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Adoption Studies and Postcolonial Inquiry

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Abstract

This essay considers the opportunities created when adoption studies is brought into dialogue with postcolonial inquiry. It uncovers the imprint of colonialism's complicity in adoption across a range of canonical literary texts and considers how recent postcolonial writing has responsibly requisitioned adoption to forge a transformative vision of futurity.

In October 2015, an exhibition opened at the V&A Museum of Childhood in London titled "On Their Own: Britain's Child Migrants," which sought to remember and explore the transportation of approximately 100,000 British children, many of whom had been sequestered in social care, to institutions in Australia, Canada, and parts of colonized Africa between 1869 and 1970. The exhibition itself was something of a migrant: it had been forged through a collaboration between London's V&A, National Museums Liverpool, and the Australian National Maritime Museum, where the exhibition had been launched in 2010 before going on tour. Its galleries portrayed a sorry tale of the impact of the British Empire on the fortunes of vulnerable families across the Commonwealth. It tracked the seizing of children from British orphanages, some of whom had been placed there temporarily by birth families struggling to make ends meet (especially in the immediate postwar years of the late 1940s), by a range of organizations and charity-supported institutions that sent the children overseas to begin, it was claimed, fabulous new lives remote from the austerity and impoverishment of their country of origin. It exposed the harsh realities that awaited many of them: often deployed as cheap labor

to build schools and institutions in punitive conditions or sexually abused by those, such as members of the clergy, into whose care they had been delivered (video testimonies of those who had been abused made for harrowing viewing in one gallery). Many such child migrants never found the new family life that had been promised them; for those that did live as part of new family relations, their experience of fostering and adoption was frequently unhappy. As adults, many sought to come to terms with their experiences of abuse within a social milieu that did not want to acknowledge the history of violence of child migration and in which documentation concerning their transportation was kept firmly hidden. As Margaret Humphries powerfully exposed in her book on child migrants sent to Australia, Empty Cradles, itself a major influence on the exhibition, many were to discover (with Humphries's help) the existence of biogenetic family connections they never knew they had back in the UK, although for some the chance to meet a birth parent or sibling had come too late, since many relatives had passed away. The exhibition's final gallery focused upon the recent public acknowledgement of and formal apology for child migration by the governments of Australia and the UK—a video recording of former British prime minister Gordon Brown's 2010 apology in the Houses of Parliament for Britain's role in the Child Migrants Programme played on a continual loop. Adjacent to this gallery was a small room for reflection, where visitors were invited to sit quietly and ponder the often upsetting materials they had witnessed. At the end of my visit I sat there for a considerable period of time.

Part of the significance of "On Their Own" was the exposure of the impact of empire, colonialism, and settlement on family-breaking and -making across the globe. The exhibition insisted that the social production of vulnerable children, rendered on their own and available for state-endorsed ownership at the service of a colonial mission, was a core business of empire, discovered far and wide across colonized space and a ready result of the inequities it wrought, not supplementary to or an exceptional offshoot of colonialism's catastrophic advent.

Crucially, the exhibition exposed the extent to which during a busy of period of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century, Britain still held to such practices even as its long imperial day waned. In locations such as Australia and Canada, the arrival of child migrants, especially after the Second World War, was part of Britain's wider immigration policy, as described by Kathleen Paul: "sending 'British stock' emigrants offered subtle, yet effective means to shore up the imperial system" (7). This stratagem contributed to a wider structure of disenfranchisement and dispossession in once-colonized space pursued by settler governments over many decades, as detailed in Margaret D. Jacobs's White Mother to a Dark Race and A Generation Removed, that supported the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their native filial domains and their relocation within settler-descended families. These practices furthered the gradual dissolution of Indigenous cultures through the weakening of endogenous structures of cultural and tribal production, as in Canada's "Sixties Scoop," so that native children were entirely cut off from the cultural provenance of their birth families. Often, these happenings required the introduction of adoption legislation that challenged Indigenous adoptive practices themselves. New Zealand's Adoption Act of 1955, for example, introduced a system of "closed" adoptions whereby Māori-born children adopted by Pākehā (settler-descended) parents lost the right to know the provenance of their birth and so were cut off from knowledge of their whakapapa, or genealogy of descent, a vital cultural component of Māori life. This was very much against the Māori practice of whangai, an everyday mode of "open" adoption where a child is not raised by a birth parent but usually a relative when parenting becomes problematic (if the birth parents are struggling or if the child is orphaned).

Given the preponderance of these disenfranchising activities across the Commonwealth, it is here that adoption studies and postcolonial inquiry find their first crucial and key point of shared concern: the strategic reshaping of family relations, often requiring the confecting of a child's adoptability or transportability, as one deliberate and central

consequence of the advent of colonialism and its legacies around the globe. The brief historical examples I have cited indicate, too, that iniquitous adoption practices in once-colonized space have continued forward after the achievement of formal independence—one might add here, too, postindependence Ireland's operation of mother and baby homes and Magdalene Laundries as evidence of, in James M. Smith's chilling term, the decolonized nation's "architecture of containment" (xiii) within which adoptable children were sourced and sent overseas in return for a suitable charitable donation to these Catholic institutions.

Postcolonial studies, at root, has long recognized that the economic, cultural, and discursive relations of colonialism have not ceased as a consequence of decolonization but have been sustained, often in a refurbished and refreshed fashion, in the new world order that has emerged in colonialism's wake. As Simon Gikandi has described it, the postcolonial recognizes that "the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation" (14), so that "postcoloniality" becomes "the term for a state of transition and cultural instability" (15) rather than a declaration of the end of all things imperial. In other words, the postcolonial insists that we witness the unfinished business of colonialism at work in our contemporaneity. As such, it affords us a critical sensitivity ever alert to the extent to which moving children via adoption today, always an "an index of political or social vulnerability" (Briggs 14) and enabled by local or international inequalities, may keep buoyant the attitudes, imbalances, and prejudices of old. In fairness, adoption studies has been cognizant of these matters for some time, not least because of the scholarly engagement with transnational and transcultural adoptions involving the US, even if it has not often drawn upon the conceptual vocabularies and the work of key thinkers associated with postcolonial inquiry. As Jane Jeong Trenka and her coauthors starkly describe things, "transracial adoption [is] the intimate face of colonization, racism, militarism, imperialism, and globalization" (Trenka et al. 7). In the light of this reminder, the elision in postcolonial inquiry of sustained attention to colonialism's

impact upon and appropriation of adoption practices seems hard to explain, given the centrality of family-breaking and -making to the business of colonialism. Why, we might ask, has postcolonial studies hardly engaged with adoption?

