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# LOVING BELINDA

Jane Jin Kaisen

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Ønskebørn sælges

Fig. 1

»Og nu kan vi så bare vente«

Fig. 2

**Homoseksuelle tættere  
på retten til adoption**

Fig. 3

**NÅR BØRN BLIVER  
EN RETTIGHED**

Fig. 4

**Madonna vil have Mercy**

Fig. 5

Barnets tarv eller en god forretning?

Fig. 6

Børnene, der var  
et eksperiment

Fig. 7

Man holder  
aldrig op  
med at være  
adopteret

Fig. 8

Danske adoptanter er verdens mest kritiske

Fig. 9

Amerikanske missionærer anklaget for ulovlig adoption

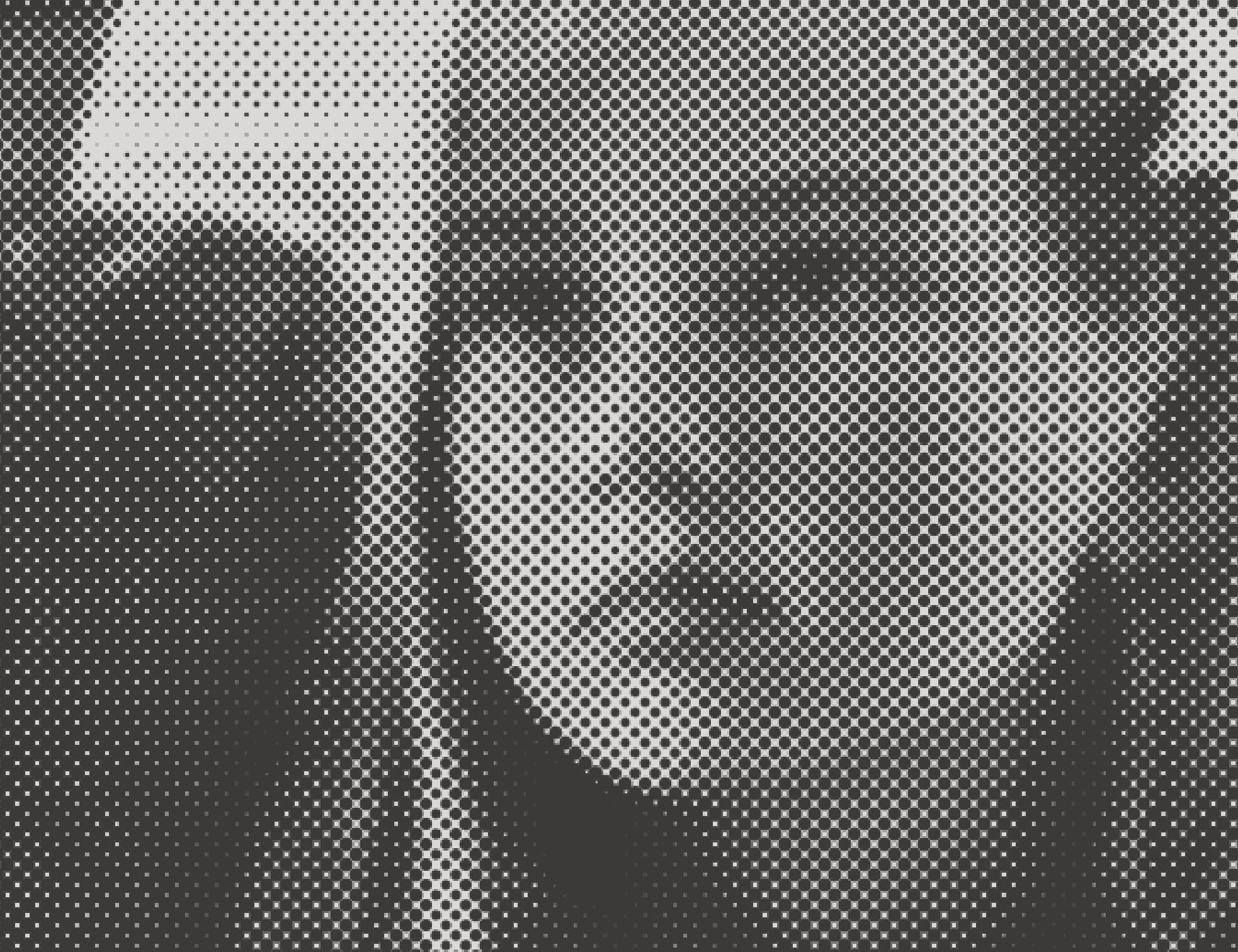
Fig.10

**1-årig dreng  
kidnappet i  
indisk slum**

Fig. 11

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Adopting Belinda, 2006

## **ADOPTING BELINDA**

Spring 2006: The home of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

A Danish TV host, who is doing a series on Danish heritage for the morning TV program *Kaffen er serveret* (*Coffee is Served*), visits Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in Minneapolis. He interviews them about their experience of having recently adopted Belinda, a little girl from Denmark.

