer. Ce sont mes parents adoptifs qui m'ont dit que j'étais dégueulasse. Parce que j'avais vomi sur moi et ils ne m'avaient pas changé. Mon père pensait

que j'étais plus âgé.e, alors il a dit : « mais je n'ai pas demandé un bébé », et donc ils lui ont dit : 'C'est la vôtre, vous devez la prendre' et c'est comme ça que ça s'est passé…

(So, we weren't asleep due to drugs. We were really hellish on the planes and it was loud all over the place. 4, 5 rows of babies who were just adopted. There are movies about it. Babies and sometimes older children too.

Ha… and I think that the trip was traumatic because it was 24 hours of travel. It' wasn't just a 5 hour (flight).

But as a child you knew you were leaving ... I don't know how to explain it to you, but I threw up, I was sick. I don't really think I was in bad health ... feelings that's it ... you can't explain. It was my adoptive parents who told me I was disgusting. Because I threw up on myself and they hadn't helped me get changed. My dad thought I was older, so he said, 'but I didn't ask for a baby', and so they said, 'It's yours, you have to take it' and that is how it happened…)

Daniel: I was born in 1963. I was told my birthday was in August, but later when I found my story, we realized I was older than what the nuns at the orphanage had told me. My birthday is more likely in mid or late July. I'm from the Awar family. And through DNA research and some fortuitous circumstances, I was able to find my story. I don't know my original first name, but I do know my family name is ElAwar…. I remember looking at the pictures of my arrival in Abadan, Iran where my adoptive father was working at the time and I kept saying to both my adoptive parents: "I wasn't a newborn." I was… I was big. I wasn't a tiny little newborn baby.

Amandine: Je pense qu'un des points aveugles dans toutes les discussions c'est comme en fait c'est très stigmatisé de se séparer de son enfant, on n'entend jamais les mères, donc on ne sait pas

quels sont les impacts long terme sur elles, psychologiquement, physiologiquement… d'être séparée de son enfant et pour moi c'est un grand souci.

(I think one of the blind spots in all the discussions is like it's actually much stigmatized to separate from your child. You never hear from the mothers, so you don't know what the long-term impacts are on them, psychologically, physiologically... to be separated from your child, and for me it is a big concern.)

Vicky: I was born Shelley Lynn and then raised as Vicky Lynne. I was born in New Westminster, in British Columbia. (her voice)

And, um…Yeah, in my adoption file I guess it indicates that there… It was… There was some trouble, I think in the… in the couple and so. I think one of the reasons for adopting another child was to, I don't know bring improvement to that relationship or bring something else to the family. Um… But it's also interesting to know that there was another little girl who had been placed with that family prior to my placement, but she had been removed.

Um… for questionable neglect. And what else can I say about me? Um…

Brent: Born Pine Falls. Winnipeg Manitoba 27th December 1957. Taken by Winnipeg child services when 1 year old.

Went through 8 different foster homes before I was with my last foster family, foster parents went to New-Zealand and I was taken to New-Zealand. Arrived in New-Zealand, in December 1962/1963. We then moved down in the South Island that was when the smacking doses of castor oil and emotional abuse began.

We then moved up to Mapua, then on to Richmond in Nelson.

All through this time we lived in Caravan parks.

The foster parents then bought a house in Nelson, I went to Nayland primary school. I would be dropped off at school early and had to walk home after school, it was a beach walk as we lived on a spit with the sea all around.

Life with the foster parents was getting worse, the foster mother was the one who dished out the violence, it only took the smallest thing to set her off, the beatings were tolerable at times, I always felt I deserved it as I was always naughty, some of these were highlighted by humiliation after being spanked with wooden spoon had to stand there without pants on until told I could put them on. When I asked to go out and play with other kids, was told tomorrow and I was given castor oil, this didn't take long to work and I was in the toilet for much of the time,

When this was going on, I told the social worker about the castor oil treatment, Bad move on my part. She had an excuse for that, (the foster mother was able to put on quite the show for social workers) and the beating I got when I got home was the worst ever with a belt and she lost it with me. I was told to never speak to social workers.

This was my life with beatings, my only saving grace was the times I could take the dog for walk along the beach, the beach was my place where I was safe, happy.

One day I strayed from where I usually was at the beach and I was approached by a man who bought me an ice cream. I told him where I lived in the street and he was around the park by our beach area again and lollies were given, it was then that the abuse started.

I wanted to say something but wasn't given a chance when I got home with lollies and late, was beaten and accused of stealing lollies.

After that I just accepted my life as it was, I started smoking, drinking what I could get my hands on. I would sneak cigarettes from foster parents.

I was told when I was 11 that I would be getting a bike for Xmas this didn't happen and was told only good boys get bikes

ACCAPALA

Mes papiers étaient…*(My papers were…)*

When I took my file…

Documents….one day, not ready yet… falsified….