In the main, the exploration of the consequences of child surrender, family-breaking and adoption wrought specifically by colonialism and settlement has been conducted in the main by historians or within the contexts of sociology and social policy. Postcolonial studies, as it has evolved since its advent in the 1980s, still remains predominantly a literary-critical endeavor. It is primarily concerned with the consequences of cultural creativity and discursive critique, for which it has been often much maligned by deferential Marxists for not attending with enough rigor to the mercantile materiality of imperial expansion in the past or the uneven condition of today's "modern capitalist world-system" (WReC 15). It is perhaps tempting to understand the field's lack of attention to adoption's colonial-crafted materiality in these terms as more evidence of the postcolonial's prioritization of aesthetics and "theory." But this view would be too glib—the argument, something of a cliché today, that the theoretical bent of postcolonial thought renders it insensitive to the pain and purview of disempowerment is hard to sustain if one surveys the field responsibly. Rather, and as I want to suggest in this essay, the absence of a postcolonial engagement with adoption has been produced by a failure of reading, not by the absence of adoption's "literary registration" (17). As I shall argue, adoptive matters are frequently captured in colonial and postcolonial writing, if one cares to look. But the inclination to look has been infrequent and often piecemeal: matters of adoption appear as occasional thematic or aesthetic concerns or are spotted in passing amid the telling of a wider story of colonial disenfranchisement rather than dwelled upon for close analysis. For example, Graham Huggan's recent edited book The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies, while cutting edge and excellently definitive of the current condition of the field today in so many ways, catches the merest glimpse of adoption matters—as in Dana Mount and Susie O'Brien's

discussion of postcolonialism and the environment, which makes passing reference to "colonial education policies in Canada and Australia that mandated the removal of indigenous children from their families and local environments" (Mount and O'Brien 526), or in Michelle Keown and Stuart Murray's reference to "the state-sanctioned removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which continued up until the late 1960s, [that] constituted a blatant racism that still feeds into the heart of contemporary [Australian] society" (Keown and Murray 617). In postcolonial studies, it is not usual to dwell upon and read for adoption; in Huggan's volume, one misses a chapter on adoption amid those on postcolonial justice, biopolitics, Indigeneity, cross-disciplinarity, the environment, globalization, diaspora, translation, and other current preoccupations.

That said, I do not want to perform a critical maneuver that has become something of a cliché in postcolonial criticism: chastising the much-maligned paradigm of the postcolonial, to borrow from the title of a recent fine collection of essays, because of all that it "doesn't say." Bringing new preoccupations to the attention of postcolonial scholars should be regarded advantageously, not as an opportunity for smug admonishment. Indeed, in their introduction to *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say*, Anna Bernard and her coeditors point out the "greater opportunity to do justice to the analogous and multiple manifestations of postcolonial cultures and societies" (4) that is created when one widens the horizons of the field's preoccupations, as part of the coeditors' "investment in the future of postcolonial studies and our commitment to its basic premise, namely the attempt to conceive of particular cultural and literary articulations in relation to larger structures of colonial and imperial domination" (6). In this same generative spirit, I want to expose the productive consequences that emerge when one brings together the insights of postcolonial thought with a concern with adoption and culture. This involves both recognizing and prioritizing, on the one hand, the often-unremarked imprint of adoption's material realities within the cultural rendition of postcolonial life and, on the

other, the canny and progressive appropriation of tropes of adoption by postcolonial writers as part of their critical representation of the consequences and legacies of empire. As I will consider, the purposeful requisitioning of adoption matters can be espied as a distinctly postcolonial maneuver in some significant canonical postcolonial texts, even if critical discussions of those texts have not always paused to value it as such. A sensitivity to the material realities and cultural consequences of adoption wrought by colonialism and its legacies opens an important new point of focus within postcolonial concerns; at the same time, postcolonial studies can make a fruitful contribution to the analysis of adoption, and one not necessarily confined to colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Discussions of adoption that draw directly upon the insights of postcolonial criticism are beginning to happen. In my recent book Life Lines, I attempt to mobilize the insights of postcolonial critique in order to claim that "There is a postcoloniality of transcultural adoption which representations of its practices, past and present, invite us to read and realize" (29). I consider the extent to which representations of transcultural adoption from Britain, Ireland, and the United States contest the normative assumptions of colonialism and modernity, and I challenge the inequalities of culture, gender, nation, and race that always contribute to the creation of one's adoptability. I endeavor to discover the depth of engagement with the material particulars of transcultural adoption across a range of different creative texts while exploring—very much in a postcolonial vein—how writers and filmmakers (adopted or not) might articulate these grim phenomena as also shaping new beginnings: as empowering fledgling modes of thinking differently about personhood and family-making, germane to all. Mark Shackleton's recent edited book International Adoption in North American Literature and Culture features contributions that engage postcolonial texts and ideas, such as Christine Vogt-William's discussion of contemporary South Asian diasporic fiction, which draws upon work by Stuart Hall, Claire Alexander, Vijay Mishra, and Avtar Brah. The conception and

organization of Shackleton's fine collection are inflected by his sense of the global reach of international adoptions as structured by the colonialisms of the past and the imperialisms of the present, which range from Southeast Asia to North America.

Prior to these, the most conspicuous attempt to cleave postcolonial and adoption matters was Pal Ahluwalia's "Negotiating Identity: Post-Colonial Ethics and Transnational Adoption." I wish to dwell upon this essay because it exemplifies the problems created when matters of adoption are imported into a postcolonial frame wholesale with scant regard for their material particulars, instead of the brokering of a critically creative conversation between adoption studies and the postcolonial. Ahluwalia's discussion is commendable not least for its attempt to dwell at length on the possible lines of connection that bring together postcolonial and adoptive concerns, and at a moment during the previous decade when a postcolonial inquiry into adoption was extremely rare. Yet his corralling of the historical phenomenon of adoption entirely within the theoretical terrain of postcolonial theory, often with little recourse to the distinctive elements of adoption's practices locally or globally, severely limits the utility of his thinking. Vogt-William's analysis seeks to utilize the potential rapport across these two domains and is equipped with an informed sense of the material particulars of South Asian diasporic adoptions that underpins her analysis. But Ahluwalia's essay threatens to evacuate adoption as a concrete colonial-crafted happening at the very moment when this vital context might be constructively exposed. It is worth reflecting on the challenges of his essay not least, to my mind, because the postcolonial inquiry into adoption is best served by seeking to avoid these.