### **CAST**

DANISH TV HOST: Morten Goll  
MR. ANDERSON: Tobias Hübinette  
MRS. ANDERSON: Jane Jin Kaisen  
BELINDA: Elke Olaf Goll





DANISH TV HOST:

Welcome to our morning series on Danish heritage. Today we're very grateful to have been invited into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, who live right outside Minneapolis, in a beautiful little cottage. Why did you choose to adopt a child?

MR. ANDERSON:

We couldn't have children ourselves, so for us it was just natural to adopt. Well, we tried for some years, but in the end, nothing came out of it, so adoption was kind of... yes...

DANISH TV HOST:

Was it a tough process to go through?

MR. ANDERSON:

It's really tough.

MRS. ANDERSON:

It's really strenuous... It's horrible in fact, the process you have to go through to adopt...

DANISH TV HOST:

Now, you chose to adopt a Scandinavian child... Is that harder than to adopt from other places in the world?

MR. ANDERSON:

Oh, very much so. Most people adopt from countries in Asia, South America, or Africa, but we really wanted to have a Danish child, so we put a lot of effort into managing it, succeeding to make this adoption happen. And we're so happy for that because we have Danish roots ourselves, so Denmark was number one and the only country for us.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Because we wanted to give Belinda everything that we're able to give her, and since we have roots in Scandinavia it also seemed more natural that we adopted from Scandinavia. And here in Minnesota we have a lot of people of Scandinavian descent, so it just seemed like the right thing to do.

MR. ANDERSON:

It's kind of natural.

DANISH TV HOST:

Do you think it has been a successful transition for, excuse me, what's her name?

MR. ANDERSON:

Belinda.

DANISH TV HOST:

Belinda, oh I see, that's a nice name. Do you think it has been a successful transition for Belinda?

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes! She's very happy.

MR. ANDERSON:

Because we believe that Danish children are so easy to handle. And this connection between us and her, sharing the same kind of roots originally, makes it so smooth and easy. So this attachment process, which so many people worry about, we never felt that actually. It just came about.

...





DANISH TV HOST:

So do you know anything about what she has been through, specifically?

MR. ANDERSON:

Yes, well...

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yeah, it was a quite young mother... I mean, so she has been to a foster family most of the time... And then she was at a clinic at last, before we received her, just to do the check-ups and make sure that everything was OK.

MR. ANDERSON:

So Belinda has actually gone through a couple of separations before coming home.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes.

MR. ANDERSON:

And there's also this issue with... Well, in Denmark... you know that... I mean, they drink a lot... especially young people... and... it's a country where even women smoke a lot. So, they have... well, there are those parents who have problems. So, it's not only that we're helping Belinda. In a way we're also helping the Danish people because she'll... I mean, her chances of getting a good life... You cannot compare with if she would have stayed in Denmark, it's impossible, with such a, I mean... Of course we feel kind of grateful to her Danish mother, but...

MRS. ANDERSON:

We also feel that we're helping an unfortunate young woman... And that was also why we went through the whole process of getting a child from Denmark

because here in Minnesota there are so many Danish things still... so she wouldn't miss her cultural identity.

MR. ANDERSON:

She'll feel at home here. Like we have done, always, when we grew up.

DANISH TV HOST:

Did you ever talk to her mother?

MR. ANDERSON:

No, we didn't. And actually we...

MRS. ANDERSON:

Because it was a full adoption from the beginning. We believe it's good to separate.

MR. ANDERSON:

Yes.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Of course we would...

MR. ANDERSON:

I mean, if Belinda wants to meet her when she's getting older, it's OK for us, but for the moment I think it's better for the attachment process and so on... She's with us now.

...





Revisiting The Andersons, 2015

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## REVISITING THE ANDERSONS

Fall 2014: The home of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in  
Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

On the occasion of the 10 year anniversary of the Danish TV Program *Kaffen er serveret* (*Coffee is Served*), a Danish TV host revisits the Anderson family. They met back in 2006 shortly after Mr. and Mrs. Anderson had adopted Belinda, a little girl from Denmark. Now Belinda is nine years old, and in the meantime there has been a lot of debate about transnational adoption and race in Denmark. The Danish TV host interviews the Andersons about how they are coping as a family and about their perspectives on transnational adoption and racism.