Dans l'information que j'ai, je sais que ma mère, c'est dans les papiers. *(From the information I had, I knew my mother was mentioned in the papers.)*

Not sure… here it says something and there something else…. Handwriting…margin for human mistakes... all done with one Handwriting… everything was done to hide…

kimura: Mes papiers avaient été changés même à l'hôtel de ville pour pouvoir me mettre dans un orphelinat d'enfant au lieu de bébé. Comme j'étais abandonné à 2 mois, j'étais considéré.e comme un bébé mais il n'y avait plus de place dans les orphelinats pour bébés. J'ai été brulé.e parce qu'on mettait les bébés près de feu. Peut-être je n'étais pas la seule non plus. Mais sans doute ils s'arrangeaient parce qu'il y avait trop d'enfants qui étaient officiellement soit trouvés, soit abandonnés et donc ils faisaient ça comme à l'arrangement. Ils adaptaient la situation alors

sans doute il y avait d'autres bébés aussi ou de petits enfants et ils étaient moins maltraités par les grands. C'est pour cela que j'ai des cicatrices et toutes de l'orphelinat.

(My papers had been changed even at the town hall so that they could put me in an orphanage for an orphanage for children rather than babies. As I was abandoned at 2 months, I was considered a baby but there was no room in the baby orphanages. I was burnt because they used to put babies near the fire. Maybe, I wasn't the only one either. But no doubt they were trying to make it work because there were too many children who were officially either found or abandoned, and so they were just doing it the way they knew how to. They were adapting to the situation so probably there were other babies as well or small children and they were less abused by the older ones. That's why I have scars and all from the orphanage.)

Vicky: I think I first realized I was adopted. It might have been… I think my one brother who… the one who was nine years older than me; We always had a very kind of volatile relationship because I was always the pesky little sister and he was the mean Big Brother.

And it wasn't until later when we actually… probably I was 19 or so 18 or 19 when we finally started putting pieces together of how we were raised. Um… How we were both affected because of the environment that we were being raised up in and so… When I was young like… he… used to say things like, "Oh, you're not my real sister" or. Um…And I think I was about 9 years old.

And I… remember the instance vividly.

Where I think that's where… I really understood because I still remember that we were… At that point, we were living with Frances because the courts kept giving her custody.

And, um... We were sitting having dinner. Pork chops. And lots of ketchup and…

I remember him saying distinctly… saying that time of like… You're not my real sister anyhow, you're adopted. And me getting off my chair. I still remember kind of holding on to the table leg.

And… I don't know, kind of maybe not really wanting to believe it or something.

I was having a reaction. I don't remember exactly what that was, but I, I remember kind of that changed…It changed something in me, you know. It wasn't a safe place. Yeah, she was extremely neglectful. And abusive. And so, you know that that brother remembers how he used to be confused as a little boy.

kimura: Je savais où étaient mes documents. Je ne les ai pas volés parce qu'ils ne les ont pas cachés mais c'est vrai que lorsque je suis parti.e, à 13 ans, lorsque je suis parti.e, j'ai pris les trucs principaux pour moi c'était mon dossier d'adoption, une poupée, et quelques affaires pas plus, je suis parti.e très vite en fait.

(I knew where my documents were. I didn't steal them because they didn't hide them from me, but it's true that when I left, at 13, when I left, I took my main belongings with me: My adoption record, a doll, and a few things. I left very quickly actually.)

Anonymous: Toute ma vie j'ai sentis que je vivais entre deux chaises, maintenant je veux créer ma propre chaise. Ma chaise à moi… je veux avoir mon histoire. Parce que l'histoire d'adoption appartient à la famille adoptive. C'est le temps de faire mon histoire, ma chaise...

(All my life, I felt that I was living between two chairs. Now I want to create my own chair. My own chair… I want to create my own story. Because the adoption story belongs to the adoptive family. It's time to make my own story, my chair...)

kimura: J'ai fait tous les efforts possibles pour devenir canadien.ne, pour ne pas devoir être enterré.e en Belgique parce que c'est en rapport avec mon adoption. C'est quelque chose qui serait comme un échec pour moi d'être enterré.e en Belgique. C'est identitaire ça. C'est une démarche identitaire… comme on ne peut pas être enterré en Corée parce qu'on est considéré étrangers avec la loi coréenne.

(I made all possible effort to become Canadian, so that I wouldn't have to be buried in Belgium because it had to do with my adoption. It's something that would be like a failure for me to be buried in Belgium. This is related to identity. It's an identity process ... like you can't be buried in Korea because you're considered foreigners under Korean law.)