Ahluwalia draws upon postcolonial theory explicitly to announce the perilous and liminal position he perceives transnational adoptees to occupy between biogenetic origin and adoptive life. To make this case, he presumes a series of correspondences between the challenges of adoptive personhood and a range of postcolonial preoccupations: the

displacement from remote pasts, the pain of being exiled from lost homelands, life lived in terms of mimicry, and more. His argument draws upon the thinking of canonical postcolonial figures such as Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, and Stuart Hall, while making reference to the work of important adoption scholars such as Toby Alice Volkman, David L. Eng, and Barbara Yngvesson. Yet the attempt to smoothly capture matters of transnational adoption with familiar postcolonial vocabularies runs some risks. First, Ahluwalia tends to collapse the material and historical specifics of adoption through this quest for comparison, to the extent that these concrete particulars are in danger of disappearing entirely. For example, he opens his discussion with an anecdote about visiting the slaving post of Goree Island in Senegal, which is now a museum, and watching many of the African American visitors attempting to deal with the traumatic impact of the legacies of slavery that have been brought to a head by their act of "return." "I have dwelt on this experience of African-Americans visiting Goree Island," he writes, "precisely because of the profound similarities between it and, I want to suggest, that endured by transnationally adopted children" (56). Yet these "profound similarities" are not carefully rendered but based on a set of assumptions uninflected by examples or tangible evidence: "For both [African Americans and transnational adoptees], there is an overwhelming desire to establish a connection with their origins in order to come to terms with the past and to develop an understanding of identity" (56). There is little sense in such sentences of the granulations or range of transnational adoptee experience and attitudes—of the many who do not feel an "overwhelming" desire to synchronize identity with normative origins—when it comes to thinking about natal provenances. Nor is there an acknowledgement of the profoundly different historical circumstances and practices that make distinctive the violent seizure of enslaved persons and the bureaucratic procedure of clinching adoption contracts, even if both are circumscribed by the realities and legacies of colonial modernity, as Tobias Hübinette has rightly noted (142–

43). While such comparisons might look tempting on the surface and may daringly relocate adoption for strategic effect in terms of slavery rather than humanitarianism, the concrete matter of adoptive lives and practices of which too little remains unknown are elided through such alignment.

Consequently, despite its laudable to attempt to make transnational adoption legible for postcolonial studies, Ahluwalia's essay suffers from an unsubtle postcolonial appropriation of a phenomenon the particulars of which need to be better admitted. There is no dialogic rapport between scholarly fields struck in the essay. At one moment, Ahluwalia turns to Bhabha's well-known concept of mimicry from The Location of Culture as an ambivalent mode of colonial discourse in order to express something of the transnational adoptee's presumed liminality, stuck between two cultures, belonging to neither, aping the powerful. Bhabha's argument, as Ahluwalia makes perfectly clear, is inspired by the impact of the British Empire upon nineteenth-century India and the requirement, as summarized in Thomas Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education," that there be fashioned for the purposes of colonial governance "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, in intellect" (qtd. in Alhulwalia 61). These "mimic men" do not uphold the hierarchies of the colonial order of things but uncover a troubling ambivalence at its heart, not least by menacing colonial authority in exposing the overlapping resemblance, not clear difference, between the provenance of "Indian" and "English" that Macaulay anxiously installs in "Minute." For Ahluwalia, "In the case of adoption, the idea of mimicry is all too evident. Transnational adoptees . . . grow up thinking and trying to be the same as everyone else only to be confronted by racism which challenges their conception of self. As 'mimic children' these adoptees are the same but not quite" (61). While we might imagine that there is something potentially very useful in thinking about transnational adoption, a la Bhabha, as a subversive, not subservient, phenomenon, Ahluwalia's argument retains a normative model of selfhood as ultimately

sourced in natal origins. There is scant understanding of the split self of the adoptee as perpetually produced by the discourses of identity within which we attempt to grow; in Kimberly Leighton's terms, of those "systems of valuation" (70) that create the confusions of identity (such as "genealogical bewilderment") by supporting notions of authentic selfhood sourced in exalted biogenetic origins. Ahluwalia's adoptee is fated to produce a flawed mimesis of normative selfhood—almost the same, but not quite—enjoyed by those natally related to their own kin. In sum, the essay offers little chance to think of adoption as possessing postcolonial agency, even if it seeks to conclude in productive, hopeful terms by looking forward to a hospitable future in which adoptees "can construct an autonomous identity that has the trace of origin in the present that allows them to live in a world of their choosing" (66). But adoption studies often asks us to recognize that identity is not necessarily autonomous, that the trace of origins is not always required for one to be "present," and that personhood is not fully a matter of choice.

While Ahluwalia's work is highly valuable in its rare attempt at least to face the phenomenon of adoption across nations and cultures, it is symptomatic of postcolonial inquiry more generally in not attending in requisite depth to a major if little-discussed core consequence of the inequalities of power produced by and inherited from colonial modernity. This requires scholars, especially of postcolonial cultural production, on the one hand to pay better attention to historical research and key events (such as the "On Their Own" exhibition) in which these concrete histories and experiences are witnessed and, on the other, to read colonial and postcolonial writing with an eye to the ways in which—following Homans's term—these histories leave their "imprint" (291) textually. To this end, Edward Said's postcolonial notion of "contrapuntal reading" proves highly instructive and fertile (79). As is well known, Said's notion requires us to notice, especially in canonical English literary texts, the often "passing references" to the realities of empire upon which both the concrete and

imagined conditions of the time depend (78). It invites us to regard the occasional and oblique mentioning of colonial conditions as referencing not only imperialism but also "resistance to it" (79). In a similar fashion, from a postcolonial vantage we might focus our acts of reading to attend better to the histories of family-making and -breaking that appear in glimpses or glances and think creatively about the ways in which these textual moments might be read resistantly. It is possible to discover evidence of these histories threaded through a variety of canonical texts in postcolonial studies that, when brought together (as I attempt briefly below), expose the substantial rather than exceptional imprint of these particulars, even though one finds often an elliptical rather than expansive rendition of adoptive matters. It becomes strategically productive to collect and reread canonical English writing as well as postcolonial texts for the ways in which colonialism and its legacies impact and imprint specifically upon filial relations in terms of the severances and associations of adoptive relations.