### CAST

DANISH TV HOST: Morten Goll  
MR. ANDERSON: Tobias Hübinette  
MRS. ANDERSON: Jane Jin Kaisen  
BELINDA: Elke Olaf Goll

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DANISH TV HOST:

You have grown a lot, Belinda. How old are you now?

BELINDA:

Nine.

DANISH TV HOST:

Wow, that's amazing! Do you think an adoptive family is any different from if Belinda had a biological mother?

MRS. ANDERSON:

No, I think, I mean, we're her parents now. It's really just another way of becoming a family. Lots of people become a family in the same way so it's quite normal.

DANISH TV HOST:

Do you feel that your surroundings have a good understanding of adoption?

MR ANDERSON:

Yes. Many people adopt here, and people understand that we're a family so there it's not a problem at all with that, and we also read a lot about adoption. We try to update ourselves. We try to follow the debates on adoption, even research coming out.

DANISH TV HOST:

Do you think that it's important to preserve the adopted child's history and aspects of the birth culture? And do you do anything to actively preserve Belinda's Danish heritage?

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes, we do a lot of things actually, and we do think it's very important. Some adoptive families are not very conscious of these aspects, but of course Belinda's Danish heritage is part of her, so we encourage that. There are also a lot of things we appreciate about Danish culture, for instance Danish design and IKEA and...

MR. ANDERSON:

Lego.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes, Lego. And we even have a Norwegian minister in the church we attend, so we try to encourage all the positive aspects of Danish culture to Belinda.

DANISH TV HOST:

That's wonderful! But have you visited Denmark with Belinda?

MRS. ANDERSON:

No. Not yet. I mean, we definitely thought about it, but it's also about finding the right time in a child's development, and from the adoption literature we have read, we understand that she's not quite old enough to take such a big journey, so...

MR. ANDERSON:

Yeah, we'll know when she's ready for it. And then we'll go, of course.

...



DANISH TV HOST:

Maybe one of the more uncomfortable questions, but does Belinda ever talk, or ask about her biological mother?

MR. ANDERSON:

We call her the Denmark-mother.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes...

MR. ANDERSON:

But again, you need to be a bit hesitant about this. There was another person in another country, and Belinda knows that as well, but we're her parents now, so we don't want to make a big thing out of it at this very moment.

MRS. ANDERSON:

No.

DANISH TV HOST:

Of course. As an interracial family, do you encounter prejudices or problems with racism?

MR. ANDERSON:

Not really here. It's so diverse here in the U.S. and it's so mixed so no, I wouldn't say so. But thinking about countries in Europe like Denmark, I can fully understand your question because there you have problems. We read that in the newspapers, we see it on television, but we don't have it here, actually. We're so open about talking about race, so it's such a great country.

DANISH TV HOST:

Still, your case is unusual because you adopted a girl from Denmark whereas

most people adopt from countries in Asia or Africa or South America. Do you think this represents a different racial or cultural issue?

MRS. ANDERSON:

Well, it's something we have always been very conscious of, and quite frankly I think there are a lot of problems connected to adoptive parents in the West adopting from African countries, for instance, because there's this whole colonial aspect. And there have been a lot of cases, also some that we have followed in the Danish media, of corruption and child trafficking and all these terrible things. Of course we would never encourage that, so in that sense we're very happy that we adopted Belinda from Denmark because we can make sure that there are not these kinds of issues in our case.

DANISH TV HOST:

How can you be sure that there were no child harvesters or corruption involved in Belinda's adoption?

MR. ANDERSON:

We're against the whole system of corrupted adoptions, and we didn't take part in that, so I think we already answered your question.

MRS. ANDERSON:

There's definitely not this kind of issue with Belinda's history.

MR. ANDERSON:

When we chose Denmark as the country of origin, that's a security in itself. There's no colonial history at all between the U.S. and Denmark, for example. It's an equal situation that we entered into.

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Loving Belinda, 2015

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## **LOVING BELINDA**

Fall 2014: In a horse stable in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

As part of her field research on adoption and attachment disorder, a Danish adoption researcher has come to interview Mr. and Mrs. Anderson who are the parents of Belinda, a nine-year-old girl adopted from Denmark. They meet in a horse stable since horseback riding is part of Belinda's attachment therapy. While Mr. and Mrs. Anderson talk to the Danish adoption researcher, Belinda is riding her horse Folkvar, a Danish Frederiksborg breed, in the background.

### **CAST**

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER: Lene Myong

MR. ANDERSON: Tobias Hübinette

MRS. ANDERSON: Jane Jin Kaisen

BELINDA: Elke Olaf Goll

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DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:  
Has Belinda been diagnosed?