Daniel: And so, when I found out my story and I found out that my mother wanted to keep me— and my father's family did not want that to happen — but she did. She did get them to allow her to keep me for an extra month so that she could nurse me. So, in all likelihood, I was about two months old when I was adopted and not the three weeks that the orphanage was saying Everything, all of my misgivings, all of the lies of the orphanage in terms of evidence and paper trail, all of the aspects of it that didn't ring true all of a sudden made sense when I found out the details.

kimura: Alors moi depuis toujours, depuis …ils me disent que je suis chinoise, des gens arrêtaient mes parents adoptifs dans la rue et demandaient combien j'avais coûté… moi, je me considère comme un chien en fait, c'est tout. Parce qu'on achetait un chien, on achetait un chat, on achetait un.e asiatique. Je n'étais pas humain. Enfin moi, je ne me considérais pas comme humain jusqu'au moment où on a eu ma sœur. Là, je me suis dit.e, on se ressemble. Ma sœur

adoptée (vient) d'une autre famille… ha… mais c'est à ce moment-là que j'ai pris cette forme de personne entière je dirais.

(So, for me, ever since… they told me I was Chinese, people would stop my adoptive parents on the street and ask them how much I had cost them… I considered myself like a dog actually, that's all. Because one could buy a dog, one could buy a cat, one could buy an Asian. I was not human. Well, I didn't consider myself human until we had my sister. There, I said to myself, we look alike. My adopted sister (comes from) another family ... ha ... but that's when I took that whole-person form, I would say.)

Amandine: Les histoires sont tellement différentes, ça dépend où les enfants ont grandi… et aussi c'est très différent si les enfants adoptés sont blancs ou non blancs… alors que pour moi toutes les personnes qui ne sont pas blanches; ils avaient des questions sur le rapport avec les origines, du racisme… c'est vraiment difficile de voir une similarité évidente même si effectivement il y'a cette question de rapport aux origines qui revient. Il y a la question de rapport de classe aussi qui revient beaucoup, la famille d'origine, la famille adoptive et si jamais, il y avait des retrouvailles, le rapport de classe revient, les rapports Nord Sud reviennent, question géopolitique…

(The stories are so different. It all depends on where the kids grew up… and also it's very different if the adopted children are white or not white… However, for me all the people who are not white had questions about the relation to origins, racism... etc. It's really hard to see an obvious similarity even though there is indeed this question of relation to origins that comes up. There is also the question of class relation which pops up a lot, the family of origin, the adoptive

family, and if ever there was a reunion, the relation between classes returns, the North-South

associations come back, a geopolitical question par excellence)

Daniel: When I hit 40 I had a bit of an identity meltdown and made the decision to go back to Beirut and found my job at the American University there. When I talk to people about it now—and I'm comfortable talking about this now—I avoided thinking about it for a while, but I really feel like my life started at 40 years old. Like everything before that was me attempting to make something of the half-baked identity I was given by being adopted.

kimura: Je ne sais pas ce n'est pas concret, c'était un sentiment que ma mère biologique veillait sur moi… je ne sais pas… je ne connaissais pas du tout l'histoire à ce moment-là mais à partir du moment où je suis parti.e de chez moi, je me suis senti.e libre.

C'est vrai que j'ai toujours penser à elle. Tout le temps tout le temps.

(I don't know, it's not concrete, it was a feeling that my birth mother was watching over me… I don't know… I didn't know the story at all at that time, but from the moment I left home, I felt free.

It's true that I always think of her. All the time all the time.)

Krista: Now, (laughing), I am 46, so I think about it a bit different, eh, than I did when I was 18 because when I was 18 I did believe, don't laugh, I did believe that a biological mother could give birth to a baby, give away a baby, and forget that she had a baby…. and… eh…. like a dog…given away its puppies... um… and after I became a mom myself, I realized... (laughing)... that is impossible… you cannot forget that you have given birth to a baby. So, after I gave birth

myself, my idea about adoption, um, did change and I did realize that even when our contact has been broken… between the mom and the baby…the mom and me, eh, our bonds didn't break. Because you cannot do that…you can cut the contact, but you cannot break a bond because it is there… it's… you can't cut it…

Amandine: Alors quand les femmes ont accès à la contraception, ont accès à l'avortement, quand ce n'est plus stigmatisé d'être une maman célibataire par exemple…ben…quasiment, il n'y aurait plus des enfants séparés de leur famille biologique…donc c'est ça pour moi l'enjeu, c'est qu'aujourd'hui… parce que à l'époque on n'a pas pensé aux adoptés, ça peut se comprendre mais maintenant on est quand même à une phase où il y a 2, 3 générations d'adoptés adultes qui demandent l'accès aux origines, qui ont besoins de leurs antécédents médicaux, etc. Donc pour moi toute la question de secret, elle est aussi imposée en termes de victimisation des femmes qui ont une grossesse non désirée…

(So, when women have access to contraception, have access to abortion, when it is no longer stigmatized to be a single mother for example… well… there would almost be no more children separated from their biological families. … So that's what for it was for me today… because at the time we did not think about adoptees, it can be understood, but now we are still at a phase where there are 2, 3 generations of adult adoptees who ask for access to origins, who need their medical history, etc. So, for me the whole question of secrecy is also imposed in terms of victimization of women who have an unwanted pregnancy...)