Several canonical texts in postcolonial criticism evidence the extent to which colonialism rearranged family relations within the unequal constraints of empire. Much has been made in recent years of the parental provenance of the foundling figure of Heathcliff, the brooding antihero of Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights, brought from Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw, as "quite possibly Irish" (Eagleton 3), through whom we might read the bitter colonial relations between Britain and Ireland, epitomized by the cruelties of the Great Famine that took hold from 1845. Alternatively, filmmakers and writers have recently wondered whether this mysterious, parentless child in Earnshaw's description, "as dark as almost if it came from the devil" (Brontë 77) who at first speaks "some gibberish that nobody could understand" (77), is the product of Britain's participation in Atlantic slavery, not least because of Liverpool's role as a key British port centrally involved in the slave trade. Andrea Arnold's film adaptation of the novel cast the mixed-race British actor James Howson in the role of Heathcliff, while Caryl Phillips's novel The Lost Child imagines Heathcliff as the biogenetic

son of Mr. Earnshaw, born to an African woman in the port who dies in poverty not long afterward. In Rudyard Kipling's Kim, a canonical novel of British India produced by a writer who, in Said's view, "brought to a basically insular and provincial British audience the colour, glamour, and romance of the British overseas enterprise" (160), the eponymous hero's parental provenance also makes plain the relations between colonial society and the construction of adoptability. "[B]urned black as any native" (Kipling 1), Kim is a "poor white of the very poorest" (1), born to a colonel's family's nursemaid and an Irish soldier, who is raised by his aunt, an opium-smoking "half-caste woman" (1), after his mother dies from cholera and his father from opium addiction. Kim's vulnerability as the offspring of the colonized Irish and poor British marks the colonial-wrought economic and political inequities that contributed to his parents' mortality, while his presentation as white does not fully paper over the possible tensions between his English and Irish connections. Ultimately the inequities also confect Kim's adoptability and culturally bastardized liminality and hybridity—he speaks both the local vernacular language and English in "a clipped, uncertain sing-song" (1) as well as becomes the chela or disciple of a priestly Tibetan lama. At the same time, his intermediate position as a white British-Irish-Indian chela living beyond the domain of the biogenetic family makes him the ideal figure to play cannily, in the novel's parlance, the Great Game of British intelligence; and, in terms of the novel's rendition of colonialism, to uphold through his colonial service the legitimating authority of Britain's international paternalism for its colonial wards.

Across postcolonial writing, adoption appears in several key texts as either a concrete consequence of cultural inequities or as part of a postcolonial strategy to expose and contest colonialism's enduring legacies in both once-colonized and metropolitan space. As Jordanna Bailkin notes, the early semiautobiographical writing of the Nigerian-born author Buchi Emecheta, such as Second-Class Citizen, captures the postwar practices of many Nigerian

migrant women in placing their children in foster care in Britain. “By 1964,” Bailkin writes, “768 African children were fostered in Kent alone, and 1,743 Nigerian children were placed in homes throughout southeast England” (89). In Emecheta’s novel, the central character, Adah, is chastised by her fellow migrants for resisting this practice. When she does eventually allow a white foster mother, Trudy, to look after her children, the results are disastrous: her son Vicky contracts viral meningitis from the unsanitary conditions in which he is kept by Trudy, who has agreed to foster children purely so that she might procure free resources (such as milk) from the local authority while working as a prostitute (one of her clients is Adah’s husband, Francis). The austere conditions of Adah and her family’s life as minoritized migrants in a racist, unforgiving metropolis, living amid harsh conditions, have a distinctly postcolonial provenance. Later, in her last novel, The New Tribe, Emecheta turned directly to the matter of transracial adoption in the UK in order to challenge Afrocentric confections of black identity in her story of a young black man, Chester, raised by white adoptive parents, who comes to believe that he is descended from African royalty. But his trip to Nigeria to trace his exalted bloodline proves almost fatal, and Chester comes instead to realize, just in time, that he is part of an adoptive “new tribe” of British-born black people with cultural, emotional, and familial ties to a diasporic range of affiliative locations and heritages, circumscribing Africa, Britain, and the US. As such, Emecheta mobilizes the material phenomenon of transracial adoption in Britain’s postwar decades as the means to challenge, from a postcolonial vantage, the continued use by minoritized peoples of modernity’s consanguineous notions of cultural, racial, and national origins as the privileged fixtures of latent identity.

Elsewhere, Bessie Head’s challenging novel A Question of Power portrays the mental and emotional breakdown of Elizabeth, a mixed-race (or “colored,” in South African parlance) migrant from South Africa who arrives in the Botswana village of Motabeng with her young son. Aged thirteen, Elizabeth had learned to her surprise when she was sent to a mission school

that the woman she took to be her mother, who was also "part African, part English" (15), was not her mother at all but had been paid to foster her. In actuality, her birth mother was white but considered insane, according to Elizabeth's teacher: "They had to lock her up, as she was having a child [Elizabeth] by the stable boy, who was a native" (16). Eventually, Elizabeth learns from her foster mother that her early days were spent shunted between institutions: "First they received you from the mental hospital and sent you to a nursing-home. A day later you were returned because you did not look white. They sent you to a Boer family. A week later you were returned" (17). Elizabeth's birth mother killed herself a few years later. The "sheer nervous shock" (16) that Elizabeth feels on first hearing the news resounds throughout her life and directly contributes to her adult woes and mental breakdown, vividly recorded in the novel. Elizabeth is certainly based on Head's own experiences as a "colored" child born in 1937 in a mental institution to a white mother and black father (interracial relationships were illegal in South Africa at the time, let us remember) and who spent much of her childhood in orphanages and foster homes. Both her novel and her life story encapsulate the intimization of the "questions of power" that sustained deep racial and cultural prejudices and modes of oppression characteristic of the Union of South Africa and the apartheid era.

One could, and indeed should, go on. Salman Rushdie's enormously influential novel of Indian independence, Midnight's Children, has at its heart the swapping-at-birth of its marvelous narrator, Saleem Sinai, and his diabolic double, Shiva, so that Saleem is parented by those to whom he is not related by birth. Bharati Mukherjee's novel Jasmine focuses on a young Indian widow who survives a difficult induction in the US and who becomes the adoptive mother of a Vietnamese refugee. Caryl Phillips's Crossing the River engages with the history of those "brown babies" born in the UK during the Second World War to white British women and African American male soldiers and the pressuring of women to surrender them for adoption. Aotearoa/New Zealand writer Keri Hulme's novel The Bone People concerns the

informal adoption of a Pākehā child, most likely of Irish descent, by a Māori father and explores the relationship of this family with a reclusive artist of mixed ancestry. Jackie Kay's debut poetry collection, The Adoption Papers, explores the problems and possibilities of transracial adoption in the UK, while her novel Trumpet turns to adoption as the means to think of identity relations in an allegedly multicultural society beyond the figurative function of blood and bloodlines. Sebastian Barry's critical presentation of postindependence Ireland's imperious carceral chauvinism in The Secret Scripture is voiced through a tale of birth-mother persecution and secret adoption at the hands of the postcolonial nation's religious. Tash Aw's exploration of postcolonial Indonesia, Map of the Invisible World, takes place through a story of the adoption of two orphaned brothers, one of whom is raised amid the travails of Sukarno's and Suharto's presidencies, the other in relative luxury in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Amid these recurring tales of colonial legacies and adoptive relations, one finds, crucially, the creative deployment of adoption for postcolonial purposes. This creativity exemplifies the fertile and productive consequences when matters of adoption and the postcolonial are brought, and thought, together. I want to focus next on two influential novels mentioned above in order to think through these consequences: Rushdie's Midnight's Children and Hulme's The Bone People.