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes, the second therapist we saw, and whom we're really happy with, is an expert on adoption issues and attachment disorder. That person also diagnosed Belinda with an attachment disorder.

MR. ANDERSON:

And that was a relief for us, of course, because then we understood that this wasn't really our fault. This is something very common, and it's also principally about her and what happened to her in Denmark before she came to us.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

Yes, because how much do you know about Belinda's past before she was adopted?

MRS. ANDERSON:

She was born to a single mother who most likely had substance abuse problems. It's not just the emotional impact, but maybe also....

MR. ANDERSON:

Medical, physical...

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes, there have been medical issues, too.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

How many therapists have you seen in relation to the attachment problems?

MR. ANDERSON:

Maybe in total three or four. It was really the one we have today that worked

for us, so we were lucky because we know other adoptive families who have been to so many different professional contacts.

MRS. ANDERSON:

It's really about finding someone who understands and has knowledge about adoption issues because some of the other therapists put different diagnoses on her, but when this one therapist said she had an attachment disorder that made complete sense all of a sudden. It completely described all the issues Belinda have, and it was also a relief to us because it's easy as a parent to blame yourself because you see that your child has so many problems, and it's difficult for you to help, but the therapist was also very good at saying that it's about placing the problem.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

Yes, because can you explain a little bit more in detail what the therapist has explained about the reason or the cause of the attachment disorder?

MR. ANDERSON:

Well, it's basically about all the separations Belinda went through in Denmark. And they're at least three, as far as we know, but they can be even more. We don't know that. We know the documented separations, and they're the one we call the Denmark-mother, her birth mother, then it's the foster family, and the institution. So before she came to us, even though she was so small, she had already gone through three fundamental separations, and I think that basically says it all.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

So you think that's the cause of Belinda's problems?

MR. ANDERSON:

Absolutely. All that taken together created the situation. That's what we were told, and that's also what we believe.





DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

Do you feel that now the process has come to an end, or is this therapy going to continue?

MRS. ANDERSON:

I think we'll probably continue it because it's so helpful, and we don't want a backlash to happen.

MR. ANDERSON:

Considering everything she has been through before she came to us, all the traumas in Denmark, it takes a long time to heal, basically, for a child who's so vulnerable, so we'll definitely continue with this therapy with Folkvar. And as we both agree upon, it's also enjoyable for us.

MRS. ANDERSON:

She'll even sometimes come and sit on our laps, or especially on my lap. Sometimes it's a little bit harder for Per, but after we have done these holding sessions, she'll just come over and give us a big kiss and say that she loves us. It's so amazing to see because she used to be so withdrawn, and she had so many issues before.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

And have you been in therapy yourselves, for example in relation to your infertility, at some point?

MR. ANDERSON:

No. Why should we? We accepted that. It's no problem. We chose to adopt, and that's just another way of having a child, right? We accepted that.

MRS. ANDERSON:

Yes, we don't have any issues.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

Do you feel that Belinda has accepted both of you equally as her parents?

MR. ANDERSON:

To be honest, actually maybe not. It's true as Jenny says that the therapy works for their relationship, pretty well now. She comes to Jenny and she sits in her lap, and she even hugs her willingly nowadays, now and then. But with me it seems that she hasn't really accepted that I'm her father. And we believe – we also talked about this problem with the therapist – that it might actually be that, because we don't know anything about Belinda's birth father – it might be that maybe there was some abuse going on. If it wasn't the birth father, it might have been another person, another male person in Denmark. Something bad happened, maybe. And that of course is something which worries us. But we'll never know.

DANISH ADOPTION RESEARCHER:

And my last question would be what hopes you have for yourself and Belinda and your family in the future? What are your hopes?

MR. ANDERSON:

Our hope is of course to just continue to be a normal family, which we believe that we are, in spite of some difficulties that we've had with Belinda's attachment disorder diagnosis. So that's really our hope for the future, and we also believe that that's what's going to happen. We will stay a normal family.

...





The Andersons, 2015







Transnational Adoption in the  
Context of Colonial Repression,  
Race, and the Right-wing Turn  
in Scandinavia

Tobias Hübinette  
&  
Jane Jin Kaisen

# Transnational Adoption in the Context of Colonial Repression, Race, and the Right-wing Turn in Scandinavia

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Tobias Hübinette & Jane Jin Kaisen  
October 28, 2014

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** In 2006, we collaborated on the art project *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia*. It included the video mockumentary *Adopting Belinda*, *Tracing Trades*, a 38-minute narrative experimental documentary, a semi-fictional archive installation, as well as a two-part performance. The project was initially shown as part of *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, curated by Kuratorisk Aktion.<sup>1</sup> With *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* we explored how colonial repression and orientalist imaginaries have contributed to a humanitarian and anti-racist self-image in Scandinavia today. The project proposed that these sentiments might have played a role in Denmark and Sweden being the countries in the world that, per capita, have adopted the most children from non-Western countries.