kimura: Les parents ont besoin d'enfants pour exister, pour avoir une raison de vivre, donc nous on vient là pour les aider…c'est ça. C'est comment le discours est placé aussi… Oui, les enfants

ont besoin d'une alternative mais pourquoi l'adoption internationale est nécessaire ? il y a toute

sorte d'adoption. Il y a l'adoption plénière, il y a l'adoption ouverte… moi, je ne suis pas contre

l'adoption ouverte… Ça veut dire (quand) on ne sépare pas la culture de l'enfant. Ça veut dire

qu'on ne ment pas sur son passé, on ne ment pas pour faire plaisir à l'adoptant… C'est qui qui

paie ? Ce sont les parents adoptifs… C'est eux qui font marcher le marché… C'est l'adoption

plénière qui est le problème pour moi… l'adoption en elle-même, c'est un bon geste pour moi…

mais c'est comment c'est fait qui est le problème pour moi.

(Parents need children to exist, to have a reason to live, so we come here to help them… that's it.

This is how the rhetoric is placed too… Yes, children need an alternative but why is inter-country

adoption necessary? There are all kinds of adoption. There is full adoption, there is open

adoption… I am not against open adoption… That means (when) we do not separate the culture

from the child. It means that we do not lie about our past, we do not lie to please the adopter …

Who is paying? It is the adoptive parents… They are the ones who make the market work… It is

full adoption that is the problem for me… the adoption itself, it is a good gesture for me… but it

is how it's done that's the problem for me.)

Krista: For instance, I asked her, the day that she did receive me, she got me.

My Dutch parents flew over there, um, on Christmas day in 1973, and they got me the day after.

They did receive in the hotel lobby, um, and since I don't even know where, I was staying in a

hospital or in, how do you call that a home where children live without, yes, so, basically, there is

no information at all… "I asked my mom: Did you save what I was wearing, because I was not

naked when you got me? And… um… I saw that it was very tough because she told me she did

not save, eh, what I was dressed or wrapped in, or anything, and my mom saved everything her

house is packed from bottom till up with stuff. So, she saves everything and why she didn't save... what I was dressed in when she got me, and I think that it is very hurtful that she didn't. When I ask her about it she thinks that it is very hurtful because I am pointing at something she didn't do well… But I think that this is really hurtful; it was the only connection that I have... because someone must have dressed me that morning before sending me off to be adopted. You know. So, it is the only connection that you have with your past. So, for me it would be very, umm, I am thinking of the word… meaningful, let us call it meaningful, to have that, that first whatever it was that I was wearing. You don't have to save the dirty diapers. Ok, you know what I mean… but the baby cloth, the outfit, the blanket I don't know…

kimura: Alors, ils nous ont adopté.e.s et après il y avait plein plein…

Ce n'était pas comme si on ne connaissait pas d'adopté.e.s coréen.ne.s. On était comme une vingtaine, dans cette commune, adopté.e.s en moins que 5 ans donc c'est quand même… il y avait deux écoles dans cette commune… donc on se voyait toujours… nos parents étaient blancs. Il y avait des Coréen.ne.s adopté.e.s qui se parlaient Coréen dans la cour. Ils n'ont pas oublié leur langue. Mais ils le faisaient en cachette parce que quand ils parlaient coréen à la maison, ils se faisaient taper dessus. C'est comme les pensionnats. C'est la même chose…on était comme des esclaves émotionnels… on devait rendre nos parents heureux. C'était ça notre but…c'était ça notre raison d'être. On devait leur faire plaisir… sinon, on risquait d'être renvoyé.e.s dans les poubelles en Corée… Quand le racisme est dans ta maison… c'est encore plus difficile.

(So, they adopted us and afterwards there were so many others like us...

It wasn't like we didn't know Korean adoptees. We were like twenty, in this commune, adopted by less than 5 years… There were two schools in this commune… so we always saw each other…

our parents were white. There were Korean adoptees who spoke Korean to each other in the yard. They haven't forgotten their language. But they did it on the sly because when they spoke Korean at home, they got hit. It's like residential schools. It's the same… we were like emotional slaves… we had to make our parents happy. That was our goal… that was our reason for being. We had to please them … otherwise we risked being sent back to the trash in Korea … When racism is in your house … it's even more difficult.)

ACCAPALA

Est-ce que tu préfères ta mère biologique ou ta mère adoptive ?

Est-ce que tu te sens ton pays d'adoption ou ton pays d'origine ? Qu'est-ce que tu préfères ? Qui es-tu ?

(Do you prefer your biological mother or your adoptive mother?

Do you relate more to your adopted country or your country of origin?)

Well, why would you? Why would you want to know that?

What would you say to your father?

If you could meet him. Um?

Pourquoi tu ne retournes pas chez toi ? Mais c'est ou chez moi ?

(What do you prefer? Who are you?

Why don't you go home? But where is home?)

Why are you coming back to search?

Aren't you happy that you were adopted?