Born in Bombay to well-to-do Muslim parents and educated in England at Rugby School and the University of Cambridge, Rushdie is the author of some of the most talismanic texts in the canon of postcolonial fiction. His second and breakthrough novel, Midnight's Children, is fascinating in its appropriation of informal adoptive relations as an important means of critiquing some of the central issues of postcolonial studies, especially anticolonial nationalism and modes of imagining community and identity. The rhetoric of family-making inflects the novel's title, of course, and it is clear that of the many analogues upon which Rushdie draws in shaping his fiction (works by Gunter Grass, E. M. Forster, G. V. Desani, and

others), Kipling's figure of the Anglo-Indian Kim, child of the empire, is key. A central plot maneuver of the novel is a familiar literary trope: the switching at birth of the novel's narrator, Saleem Sinai, with the character Shiva, both of whom are born at the stroke of Indian Independence at midnight, August 15th, 1947. Saleem is born to Vanita, wife of Wee Willie Winkie the accordionist, and is the lowly offspring of the illicit seduction of Vanita by a British man, Methwold, whose luxurious estate is to be transferred to the Sinai family the moment Methwold leaves British India at the advent of independence. Shiva, by contrast, is the biological child of the wealthy Amina and Ahmed Sinai. During a distraction at Dr. Narlikar's Nursing Home, Mary Pereira, a Christianized servant, switches the identifying wristbands on each newborn—she is enamored of Joseph D'Costa, a communist, and his criticism of India's social inequalities—so that the humble-born Saleem can enjoy a life of comfort that he would otherwise never know, while Shiva must face a harder social existence (one made worse by the death in childbirth of Vanita). Rushdie's switching of the children clearly has symbolic purposes: if Saleem, born at the stroke of midnight, along with Shiva parodically personifies the fledgling postcolonial Indian nation, a place that has never existed in this form before, then the facts of Saleem's biogenetic inheritance underscore the genesis of nation as the common product of the unequal relations between India and Britain, just as Saleem is the biogenetic creation of the wealthy Methwold and the humble Vanita but whose plural genealogy is not necessarily acknowledged at large. "An Anglo?," exclaims the figure of Padma, to whom Saleem narrates his story. "What are you telling me? You are an Anglo-Indian? Your name is not your own?" (118). Padma is horrified to learn that Saleem is not biogenetically related to his parents and affronted by his seeming lack of care about the fate of his birth mother, Vanita: "You are a monster or what?" (118). Her reaction sustains, it seems, the usual way of thinking about personhood even in this most magical of novels: as the primary product of consanguineous relations against which all other forms of parenting and family-making seem

at best synthetic or at worst freakish. But as is the case with most things in the novel, Rushdie will not let this old means of thinking about identity stand.

At first sight, there is nothing especially progressive or postcolonial about Rushdie's use of the trope of switching infants for symbolic purposes, especially as it enables him to draw figuratively upon notions of miscegenation and mixed-race personhood to make a wider point about the essentially hybridized cultural and political condition of postindependence. Indeed, the entanglement of biogenetic provenance with cultural conditions might be taken as a profoundly and depressing modern move, one that keeps nature and nurture firmly synchronized and ready to service fictions of racial (im)purity. Andrew Teverson's reference to Saleem's Anglo-Indian bloodline—Rushdie "uses hybridised heroes as a means of comprehending cultural transition" (129)—betrays the general presupposition that those of mixed bloodlines automatically are also culturally plural. But why do we think that culturally hybrid personhood is guaranteed by matters of blood? As Stuart Hall argues in his discussion of Caribbean cinema, all examples of cultural identity are forged in concert, the result of complex positionings and placings that breach old ideas of identity in terms of "one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self'" (393). The postcolonial predicament of Caribbean culture exposes this situation, Hall argues; but it is by no means a culturally exclusive matter, as Midnight's Children evidences.

Rushdie moves quickly to block Midnight's Children from readily supporting Padma's admonishment of Saleem's perceived indifference to his birth mother by prising apart biology from culture. The novel does not indulge in romantic quests for reconnecting biogenetic relations and family reunions as in a fairy tale—even though it begins "I was born in the city of Bombay . . . once upon a time" (9)—but draws back from sustaining a sense of "true" personhood via myths of bloodlines. Only a couple of paragraphs after Saleem reveals that he was switched with Shiva, his narrative races forward to the moment, several years later, when

Mary Pereira confessed, “No: I’m no monster. Nor have I been guilty of trickery. I provided clues . . . but there’s something more important than that. It’s this: when we eventually discovered the crime of Mary Pereira, we all found that it made no difference! I was still their son; they remained my parents. In a kind of failure of imagination, we learned that we simply could not think our way out of our pasts . . . if you had asked my father (even him, despite all that happened!) who his son was, nothing on earth would have induced him to point in the direction of the accordionist’s knock-kneed, unwashed boy” (118).

Rushdie’s presentation of Saleem’s informal adoption stalls the presumption of imminent connections between blood, culture, and nation risked in the alignment of Saleem and India as both hybrid beings born from Anglo-Indian relations. Even as he uses it, Rushdie lays bare the common equation of biology, belonging, and community as always an entirely figurative strategy, in truth as fantastical as the novel’s other wild flights of fancy (Saleem’s telepathy, for example). The remark also contributes to a rendering of the Indian nation in a manner that sets its face against exclusionary visions of postcolonial nationalism that turn on illiberal, schismatic, and prejudicial confections of the people. As Saleem’s parenting suggests—“it made no difference!”—difference is not divisive. Rushdie’s novel imagines an India of all kinds in a distinctly adoptive vein, as a democratic coming together of the manifold and diverse regardless of genealogy, birth, caste, or creed. There is “no monster” here to be judged, legitimated, or cast out: all are welcome, as in the “many-headed monster” (115) of the Indian crowd that throngs Colaba Causeway twenty-seven minutes before independence is declared. No surprise, then, that the novel’s very design draws upon a crowd of diverse literary antecedents—Kipling, Forster, Desani, Marquez, Grass, A Thousand and One Nights—to entrench and sustain this political ideal as an aesthetic principle, where purities of all kinds are gratefully quitted.