Back in 2006, transnational adoption was largely uncontested in Denmark, however during the past few years there has been significant public debate and criticism of transnational adoption. This is largely due to the fact that a growing contingent of adoptees themselves have provided structural critiques of transnational adoption. This shift in attitudes towards transnational adoption was a motivating factor for making the videos *Revisiting the Andersons* and *Loving Belinda* as follow-ups to *Adopting Belinda*. All the videos build on a fictional narrative of Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, an Asian-American couple who in 2006 adopted Belinda, a white girl from Denmark. By reversing the racial 'order' in transnational adoption, the videos seek to destabilize reality and expose the racial dynamic and uneven relations of power embedded

in transnational adoption. The new works in the *Belinda* series incorporate recent debates and critiques of transnational adoption and racism in Danish society. However, while Mr. and Mrs. Anderson from their Midwestern American perspective pick up on racism in Scandinavia, they at the same time disavow their own racial difference and disregard problematic race relations in the United States while framing their adoption of Belinda as ethical and unproblematic.

Being a pioneering scholar on transnational adoption in the Scandinavian context, I am curious as to how you interpret the changing attitudes on transnational adoption in Scandinavia, and what might have caused some of these changes?

**Tobias Hübinette:** I can mainly speak about the Swedish context although, of course, I have followed the Danish discussion from a distance. I think an increasingly multiracial Denmark and Sweden and the whole adoption discourse have developed together in many ways. Nowadays, adult adoptees are more connected to the non-adoptee racial minorities than they were before, and this has created a new image of adoptees within the Danish and Swedish societies. Before we were very isolated, at least in Sweden, but today adoptees in Sweden are seen much more as part of other minorities instead of just being isolated and belonging to white families. That development has taken place because adoptees themselves, and also non-adoptees, have become more active in speaking out against racist discrimination and also in voicing a claim to Swedishness, which has not really been heard before.

I think the difference between Sweden and Denmark in terms of the adoption discourse is that we had that discussion in Sweden maybe 10 years ago, but then it sort of died out and now has appeared in Denmark. In both countries the discussions have been more or less totally driven by adult adoptees themselves who have claimed their voices in this discussion which until just recently was totally dominated by non-adoptees, especially adoptive parents and adoptive agencies, but also the ordinary public who never saw the situation of adoptees as problematic or special in any way. So what is happening in Denmark now happened in Sweden some years ago, but it is a similar process, I think.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** So do you observe an emergence of different strategic alliances between transnational adoptees and other minorities in Sweden? I am thinking that there is a political potential in us as adoptees strategically aligning ourselves with other minorities instead of trying to assimilate with the white majority.

**Tobias Hübinette:** Many adoptees, who are active within the adoptee community, probably still see themselves as separate, but others look at us now as being a part of a wider minority Sweden, so the kind of separate identity of the transnational transracial adoptee is still there, of course, but something

has happened, which forces adoptees in a sense to choose sides. There are also some adoptees who are active in the far-right political party, *Sverigedemokraterna* (the *Sweden Democrats*), and they are more openly active than before. They are visibly active. As adoptees we have always been that symbol of course, but now it is more obvious that we are this missing link or symbol between the minority and the majority, perhaps even in a perverse way. The very obvious example of this was an election campaign film made by the political party *Sverigedemokraterna* just before the election, where there were two adoptees, one from Korea and one from Sri Lanka, together with the white party leader. Their position were as Swedes, but also as something else because obviously they were not white, so it was a very strong statement from the side of the party, saying: “We are not racist”, and it was also a claim to Swedishness from the side of the two adoptees, but a very far-right kind of Swedishness, of course.

I have always thought about the role of the far right. It is already mainstream in Denmark, and it is becoming mainstream everywhere. The position of the far right when it comes to adoption and adoptees has also shifted recently. In the 1990s, most of these parties were against adoption and adoptees for obvious reasons, and they did not accept adoptees as members, and they would actually be ashamed if members of these parties were adoptive parents, but now they have included adoptees, on the surface at least, exploiting them. And some adoptees have joined them. There must be adoptee members too in Denmark in *Dansk Folkeparti* (the *Danish People's Party*).

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** I think it could be interesting to talk about how it was to reverse the racial dynamic in *Adopting Belinda* and *Loving Belinda* where we as adoptees played the roles of the adoptive parents. There was a strange kind of pleasure in playing or embodying the roles of the adoptive parents, and it felt almost like a cannibalistic act.