Jennifer: I have a feeling like one of my first memories as a child was being in a crib in like an apartment and then a small crack of light through the door. And then maybe I'm curious and crawling out and then two guys in suits were at the door and then I was. I don't know who the person was, but I was rushed back into my crib, and I'm pretty sure I was in like a foster home at that point. And then I also remember like a fold down table on a plane, and I think that was during the adoption process when I was flown down to meet my new family. My adopted family never withheld that information, telling me that I was always adopted.

But when I was young I didn't know what that meant. I didn't understand that, when I was very young child and I maybe had questions, always had questions like who am I, where, where did I come from and all that stuff?

People started to take notice that I look different than them and then they brought it to my attention through racism and picking on me. So, what I can remember is like being in junior social studies class then the subject of Native Americans came up and they all kind of like turned to me and looked at me and I couldn't understand because they're like expected me to know all of this history and what not, but I had no idea of anything.

I just was clueless… I just didn't really understand. I just knew that the tone was very hateful.

Then when I became homeless. I started to be around indigenous people and drinking and partying in the back alleys and what I noticed is that there was a lot of trauma. A lot of hurt a lot

of that, but they kept their sense of humor and I heard their stories and I realized I didn't have my own story and I know that I was free to do what I want.

The day that I found out I was pregnant is the day that I quit drinking and being a daily alcoholic. It's going on six years without a drop of alcohol. I found a purpose. I found that it wasn't just about me anymore. That is about my son and I started my path really healing 'cause I knew from my own experiences with my mom and how it affected me, my upbringing. I didn't want that for my son, always wondering where he came from and why wasn't loved enough for them to keep him. I always wanted to be by my son's side.

Vicky: You know he was nine and 10 years old. I was an infant at that point, right? And he was always tasked with changing my diapers and looking after me.

And it was cloth diapers back then with the big diaper pins, the safety pins and he said he used to stick me. Used to stick me with the pins. Just out of his own frustration and resentment for having to care for me.

kimura: Pour moi, c'est une expérience personnelle, c'est certain… mais aussi on est à peu près 200.000 adopté.e.s de la Corée. Ce n'est pas juste mon histoire, il y a des meilleures histoires, il y a des histoires qui sont plus positives…Moi, je ne pense pas que mon histoire soit nécessairement négative…mais c'est vraiment à partir du moment qu'on ne veut pas considérer l'adoption internationale en masse, je dis bien EN MASSE… ça veut dire, on nie le fait qu'on était manipulé… comme… c'est un génocide culturel. C'est comme si on niait les pensionnats, c'est comme si on niait le scoop 60 et comme si on niait les histoires des Aborigènes en Australie… C'est une sorte de déportation volontaire et ça prend le pays adoptant et le pays d'origine. On ne peut pas que blâmer la Corée… It takes 'two to tango'…

(For me it's a personal experience, for sure ... but also, we are about 200,000 adoptees from Korea. It's not just my story. There are stories with better outcomes, there are stories that are more positive… As for me, I don't think my story is necessarily negative… but it really all starts from the moment when one chooses not to consider that mass international adoption exists, and by that I mean in significant numbers… That means, we deny the fact that we were being manipulated… like… it's a cultural genocide. It's as if we were denying the orphanages, it's as if we were denying the scoop 60 and the stories of the Aboriginals in Australia… It is a kind of a voluntary deportation. The adopting country and the country of 'origin have a hand in what happens due to those adoptions. We can't only blame Korea… It takes 'two to tango'…)

Daniel: On my first day of 1st grade when I was six years old one of my classmates came right up to me and asked me: "why are you brown?" And I didn't have an answer for him. That's when I was made aware of skin color and you know what does it mean to be brown as opposed to everyone else who is white in the class. It marked me. Now I know that this was the beginning of a lifetime of trying to fit in, with that pressure to assimilate, and this is shared by many immigrant groups. Those questions of racism and discrimination that dogged me growing up were still part of my life in terms of job advancement and that kind of thing.

Amandine: Bon, moi mes parents sont blancs et effectivement moi je suis noire. J'ai toujours vu qu'il y a une différence physique on va dire. Alors pour moi ce n'était pas la question d'adoption mais c'est plus le fait d'être noire.

(Well, my parents are white and indeed I am black. I've always seen that there is a physical difference, let's say. So, for me it wasn't about adoption but more about being black.)

Annie: Micro-aggression, like when I think about school, it wasn't that much present, but when I think back, it's outside of the school that the micro-aggression were more present because of maybe…

And I think this affected me more than being in the private school and because we are more like… uh, like the rules are more strict, so it's more respectful in a way, but outside of that at plenty of like, I think this was more my experience of Micro-aggression, especially in the streets or in my first job as a teenager so that it really made a difference of how I perceive myself. I feel especially in doing social jobs like being a cashier in the grocery store and doing some clothes selling with tourists.

Jennifer: I can't wait to really reconnect with my culture. I'm starting the process now, but I would like to know my non-Colonized name in my own language. I think it is important that we have our own identity in our own names in our own language, and I don't have that yet….

So, I really wanted to fill that void and I think that is really empowering.

