Constructing Transnational and Transracial Identity
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Constructing Transnational and Transracial Identity

Adoption and Belonging in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark

Sigalit Ben-Zion
This book is the dedicated to the Invisible One, A Father to Orphans.

**Longing**

I walked slowly  
in calculated steps  
towards the past  
towards the great white stones'  
which reminded me  
what I already have managed to forget  

to forget the love  
the longing  
the pain  
the search  
to forget how much I love you  

I kept walking towards the endless sea  
I wanted to touch eternity  
the horizon  
the waves  
the wind  
the love  
the longing  
I wanted to touch you  

I whispered your name to the waves  
who kissed the shore goodbye  
I whispered to the waves  
what I couldn’t say to you  

If you only knew how much I love  
if you only knew how much I want  
but you deserted suddenly the battle field  
and left me with the questions and the doubts  
and with the longing for someone  
who once was and is no more  

Sigalit Ben-Zion  

*A mark of a Jewish grave*
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Preface: The Untold Story of the Journey into the Twilight Zone

While you see my name on the cover and title page, the book itself reflects the guidance of the Invisible One, a father to orphans, who carefully directed and choreographed the course of the play backstage, initially titled Living in the Twilight Zone.

Everyone has their unforgettable moments. For me it was Tuesday afternoon, February 19, 2014, when I was told by editor Robyn Curtis from Palgrave Macmillan that I received a “green light” from my anonymous reviewer. I was the luckiest person on the face of the Earth. Without any warning tears came out expressing an intense feeling of ecstatic joy and pain. It was the climax of my journey into the Twilight Zone, and the flattering words used by the reviewer only confirmed in my heart of hearts that I should never give up on my dream even if everyone thought it was an impossible task to accomplish.

In the following I would like to share with you some highlights of the journey that is expressed in a form of a letter that was written to my anonymous reviewer. Let me start from the end, or from the beginning of the end, of the journey that reflects paradoxical binaries of spirituality and intellectuality, passion and reasoning, the unattainable and achievable, the unimaginable and the conceivable, which exist in a perfect harmony somewhere in between heaven, the sky, and the earth – the Twilight Zone.

After I finished writing my PhD, which was later transformed into an academic book, I had an irresistible urge to write a new book that would deal with the relationship between first- and third-world countries from a postcolonial perspective. In the pilot project I used different social categories, such as “transcolor adoptees” and “first and second generation immigrants” to support my theoretical hypothesis. I applied for a national grant from research councils in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, but the applications were turned down. The turning point occurred in autumn 2009. After I returned from my fieldwork in Denmark, I realized that a paradigm shift needs to be taken into consideration. Fascinated by the narratives of transcolor adoptees, I was resolute to focus only on adoptees and let their narratives guide the course of this ethnographic investigation. However, there were a few obstacles. Since there was no grant available, I had to consume
my own capital and give up my own academic career and social life. There were few available ethnographic studies on transcolor adoption and most of those available were written by adoptive parents. It was almost impossible to find informants who were willing to take part in this research project. To top it all, my colleagues thought the project proposal was too pretentious.

Having said that, embarking on the journey into the Twilight Zone was like a kamikaze suicide. Just as Columbus’ planned destination was India, but accidentally discovered America, I too “accidentally” discovered “Scandinavian transcolor adoptees.” To be perfectly frank, I was not even aware of the social category “adopted” until I began my research into transcolor adoptees. I often wondered if the Invisible One was speaking in riddles to my heart letting this sacred torch burn deep inside of me and won’t set me free until the voices of the adoptees will be heard. At any rate, in spring 2013 the mission was accomplished.

It was time to find a publisher. To make a long story short, I “accidentally” ended up with Palgrave Macmillan. It was time to send the manuscript to the reviewer. I was scared stiff, being aware of the disturbing fact that the reviewer is actually the first scholar who is going to read the entire manuscript! I never felt so fragile.

**NEW YORK: A “CONCRETE JUNGLE WHERE DREAMS ARE MADE OF”**

I came to New York on December 24, 2013, and was told that the reviewer is expected to send the evaluation in early 2014.

While waiting anxiously, I used the opportunity to experience the cultural and the academic settings from a USA/NY context. My overall experience was that “everything is big in America” including the cold weather!

I wanted to meet Robyn before leaving New York in February although we both knew there wasn’t any point in arranging a meeting without the review.