**Tobias Hübinette:** I agree. Playing or becoming the adoptive parent, to a white Danish child, was of course a very weird but also very rewarding experience for me in some way. For the first time in my life it was possible to speak about these topics without being interrupted or questioned at all. The authority and agency were already there because the position of power was already there from the beginning. In the *Loving Belinda* video that takes place in a horse-riding range with an adoption and attachment researcher, who also happened to be Asian, it was so natural and so easy. It always felt as if the script had already been written, so to speak, and that became very clear at that moment.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Yes. It really did. Although we planned this shoot better than when we filmed *Adopting Belinda* back in 2006, our dialogue was still very improvised and completely unscripted, but it felt very natural because this narrative logic is so pervasive, so it was so easy to imagine what our characters, the adoptive parents, would respond when asked different questions by the

adoption researcher.

Making *Loving Belinda* made me imagine or fantasize what will happen to Belinda and the Andersons in the future. How might they for instance respond to the challenges they are met with as an adoptive family given that discourses surrounding adoption will change, and given that Belinda will grow up and develop her own opinion and perspectives on adoption? I imagine that the Danish TV host might revisit the family every 7-8 years for decades to come, and that we will get to know Belinda's perspectives through future interviews. Will she search for her Danish birth mother? Will she become politicized as an adoptee and perhaps even align with transnational, transracial adoptees of color in Denmark and in the United States? Or will she as a white subject fit perfectly into the middle-class American family she grew up in and disavow her racial difference en lieu of her adoptive parents?

I was inspired by the British documentary *Up Series* in which Michael Apted, a TV documentarist, revisits a group of people whom he has been following since they were seven years old back in the 1960s. In the beginning there were twenty children. Now there are fewer participants as it is voluntary for them to participate. It is a quite amazing project: A new documentary about the same people has been made every seven years for five decades. The first documentary was made to show how upward mobility in Britain was impossible, but now it has turned into this quite amazing document of a number of people throughout a life course, which of course also reflects how society and culture around them change. I imagine something similar with Belinda. It would be incredible to meet her and the Andersons again when she turns eighteen or twenty-five and so on.

**Tobias Hübinette:** Yes, how she will turn out, and how the family will develop.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Yes. I think the longer I work with adoption and questions surrounding adoption, I begin to see things in a different time frame. When I was younger, I thought of it much more in terms of ‘When will South Korea end its transnational adoptions?’ or ‘When will I as an artist have said what I needed to say about adoption?’ These days I think about it more in terms of process. It is an issue that I of course will keep following and keep being engaged in on a personal and political level, and something that I, as now with *Loving Belinda*, from time to time will feel compelled to reflect upon artistically as the discourse around adoption changes and is seen in relation to new social formations and political contexts.

It is interesting to see how adoption these years is being connected to other issues, which in turn enables a different kind of thinking of adoption, for instance in relation to transnational commercial surrogacy and the transnational fertility industry, or in a Danish context, in relation to ongoing debates surrounding race and racism, or homosexual, single, or multi-parent family formations, and how these challenge discourses of rights.

**Tobias Hübinette:** Yes, and also with the gradual demise, at least of transnational adoption. The numbers are dwindling, so the adult adoptees in the future will have a very different experience than we had because we were able to find each other and create something together. They will not be able to do that because they are so few, so they might become minoritized, which I think is totally plausible. Or it will be like those who came in the 1950s and 1960s. Both these scenarios are very different from our experience because we were lucky enough to belong to the big demographic group. That will never happen again for those who are younger today, so Belinda is part of that new context, but in a different way, of course. And maybe the adoptive parents will also be more ethnicized. It is difficult to tell.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Although this aspect is not known within the fictional narrative, something that is very meaningful to me with the *Loving Belinda* project is that we, the people who play the characters in the films – you, Morten Goll, Lene Myong, and myself – have all in different ways been deeply involved in questions surrounding adoption, race, asylum, and migration politics. During the past eight years, it is not only the characters in the film that have changed, but we as the people who play the characters have also changed. I was wondering if you could talk about how your own work and focus have developed over the course of the past eight years? I remember that you were saying, when we recently met to shoot *Loving Belinda*, that these days you are looking more at issues of race and whiteness, and I am curious about that shift or reorientation in focus, or whether you see this as a shift at all?