When a person can reconnect with or connect with their own history or their family, their nationality and all that stuff.

Daniel: I mean the irony is, as an adoptee from Lebanon to the United States, I evoke the Lebanese dream of leaving the country and becoming acculturated in a different culture. And so, coming back to many was just seen as aberrant.

Like why would you even want to do that?

Amandine: Quand j'étais petite j'avais des informations que mes parents avaient eu des assistantes sociales. Donc mes parents savaient toujours que ma mère était marocaine. En tout cas

moi j'ai l'impression d'avoir découvert ça dans mon dossier quand j'avais 18 ans. Mais enfaite ma mère m'a dit qu'elle me l'a déjà dit en fait, mais bon… je ne sais pas… euh… mais à part ça il n'y a pas beaucoup d'information que mes parents avaient et en fait moi je voulais voir mon dossier toute seule parce que c'était mon histoire et moi j'avais envie d'aller découvrir mon histoire toute seule.

Entre le moment que j'ai déposé la demande pour ouvrir mon dossier en 2002 au moment que j'ai eu des réponses sur ma mère biologique 2019, ils se passaient 17 ans!

(When I was little, I had some information that my parents had received from social workers. So, my parents always knew that my mother was Moroccan. Anyway, I feel like I discovered this in my file when I was 18. But in fact, my mother told me that she already told me before, but hey… I don't know… uh… but other than that there is not a lot of information that my parents had and in fact, I wanted to see my file on my own because it was my story and I wanted to go and discover my story on my own.

From the time I applied to open my file in 2002 to the time I got answers on my birth mother 2019, 17 years had passed!)

Vicky: After a few months, my biological mother sent me some photos and one photo was.

A biological uncle, on my… on the paternal side, when I saw the photo, it was like my twin. And then later that day… that evening, when I was getting ready for bed, and brushing my teeth, and when I looked in the mirror. This, this thing happened.

And it's from that too. I think that I had a new understanding of just how strong the psyche is. And the impacts, right. Those psychological impacts and, so, looking… into the mirror and it was

almost like… Remember, those photo booths that were around for a while in shopping malls… where If you would go into the photo booth and it would take your picture, but then you could select the kind of finish you wanted and so it could be like a pencil sketch, right? It could be a sketch, a portrait, done more in that style than as a photograph.

What it makes me think of … what happened was when I looked in the mirror, all of a sudden it was like… like, I wasn't just bleeding out. I think before that, that's what it was like there was no real definition when I looked in the mirror. And this particular day was like… like, all of a sudden, my face really kind of took a new form…

in my eyes and my nose and I was just like oh! ….

 because all of a sudden, it's like I had origin.

I've never had the origin before. So yeah, that was really powerful.

kimura: Pour elle, ma mère, c'était un soulagement que je l'ai retrouvée. Parce que pour elle, on a volé son enfant. Alors du jour au lendemain elle ne me voit plus… c'est ça… mais c'est vrai que lorsqu'on s'est rencontré.e.s, on s'est rendu.e.s que ça nous faisait du bien parce qu'on avait été séparé.e.s involontairement.

(For her, my mother, finding her was a relief because for her, her child was stolen from her. So, overnight she could no longer see me ... that was it ... but it's true that when we met, we realized that it was doing us good because we had been separated involuntarily)

Jennifer: My whole life I was like I wanted to see a baby picture of me.

I wanted to know what I looked like, all I had was toddler pictures and when I went to go see my Dad, he gave me my first baby picture. These are my siblings and my Dad and me. I'm the baby.

This is my sister, Sharona. My brother Reyburn and my Dad Gerald. And it's been like, Oh, a void filled 'cause I was like I've never had a baby picture and then also my Dad gave me a younger picture of him. This is me in the crib with my brother Reyburn and my Dad.

My Dad's smile is the same as mine, finally I have another piece filled I KNOW where my smile came from!

Views on intercountry/transracial adoption

Daniel: I often say to friends of mine who are adoptees when we talk about this that we need another term for when we say other kinds of adoption. Adoption to me is functional to rupture and dissolution of family. Whereas kinship care and these other ideas are about extending community and family, and I see a huge difference there. I see an ideal within the foster care system that is along these lines as opposed to thinking, I need to rupture all ties of this child with their origin and bring this child into my family structure. This is quite different from a foster care ideal which would say on behalf of the community and on behalf of this family, I'm going to take care of this child and I am going to hope that the day will come when this child will be able to be taking care of by their source and original family. I find it difficult to speak of adoption in terms of family creation because within the Anglo-Saxon tradition it didn't start this way. It didn't have anything to do with family creation. It was about indentured servitude. It was about finding an heir for a wealthy family. All of these things that are much more economic than familial, and so I really feel that it's crucial for all of us who are investigating and researching adoption to question this idea of adoption equals family creation because I don't think that's the case.