This demotic, culturally pluralized vision of an India sourced not in bloodlines but in a common, cacophonous cause is definitive of a particular imagining of India for Rushdie, one that we should not "think our way out of": a welcome "failure of the imagination," to be sure. Politically, it is fundamentally indebted to a distinct rendition of postcolonial nationalism enshrined by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in his famous "Tryst with Destiny" speech delivered on the eve of Indian independence and from which Rushdie derives the central conceit of his novel by having Saleem and Shiva born, like India, "at the stroke of the midnight hour" (Nehru 1). Rushdie's strategic enthusiasm for Nehruvian nationalism is readily discernible throughout his work. As is well known, the chronology of Midnight's Children jumps from 1919 to 1942, effectively bypassing the ascendency of Gandhi's Nationalist Movement. "Thus," presumes Timothy Brennan in an early influential commentary, "the story of Indian nationalism is erased from the book that documents its sad outcome" (84). But Rushdie's aim is to uphold the desirability of a Nehruvian model of the nation in contradistinction to Gandhi's, which is tactically downplayed. In his essay "Dynasty," Rushdie criticizes "Mahatma Gandhi's bizarre attempt to marginalize human sexuality by saying that 'the natural affinity between man and woman is the attraction between brother and sister, mother and son, father and daughter'" (49). Rushdie admits little truck with a mode of thinking that mobilizes "such affinities of blood" (49). Second, in his coedited collection (with Elizabeth West), The Vintage Book of Indian Writing 1947–1997, Nehru's "Tryst with Destiny" is placed as the book's first extract, as if to underwrite its prioritized status in Rushdie's political imagination. So it is not the case, as Brennan argues, that Midnight's Children plots the sad demise of "the story of Indian nationalism" in general. Rather, Rushdie's adoptive aesthetic instead defends the ideal of a distinctly Nehruvian nationalism, one that decries atavistic myths of blood and kinship while at the same time articulating the failure of the postcolonial nation to uphold this ideal in its historical fortunes. Nehru's vision of India in his speech appropriates

the language of birth and family—"Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour. . . . We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell" (Nehru 1, 2)—but in a distinctly associative and affiliative register, rather than in exclusive and consanguineous terms, so that "India and her people" (1) are not defined in terms of race, ethnicity, caste, or creed. The tragedy of postcolonial India, according to the novel, is that since 1947, the country indeed has "split into isolated fragments" (2) as Nehru had feared—just as the novel's magical Midnight Children's conference, peopled by all those born in the first hour of Indian independence, quickly descends into factions and squabbles: "Quarrels began, and the adult world infiltrated the children's; there was selfishness and snobbishness and hate" (304). Ultimately, then, Rushdie offers an adoptive vision of India's postcolonial nationhood affiliatively conceived, one that rejects the subsequent factionalism of postindependence India and its illiberal, antidemocratic fortunes grimly demonstrated by the suspension of democracy by Indira Gandhi (the "Widow" of Rushdie's novel) in the "Emergency" of 1975–77 that preoccupies the novel's somber final part. Such glum outcomes, antipathetic to the Nehruvian ideal of India, would come to preoccupy his later novels of India, such as The Moor *'s* Last Sigh.

Rushdie is much maligned in some postcolonial quarters as an elite cosmopolitan migrant complicit in the wider "diasporic" rejection of anticolonial nationalism. Yet his attempt retrospectively to imagine and uphold the Nehruvian ideal of Indian nationhood adoptively, beyond the lines of blood, filiation, and atavistic difference that have troubled too many postcolonial nation-states, needs to be better recognized. His deployment of an informal adoption in which the bonds of blood are not the arbiters of imagining community is politically responsible rather than fanciful, not least in the implication that adoption offers important critical leverage on the some of the key assumptions of colonial modernity that risk redeployment in the advocacy of some postcolonial nationalisms. In reading this canonical

postcolonial text in concert with the concerns of adoption studies, we might valuably discern its serious critique of India's atavistic national undoing—not nationalist thinking in sum or in general—that asks us to think interrogatively about how some attempts to materialize nationalist aims may sustain the prohibitive parameters of personhood and human relations normatively conceived. To my mind, a salutary element of the novel's postcolonial critical propensity is derived exactly here, in its progressive use of the tropes of child-switching and informal adoption to delete atavistic notions of blood from creatively adoptive conceptions of belonging, community, and identity.

Rushdie's ironic and ultimately dismissive deployment of bloodlines in Midnight's Children may be appropriate to his particular concerns as they emerge in the context of postindependence Indian nationalism, but they are by no means portable to all locations of colonialism and settlement. Indeed, arguably one of the most tense elements of the encounter between adoption studies and postcolonial inquiry emerges in the context of Indigenous or First Nations peoples, as in North America and the South Pacific, who have been displaced from ancestral lands as a consequence of mass migration and settlement from Europe. In these contexts, blood, culture, and belonging combine differently. For many such peoples, ideas concerning cultural identity, belonging, and land claims derive from notions of blood entirely different from those developed as part of the scientific racism of colonial modernity as vividly described by Robert J. C. Young, in which Eurocentric ideas of cultural hierarchy, civilization, and degeneration connect firmly to notions of "pure" blood, miscegenation, and "racial intermixture" (Young 114). As Cathy Hannabach has shown, settler-descended states have been quick to appropriate modern notions of "pure" and "mixed" blood as a way of contesting Indigenous understandings of bloodlines and -relations, often to legitimate their quest to appropriate Indigenous-held land. An example is the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), which assigned "Indian" identity to those with one-half or more Indian blood and hence

excluded “Native definitions of tribal citizenship and identity” (Hannabach 48). Much US legislation, in Hannabach’s description, seeks to override Indigenous definitions with alternative models of biological personhood that uphold racist ideologies. For example, “US blood quantum laws have historically defined Native American and Hawaiian identity through hyperdescent: the children of mixed-race parents (specifically a Native American/native Hawaiian parent and a white parent) are automatically assigned the racial category of the dominant group, in this case white” (48). This is in contrast to African American peoples whose blackness has been perceived in terms of hypodescent (as in the “one-drop rule”). Conceived as such, so-called mixed-race Indigenous peoples are potentially withheld from being considered as the rightful claimants of enclosed land, equal rights, or American citizenship because of the strategic deployment of hypodescent or hyperdescent. Yet while a postcolonial critique of consanguineous relations and biological essentialism allows us to contend with these tactics of subjugation, very much in tune with adoption studies’ suspicion of blood as an exalted origin, the issue of Indigenous notions of blood proves a much thornier issue for postcolonial scholars.