**Tobias Hübinette:** Yes, I am almost solely focusing on race, whiteness, Swedishness, and Europeanness. My current focus on race within the European and Western context is a shift that I think started while I was engaged in questions of adoption and adoptees, so by way of the adoption issues I ended in this larger picture. I do not really know how it happened, but nowadays I am not publishing at all, more or less, on adoption, except if the media or others contact me, but I am not proactive anymore, apart from supporting TRACK,<sup>2</sup> but that takes place mainly in Korea.

Nevertheless, what I am currently writing and lecturing about is still about adoptees because I use adoptees as examples, and I use cultural productions by adoptees when I teach and write, so I reference adoptees, but it is more in connection to questions of belonging, nation, and whiteness. These questions have come to the forefront, not least because of the success of the far right, but also because we are now witnessing in the Scandinavian countries something that might parallel the minority civil rights movements in the English-speaking world in the 1960s and 1970s – and adoptees are part of that movement, whether they want it or not because they are part of the bigger picture. I think that is why it felt very natural for me to shift focus. It is maybe not even a shift of focus at all, but rather another way of contextualizing

adoption as a migration process and adoptees as minorities of color together with other minorities who are not adopted.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** And that is incredibly meaningful and important. I wonder if, by connecting adoption, or seeing adoption as part of larger migration processes and in a historical context, might also be a way to disrupt exceptional attitudes and narratives of adoption, as it is often read, not primarily as a form of migration, but in the context of alternative family-making in the West, along with connotations of humanitarianism, et cetera?

**Tobias Hübinette:** Yes. An exceptionalist attitude towards race is both affecting adoptees and non-adoptees, and the exceptionalist attitude towards adoption is about forgetting the colonial past, as well as the colonial present. So yes, in the bigger picture, it is about connecting all these aspects and seeing adoptees as part of it. Before, I only saw adoption and adoptees, and I only saw exceptionalism in relation to adoption and adoptees, but now I can see it in relation to other forms of migration. Adoption is more extreme because it is about forced migration, and it is also about forced assimilation, so without a doubt it is still a very extreme example, but I think adoptees, whatever their political views, can benefit, at least intellectually or politically, from connecting themselves and their lives and adoption to bigger contexts of migration and colonialism. Before, it was difficult for me to do that except on a theoretical level, but now I am doing it practically, in practice, because the situation has changed, and adoptees are actually more connected to other non-adopted minority and migrant groups compared to before.

Perhaps this has happened in relation to the second generation. It did not really happen with the first generation because there were so many difficulties – perhaps that is why we never connected, but now when there is a critical mass of many second-generation minority people who are not adopted, now there are at least contexts.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** I very much agree, and as you mention, it is extremely important to look at adoption within this larger context, especially with the increasing right-wing radicalization.

**Tobias Hübinette:** Yes. To be honest, though, most people do not see adoption as part of the migration regime. They still see it more as a reproduction technique or child welfare intervention rather than as a migration method, and thus they see it more as a family formation than a migrant family, but that is changing. Something is happening, which I think we have already seen in the English-speaking world, in Australia for example, which has a very progressive adoption policy, depending of course on whether you are critical or not. They totally connect adoption to migration and also connect current adoption policies to the experiences, the bad experiences, of trans-racial adoptions within the country. I think that we will see more and more of

that in Europe, too. It is inevitable. And I think it is also a task for the future to connect to history, not just the colonial roots, but also how transnational adoption happened during the Cold War with South Korea as a prime example. In other third world countries, adoption was also connected, not just to decolonial processes, but it was also seen as an emergency action in countries like South Korea and Vietnam, as saving children, basically.

We are not witnessing the end of transnational adoption, but we are witnessing the demise of the practice. It will never ever be like it was before. It is highly probable that Korea will end adoption within five years, not totally, but as a system. We will most probably see the end of it in our lifetime. And that makes it possible to rethink the modern history of adoption, which we could not really do before, we could only speculate.

We became adults during the heyday of transnational adoption between around 1992-93 and 2008. These were actually the big numbers, and we all witnessed those years when adoption was everywhere in popular culture, in the media and in general, but that is not the case anymore, not in that celebratory or sentimentalist way. So the possibility of critiquing adoption in Denmark like you are doing now, this is only possible, I think, because of this demise, and that is of course a bit discomforting, but at the same time it is also nice that now finally we can express these things that we also said ten years ago, but in those days it was seen as extremist or just weird.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** That is true. It is interesting to look back at how the discourse around adoption has shifted quite a bit, even just within the past few years in a Danish context. When we made *Adopting Belinda* and *Tracing Trades* and presented our thoughts at *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* in 2006, I think our perspectives were considered rather extreme to many people in a Scandinavian context. It was unprecedented to many to think of adoption in the context of colonialism and as a form of forced migration, but a lot has changed since then, so it is also interesting to revisit Belinda in this context, and to look, from the perspective of the present, at how adoptees' critical perspectives on transnational adoption have evolved and mark a historical and discursive break.