Jennifer: I think of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt… like, do they think that their kids are like accessories. Like one day I want one from Zimbabwe. So, let's go order up a Zimbabwe child like

I… I think people need to be brought up with the people that know their root language and culture to pass on. They have to know the history, the culture, everything about where they're from. Otherwise, you're just going to be lost or living life with identity issues.

Vicky: It always made me uncomfortable and I found it awkward because there's something about the savior…that you're saving these children or something, and… not enough thought put into that. I don't think people are looking critically enough at how deeply like emotionally, psychologically, spiritually like at a soul level… What… that does to individuals when they… when they grow up being so different than from who… they are, who they were intended, as a spiritual being who they were intended to be. And, um. I think. I think people need to… be made more aware that if they are going to adopt a child… that it's them and the family unit that needs to adapt and not the child that they're bringing into their environment. And I don't think that's told enough to people.

There… there's this idea of like… It's the child again who's going to assimilate

So, I think whenever… Whenever I see. Whenever I see those interracial adoptions of families…. Yeah, that's a child of another culture, another color…

I just… I notice that and I always kind of send… lots of love to that child.

Brent: There needs to be an apology… They need to come to my tribe.

They need to apologize personally to me and my brothers, my sisters. Um, and my tribe, because my tribe were decimated. Um?

It is something that… Uh, needs to be done. Uh, that shows me. That they mean it.

I know it's silly, but it's those little things that we missed out on and. We missed out on a mom, I never got to see her… I know she wasn't perfect, but it is still mom. It doesn't matter what anyone says, yeah? Uh. and where they lived, but it would have been difficult, but... Um?

I know she would have tried her best. It's a little that they had, but.

Yeah, they took that away from me. I haven't even got another…

I never got a hug from her, the Kiss from her…

I never got a smack around New Years. not once.

I got welcomed into the tribe again with my wife and my sister.

It was a huge moment. We've been there a day and a half, and the chief came and said, we gonna welcome you and I was gonna be allowed in the sacred area and hug the tree and they will play the honor song for us. So that was... That meant more to me than anything. I don't think people can understand that, see and. I've never been a very spiritual side; It was, it had to me, had to be so logical and I had to understand Yet when I was there, and the drums were playing. Um? And I was holding on to the tree and the Uh.

The sacred ones were there with us. I just, I couldn't hear the drums or anything anymore. It's just like I got the sense. But in my mind: I'm home, you home. I'm watching you so. Mom was there.

Vicky: Waiting for years and years right… to get… to get my name. My friend asked me: Oh, if you knew your name, what would it be? And I wanted it to be something really powerful. Right? Like Thunderbird woman or… She, who rides on the back of the Thunderbird because I'd have dreams of riding on the back of Thunderbird with all this fringe and... then I guess I don't know, maybe just a month later… and that was only in 2013. But maybe like a month later, I'd gone to

the conference in Winnipeg, and we were out on sacred land with one of the elders and he smoked his pipe and came out of pipe ceremony… looked at me and said I've got your name…

and that was it, Gentle Wind/kisêwâtisiwinyôtin:iskwew … and… I was a bit hysterical. I laughed and I cried. I fell on the rocks and… I had this beautiful, beautiful Torres Straits woman with me… a spirit sister…Venita… and she just kind of sat down beside me and you know, had her hand on me… Um… Just there to care for me in this really special way… like that was a pretty sacred moment right? Yeah…one of those defining moments that happen in life. Elders… already for years… because I've been chasing all the time… of like… who am I? Where am I from and… and, I had some of those answers by then and had the relationships with my biological family. Like… Um… In place and everything… But there was something about… Yeah… those real spiritual connections and… receiving that name, it just… having all of those elders all those years…

Who... repeatedly said to me "Stop running, stop looking" and putting their hand on my heart…You know who you are…You know who you are…You know who you are."

Appendix E

Dr. Catherine Richardson's Reflections to Zeina

December 15, 2020

Dear Zeina,

I am taking up your invitation to write some reflections on your performance/presentation.

It was so lovely to see you surrounded by your circle of support, your family including your brother in Lebanon and your sister. It is also lovely to see how your children support your work and activities just as you support theirs. What a creative family you have, or you have created!

The topic of adoption is a hard one. Since I am not an adoptee, I can't weigh out the various positions from an insider perspective. As a self-proclaimed child welfare advocate (advocating for young people, their mother, their parents and their natural/biological families), I understand the Venn diagram of overlap between adoption and suffering. I understand, as a compassionate outsider, the high percentage of Indigenous child adoption breakdowns, the identity issues for adoptees and the overlap between adoption and human trafficking. I feel uncomfortable when I see wealthy personalities adopting children of color and displaying them like "arm candy." This is especially outrageous in the cases where children already/still have parents.

A few years back, I learned that some parents in a particular African country, drop their children off when they need a break/need to work and pick up their child a little while later. They had a shelter like this in Calgary – a very good program where parents in crisis could leave their children for up to three days, no questions asked. They could do this once a month I believe. The children would receive good care when they were at this Centre. So, at a similar Centre in Africa, westerners would come, thinking it was an orphanage, and "adopt" the children. Mostly I believe that adoption should only take place if it is "open", loving and keeps the child always connected with their culture, their extended family, their land, their language, and so forth. Perhaps the permission of a

family member is needed, with a statement that the child may return to the birth/natural family at any point.