For example, in his valuable book Blood Narrative, Chadwick Allen explores the “blood/land/memory complex” (16) in the writing of Native Americans and the Māori of Aotearoa/New Zealand and argues forcefully for a sympathetic and informed approach to these three terms as “tropic or emblematic figures that contemporary indigenous minority writers and activists have deployed in their works . . . to counter and, potentially, to subvert dominant settler discourses” (15). Influenced by the notion of “blood memory” in the writings of N. Scott Momaday, Chadwick reads Indigenous ideas of blood as the result of carefully crafted narratological strategies that, along with ideas about land and memory, discursively refashion Indigenous futures by productively activating ancestral cultures as usable pasts. He is conscious, on the one hand, of the disenfranchising and essentializing blood quantum policies

of hyperdescent, especially in North America, where "Indian identity became subject to a genetic burden of proof" (177); and, on the other, of the postcolonial critique of blood-borne essentialisms. His advocacy of an Indigenous blood memory as a discursive maneuver is proffered as distinct from received notions of "pure bloodlines or the uninterrupted continuance of indigenous languages or specific lifeways" (205). Blood memory tropes "the conflating of storytelling, imagination, memory, and genealogy into the representation of a single, multifaceted moment in a particular landscape" and brokers "a method of re-collecting and remembering as text the indigenous identity" (181). Yet in his conclusion, Allen equivocates between his discursive rendition of "blood memory" indebted to his engagement with postcolonial studies and the political ventures of Indigenous peoples who have demanded that settler cultures honor the treaties they signed and recognize Indigenous nations and sovereignty: "Despite elaborate theorizing of postcolonialists and multiculturalists, the treaty paradigm requires a level of essentialism, a clear border between one nation and its treaty partner" (220). While Allen cannot conceptually endorse the essentialist tactics of those subjugated peoples to whom he is passionately politically committed, neither can he go so far as to perceive Indigenous meanings of blood as postcolonial situational practices or as a Spivakian act of "strategic" essentialism. In his view, "the anti-essentialism typically espoused by postcolonial and multicultural critics alike . . . may be of limited use for understanding the development and, in particular, the endurance of essential markers of identity within the particular dynamics of Fourth World (post)coloniality" (198). By his own admission, Allen ends his book critically hamstrung, unable to find a way of aligning Indigenous claims voiced through the blood/land/memory complex with the antiessentialist thrust of postcolonial thought. "My purpose has been neither to applaud nor to denounce such tactics" (220), he writes, as if such a position of critical neutrality were ever possible or indeed desirable. As Allen's work intimates, there may remain something of a gap between the conceptual critique

of the figuration of blood in postcolonial thought and its literary and cultural rendition in neocolonial contexts. The political and ethical fissures that result are complex and very difficult to resolve, and postcolonial scholars must remain cognizant of these often insoluble challenges. Allen's work captures just how complicated it might be to sustain or to relinquish consanguineous thinking as part of the political aspirations of postcolonial critique in the context of Indigenous advocacy.

That said, I want to turn, by way of conclusion, to one such Indigenous context as it emerges controversially in Hulme's award-winning novel The Bone People, a canonical text in South Pacific writing and (like Midnight's Children) in postcolonial literature more generally. Hulme's position as a writer has become entangled in discussions concerning Māori and Pākehā (European-descended) identity and bloodlines. As Michelle Keown explains, her status as a Māori writer is unpalatable to some who are conscious of "her mere one-eighth proportion of Māori blood and her ostensibly European physiognomy. . . . while choosing to identify herself as a Māori, she has throughout her life been labelled as Pākehā on the basis of her physical appearance, and these personal experiences inflect her exploration of the disparity between specular and biologically determined (or elective) identities in a wide selection of her writing" (102). These concerns over identification, belonging, cultural plurality, and perceived biological admixture emerge in the novel's central character, Kerewin Holmes, a reclusive artist of Māori, Orkney Scots, and English ancestry, who lives in a strange towerlike dwelling by the sea in the country's South Island. As I will briefly suggest, in attending to adoption as a postcolonial critical matter in the novel, The Bone People may in itself offer a way of thinking that takes us beyond the unequal relations that hinder the emergence of a bi- or indeed multicultural community still caught in the constraints of colonialism's legacies, but which also suggests an adoptive alternative to the "blood/land/memory" complex.

The Bone People has at its heart a triadic relationship. The novel begins when Kerewin's isolated existence is interrupted by a traumatized and mute Pākehā child, Simon, who appears to have been orphaned as a consequence of a boating accident and is informally adopted by a local Māori widower, Joe Gillayley. As Kerewin comes to discover, Simon is often violently disciplined by Joe as part of his problematic attempts to curb Simon's waywardness (he often skips school and is not immune to stealing from others). The revelation of this violence to a child eventually disrupts the growing friendship between Kerewin and Joe, and the triad is broken up: Kerewin pulls down her tower, while Simon is removed from Joe's care after a particularly brutal assault. But by the end of the novel, the three characters are brought together again amid other members of the local community as Kerewin builds a shell-shaped new dwelling that, in recalling the spiral design of much Māori material culture, emphasizes new connections between times, communities, and cultures. As Allen describes it, the building of the tower "reunites Kerewin with both her estranged traditional family and with Joe and Simon, her nontraditional family" (153) and allows a new form of singular and collective identity to be forged, "traditional in the sense that family and community remain in focus, but . . . modified to meet contemporary needs" (153). But in contrast to Allen, I would hazard that one of these contemporary needs, controversial for both Māori and Pākehā, is actually the relinquishment of blood as the guarantor of generative, nurturing, and stable modes of dwelling collectively.

It is notable that each of the novel's three key characters has not enjoyed happy families. Kerewin has endured a long-standing dispute with her filial relations and chooses to live at a remove from them (thanks in part to winning a sum of money in a lottery), while Joe's family past includes his experiences growing up in a menacing domestic milieu as well as the heartbreaking loss of his wife. Kerewin discovers, through a ring that was found on Simon's person, that Simon may be the son of Irish-descended settlers who drowned while involved in

trading drugs, but when she contacts a possible relative—His Lordship, the Earl of Conderry—she is quickly rebuffed, told that the owner of the ring (His Lordship's grandson, possibly Simon's first father) "was disinherited for disgraceful propensities four years ago" (Hulme 121), and is told not to write again. This symbolic cancellation of biogenetic inheritance considered as the best means to secure identity has important consequences for the representation of Māoritanga (Māori culture and way of life) in the novel, not least because matters of whakapapa are crucial to Indigenous renditions of one's tribal provenance or membership of the iwi. Rather than mobilize consanguineous notions of genealogy as part of the new, refreshed representation of a postsettlement, postcolonial Aotearoa/New Zealand, Hulme's novel refuses the notion of blood as empowering cultural transfusion, one that would keep commensurate modernity's association of biogenetic admixture with cultural plurality. As a mixed-race figure, Kerewin might be a ready-made symbol for a polycultural nation, given her several lines of descent that blend Māori and Pākehā ancestries. Yet like Rushdie, Hulme is keen to reject ideas of cultural inclusiveness figured in terms of a pluralized bloodline, as a matter of biogenetic provenance and as a tropological maneuver or "blood narrative." Kerewin's reclusiveness and isolation in her tower sustains the decoupling of blood from belonging throughout the novel. As a mixed-race character, she is absolutely not the sole figurative embodiment of a polycultural futurity. Instead, Hulme looks for a distinctly adoptive solution to the predicament of postsettlement Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Joe's informal adoption of Simon is significant in this regard. It is not uncommon for their relationship to be read as an allegory of bicultural relations, where the violence meted upon Simon as Pākehā stands for the retributive ambitions of an oppressed Indigenous society. In a reading of the novel that fails to recognize the full inclusiveness of Hulme's vision of a reconstituted community, Antje M. Rauwerda argues that the "abuse the child suffers is, in terms of a postcolonial allegory, retributively just" (24). But if we situate this relationship vis-