Robyn welcomed me with a smile, and as she led me to the meeting room she informed me that a few hours ago she received the evaluation. Caught totally off-guard, I thought to myself it can’t be true. Eagerly I asked Robyn whether the manuscript was approved or if I am going to face the music from the reviewer.

She explained that we did receive the “green light” but there is work to be done. The taste of freedom was sensational. As tears came out, I explained to her why I am behaving in this “strange” way, but if you ask me I was not the only person who was moved from within in this room. Robyn and I were impressed by the long evaluation of the reviewer, five pages! Someone was obviously doing her “homework” diligently, Robyn noted.

She informed me that although the evaluation is flattering, there is work to be done, but it is achievable. Trying to encourage me she pointed at the paragraph where the reviewer was praising the work. I was over the moon. The reviewer certainly understood the very essence of this project. For the
first time I knew in my heart of hearts that the voices of the adoptees would be heard. I was on top of the world. It was not a waste of time to come to New York, after all!

**BACK TO THE DESERT OF REFLECTION**

Upon my return to Tel Aviv it was time to work on the revisions of the book. Reading the reviewer’s meticulous evaluation left me feeling at sea! To begin with, I disagreed with most the critics and suggestions. Second, I had no idea how to get handle of doing the revisions. Third, I’ve never experienced someone critiquing my work with such an authority, insinuating in almost every detail that I should reframe the research project theoretically, methodologically, and structurally, mostly pertaining to Chapter 1. My overall desire was to demonstrate beyond any doubt that the reviewer was barking up the wrong tree.

Ironically, as I was reading the available literature, and discovering new books and articles, I began to grasp with my mind and heart the significance of the reviewer’s insightful suggestions and critics. Instantaneously, pride was turned into shame. I somewhat realized that I resisted vigorously the intellectual guidance of the reviewer who was actually encouraging me to try new approaches and expand my intellectual horizon. Thanks to Robyn, I was able to exchange a few letters with this anonymous reviewer, which in many respects enabled me to bring this work to completion and perfection.

As for the ending, it seemed that all social actors involved in this project were truly delighted with the final result. It was time to move on to the next phase, and reluctantly say Goodbye to my anonymous reviewer. A mysterious person who was reading me like an open book, and was pushing me to the limit of my choice!

Having finally reached Safe Haven, in retrospect it seems as if the enigmatic dimension of the journey into the Twilight Zone has only intensified. I began to wonder that maybe “this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning!”
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I recall asking my father, who was suffering from serious illness, how he managed to endure the severe pain. He answered wisely, “I have God above and your mother below.” What I did not know then that these would be the last words I’m ever going to hear from him! In the same spirit, I would like to say that the creation of this book has not been created “out of nothing,” but it is the outcome of the guiding hand of the Invisible One and an ongoing interaction with informants, friends, and colleagues who have almost become my kin.

I am enormously grateful to all of you, my dear informants, for sharing your stories, experiences, and time with me. You have enlightened me with profound insights that I could not find in books or articles about adoption, and the Human Condition. In this respect you were not only my teachers but also my partners in writing this book!

There is one academic institution I would like to thank especially, the Department of Social Anthropology at Stockholm University. Having the privilege of doing research in a stimulating and supportive academic environment provided many fruitful conversations and interactions with local and international scholars. Each of them contributed yet another colored stone to the mosaic of my knowledge, or added yet more depth to my understanding and insight. I especially want to thank Professor Karin Norman for encouraging me to reconsider my methodological agenda by employing the multi-sited fieldwork and making my stay at Stockholm University pleasant and productive.

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is highly manifested in the production of this book. Thank you for making my dream come true!

I wish to express my warm and sincere appreciation to you, my anonymous reviewer, for your profoundly helpful comments and critiques. As I’ve already said in the Preface, you’ve played the role of the “rescuer” with a capital “R.” Using kin idioms, you were certainly “pampering” me intellectually and emotionally, but you were also “straightening me out.” In a sense you have become an inspiring and enigmatic mentor who enabled me to raise the standard of the book, and develop intellectually.

Speaking about transnational connection and collaboration, it’s been a great privilege and a pleasure to work with the staff members of Palgrave Macmillan and Integra Software Services, who have been extraordinarily generous, attentive, supportive, accessible, amenable, open to new ideas, negotiable, and cooperative.

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The ultimate acknowledgment goes to the Invisible One, who in very visible ways enabled me to fulfill yet another academic dream.