In this world where children are so mistreated, abuse through adoption should not be possible. In some cases, the adoptive parents are looking for a companion or a housekeeper, or an agricultural worker. It is possible to take in children, feed them, help them to grow, without having to adopt, no?

In terms of your artistic presentation, it is so beautiful how you create speaking parts and then invite the appropriate person to read those out loud. I believe there is meaning in the person you choose to read. It sometimes seem that we each have a counterpart in other cultures, other cities, someone who could be our sibling. We can recognize a similar spirit across settings. Perhaps this awareness goes into your choice of reader. You are a teacher, not in the sense of imparting, but in the sense of inspiring, of touching, of disrupting the system, gently, to make room for new knowledge.

I hope your future provides opportunities for you to continue creating, to continue performing and sharing yourself, and your reflections/perceptions with the rest of us. What a gift!

I look forward to the next opportunity to experience your magic.

Much respect,

Cathy

Appendix F

Feedback of the audience

Zoom-Chat

18:25:23   From Dina Joubrel : nous regardons tous ensemble la même lune, même si c'est par des angles différents

18:27:30   From Dina Joubrel: je sais d'où vient min sourire... très beau

118:33:45   From Christine Charles: Merci infiniment pour ces témoignages extrêmement intimes, profonds et de fait particulièrement touchants et riches. Je me suis privilégiée d'avoir été invitée à assister à ce partage.

18:35:07   From Elizabeth Fast: I wanted to thank all those who shared those stories and all of the interpreters, I think you did a marvelous job in conveying the stories in a way that we could really hear them

18:38:52   From Ursula Neuerburg: Congratulations to you all for honest, difficult work, for allowing us into your stories and experiences, for giving us part of you allowing us to ask and question ourselves and somehow thus become part of your process! Merci!!

18:40:20   From Sharon Bayly: Thank you all. Merci beaucoup. I have been moved and deeply touched by your shared stories and by the authentic embodiment of them on this online platform. ♥

18:42:02   From Mariam Raad: all the participants are wonderful and I am lucky to be invited to this meeting. Mariam Raad from Lebanon

18:44:23   From Nadine Salam: Very instructive, opening many windows for deep thoughts. Well done despite hard work that had to be done during Covid. Way to go Zeina!

18:47:06   From Toby Long: Wonderful in so many ways. Congratulations for the instructive, enlightening performance. Congratulations Zeina for a wonderful touching tribute.

18:47:55   From Zeina Ismail-Allouche: Thank you Toby and all of you for being there and witnessing.

18:50:22   From Laurence Lainesse: thank you so much to you Zeina, to all of you who allowed us to access to your stories/lives, to the performers. Grateful to have been witnessing the power of your medicines. with Love and Solidarity.

18:51:01   From Nathalie Rafei: Merci pour toute personne qui a partagé son témoignage, c'est précieux et super sensibilisant. Je comprends mieux ma fille qui a resisté à

l'immigration. Moi qui pensais qui ça serait plus facile pour elle de s'adapter. j'avais tort.

Merci à toutes les organisatrices

18:54:15   From Marie-Jeanne Beaupré : Merci beaucoup pour cette assemblage de récits! Très beau projet.

18:55:23   From Jennifer Mitchell: <3

18:55:42   From Johnny El Hage: Congrats Zeina and all collaborators. Thanks for sharing the work, and the valuable knowledge in such a lovely space.

18:55:44   From Raja Salim: Thank you all!

18:55:45   From Rita Saliba: Thank you very much Zeina!

18:55:52   From Rita Saliba: All the best,

18:55:58   From M G: merci

18:55:59   From Lynn Kodeih: ❤️

18:56:07   From Jennifer Mitchell: Thank you

18:56:11   From Mariam Raad: merci

18:56:11   From Lucine Serhan: Thank you all. Congratulation Zeina

18:56:12   From Nisa Remigio: Thank you so very much to all involved. That you Zeina for unsettling me.

18:56:12   From Lynn Kodeih: merci Zeina ❤️

18:56:14   From Rania Afiouni: Awesome work and awesome courage! Thank you all and Zeina

18:56:33   From Murad Hannoush...B.Sc..MBA..Ph.D.. : Thank You Zeina..Thank You All...Graciously well done...Hope to be of Service to You All...

18:56:47   From Thomas Ingerman: Beautiful and so moving. Thank you everyone.

18:56:56   From Dounia: bless you all❤️

18:58:28   From Catherine Richardson: Yes blessings to you and your families…

18:58:39   From Rachel Berger: Thank you so much to all those who shared their stories and to all those who performed, to Vicky and Cathy for creating safety for us as we received theses stories, and to Zeina for bringing this all together. Your beautiful, careful and important work has been a pleasure to see.