à-vis the historical context of transcultural adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand, two important points emerge of a more concrete rather than casually allegorical nature. First, from the vantage of adoption studies, this relationship can be strategically requisitioned contrapuntally as obliquely marking the historical phenomenon of family-breaking and transcultural adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In other words, there is a materiality to adoptive relations across cultures in this context that needs protecting from being evacuated when regarding this relationship as a general allegory of the inequalities of biculturalism. Second, and given this materiality, we might note the oddity of the novel presenting a Pākehā child being raised adoptively by a Māori parent: adoptions have usually happened in the other direction, with Māori children entering Pākehā families via "closed" adoption contracts. I read the "reversal" of these cultural relations as exposing through defamiliarization the presence of bicultural adoptive practices in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a means whereby this otherwise hidden history of adoption as a recurring reality is brought into the light counterintuitively through a representation of exceptionality. While the violent parenting pursued by Joe may indeed index the unfinished violent legacies of European settlement, as Rauwerda sees things, from the vantage point of adoption studies the representation of Simon and Joe's relationship invites us to think about adoptions of all kinds in a postcolonial setting at one level as constituting an act of violence, as inseparably bound up in and shaped by the wider complex of inequities that characterize and cut across the country's bicultural condition. In other words, if Hulme presents at the novel's climax a vision of a reconstituted postcolonial community that is distinctly adoptive, then the cruelty of Joe's fatherly disciplining works, first, to ensure that adoptive relations are not idealized or romanticized in The Bone People and, second, to sustain the point that a progressive transformation of transpersonal relations is not possible without the redrafting of social relations in their entirety so that violence ceases to be the legacy of colonialism's irreversible advent.

The novel's adoptive ending brings together previously ostracized members of Kerewin's extended family along with Joe and his Māori iwi in Kerewin's shell-shaped dwelling as part of a new communal set of relations that collectively breaches the boundaries of all previous descriptions of relation: Māori, Pākehā, mixed-race, and others. It is a space of forgiveness and healing in which Joe is admonished for his previously disgraceful treatment of Simon, but he accepts the opprobrium and seeks to face the future fully cognizant of and sorry for his part in the country's legacy of violence: "It's past, but we live with it forever" (Hulme 539). Importantly, the vision of this transformed collective is anticipated by the mute Simon just before he runs away from his official carers and seeks out the sanctuary of Kerewin's new abode: "He has worked at keeping them together whatever the cost. He doesn't know the words for what they are yet. Not family, not whanau . . . maybe there aren't words for us yet? (E nga iwi, whispers Joe; o my serendipitous elf, serendipitous self, whispers Kerewin, we are the waves of future chance) he shakes the voices out of his head. But we have to be together. If we are not, we are nothing. We are broken. We are nothing" (479).

This vision of "future chance," which Hulme deliberately assigns to the adoptee figure in the novel as its mute custodian, blends the voices of those connected across the spectrum of Māori and Pākehā ancestries. The received vocabularies of filiation (family, whanau) do not solely capture the specifics of the togetherness that Simon pursues at all costs, in defiance of the structures that would break the promise of a new collectivity wrought from the serendipitous triad of Kerewin, Simon, and Joe. Yet Joe's Māori phrase suggests a possible new figurative vocabulary. As the novel's notes inform non-Māori speakers, the phrase that Simon hears in his head rests upon a pun: "It means, O the bones of the people (where 'bones' stands for ancestors or relations), or, O the people of the bones (i.e. the beginning people, the people who make another people)" (546). As Allen sees it, and given the title of The Bone People, the novel ends with a refashioning by a new Māori-inspired identity: "By redefining

themselves as together, they become new ancestors" (Allen 154). But what is not usually commented upon is the distinctively adoptive character of this redefinition of human attachment, one that takes us beyond consanguineous models of cultural identities of all kinds, where "the people who make other people" need not be biogenetically related in order transformatively "to be together" anew. The novel registers this redefinition in its use of biological terminology, where the exclusionary or exalted notions of blood (pure, mixed-race) are relinquished in favor of the image of bone as a refreshed metaphor that describes human commonality and transpersonal relatedness, beyond the precepts of discrete genealogies of cultural identity expressed in liquid, consanguineous terms. (One wonders, then, why Allen still holds to tropes of blood in his sensitive engagement with the novel.) As such, Hulme deploys the idea of adoption as both a material and figurative preoccupation: as a measure of the colonial-sourced phenomenon of family-breaking as well as an incipient, anticipatory, and progressively postcolonial model of family-making. Without this attentiveness to the centrality of adoption, foregrounded by sustaining postcolonial inquiry and adoption studies in productive dialogue, the richness as well as specificity of Hulme's careful imagining of new human relations as quintessentially adoptive is lost.

Hulme's wide-angled representation of adoption in Aotearoa/New Zealand as both a material matter of violence and dispossession and a figurative mode of engendering new relations for the future is, to my mind, exemplary of a postcolonial standpoint. Postcolonial studies recognizes the indebtedness of today's local and global conditions to the fortunes of colonial modernity and the European empires, the imbrication of representation and the imagination in the discursive domains inherited from divisive pasts, and the extent to which decolonization in both the economic and the cultural sphere very much remains unfinished business today in, to use Derek Gregory's chilling phrase, our "colonial present" (xiv). At the same time, and while sustaining its skeptical vigilance of the world, it invests in both the

necessity and the possibility of change, insists upon the role and agency that cultural representations can play in transformative processes, and critically prizes the innovative cultural creativity that, while sourced in sordid histories, might point the way to marvelous futures. Viewed through these lenses, adoption may emerge fruitfully in a similar vein: inevitably sourced in severance and hurt as a direct consequence of inequality and exploitation that must be admitted, not elided, through the rhetoric of humanitarianism or child "rescue"; but also containing the capacity to broker a skeptical approach to existing ways of imagining filial relations and to model new modes of transpersonal relations that may free us all, adopted or not, from the constraints of the normative. The potential rapport between each field of inquiry, as I hope I have proved, is rich indeed. It requires postcolonial thinkers to take better account of a phenomenon of which, until now, the field usually "doesn't say" much, to bring the centrality of family-breaking and -making into better view so that the historical violations witnessed through the "On Their Own" exhibition are not news. And it may require scholars of adoption and culture to be aware, too, of not only the very many historical and cultural contexts of adoption practices but also how imaginative representations of adoption possess something akin to the vital postcolonial propensity to dare to imagine a progressive futurity emerging from the heartaches of the past.

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