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**1. Kuratorisk Aktion** (*Curatorial Action*) is a curatorial collective committed to curating radical critique and critical action through decolonial-transnational feminist work. For more info about Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org>. The art project Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia can be viewed on the website under 'Act 3'.

**2. TRACK – Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea** is an organization advocating for full knowledge of past and present Korean adoption practices to protect the human rights of adult adoptees, children, and families. TRACK was founded in 2007 by a group of American and European adoptees.

Reflections on Art, Asylum  
Politics, Racism, and  
Transnational Adoption



MORTEN GOLL  
&  
JANE JIN KAISEN



# Reflections on Art, Asylum Politics, Racism, and Transnational Adoption

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Morten Goll & Jane Jin Kaisen  
October 30, 2014

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** You play the character of the Danish TV host who interviews Mr. and Mrs. Anderson in *Adopting Belinda* (2006) and *Revisiting the Andersons* (2015). In the videos the characters, instead of being played by professional actors, are played by people who have been critically engaged in themes that the works address, such as transnational adoption, migration, and race.

You have yourself as an artist created several public interventions during the previous government term as a reaction to the right-wing turn in Denmark. And in 2009 you were part of establishing the Trampoline House, a user-driven culture center for asylum seekers and other Danish residents working towards a just and humane refugee and asylum politics in Denmark. I am interested in how you look back at your critical engagements with issues of migration and racism from the mid-2000s when we made *Adopting Belinda* and up until now. I can imagine that your work with the Trampoline House might have changed or challenged your perspectives on these issues and your way of engaging with them?

**Morten Goll:** Yes, indeed. When reality hits you. There is a difference between making an artwork that has to function aesthetically as a critique of something in an exhibition on display for three weeks, and then to be a part of the world and having to interact with the real over a longer period of time. Art is of course also a part of the world, but I found that I spent a lot of time making objects, intending to criticize the status quo, while simultaneously being frustrated over the relatively small impact on the world of these art objects/projects.

We had the Cartoon crisis in 2005. It was simply a disaster for com-

munication in this country. The bodily feeling I had at the time was, 'What can we do when the right wing has taken over the left's arguments about the freedom of speech?' Freedom of expression is the artists' core value, but what happens when the right wing takes that argument and uses it as part of a crusade to smash the relationship between different ethnicities to deliberately destroy the integration? So we are in a situation where the entire public space in which all communication takes place is unsuitable for communication and dialogue because meaningful dialogue is hindered by lack of mutual respect. It is like playing squash without a wall. You need a wall in order for the ball to bounce back. Communication without limits and limitless freedom of expression devalues communication and renders it useless. The next step is war (read terrorism).

I had a personal crisis: 'How can I continue making art in public space?' And consequently I decided to stop producing art by way of the symbolic object or act and started interacting with the real and organizing actions. I wanted to find a vehicle for social change. And for myself, I also needed to find a social space where we could restore mutual respect, equality, and democratic values as a way to re-establish a space for meaningful communication. We started by drawing on our poststructuralist and postcolonial theories. We read Foucault, Agamben, Mohanty, and others. However, the mindset that made us ready to venture into the collective process leading to the creation of the Trampoline House began with this notion: 'We're done criticizing – now we'll create a social space that works'. That was of course quite ambitious, and what happened next was obviously what always happens the moment you get hands-on with reality – it starts to hurt because your theories and ideals do not take into account the complexity of power relations in a social context like this. When you hit the real, you have to become a pragmatist. In practice, you have to accept the abandonment of the untainted position that you can hold as an artist.

However, we soon realized that there was also much to gain this way: There was a much bigger audience for dialogue, and the dialogue was actually both fun and meaningful. Not to mention the fact that for once we were having this dialogue with the people who are subjected to the system we wanted to criticize. I felt that it was infinitely more meaningful to work this way, maybe because the stakes were higher: Failure of the project would mean failing hundreds of people who were in a precarious state, but at that point in life the core organizers, Tone Olaf Nielsen and myself, felt that we were in a position, having spent years collecting experience, where we could actually get it right – of course recognizing that we were starting up a social process which would need infinite attention, care, and development. The same is true for democracy in all its conditions around the world.

We work with democracy in the Trampoline House. Still I cannot say if we have a better democratic forum than Parliament. It is certainly not perfect. The essence of democratic dialogue is to acknowledge 'room for improve-

ment' and to constantly seek to get the silent (or silenced) voices to participate in this process.

Some might assume that our interest in democracy is a desire to teach and preach democracy to people from the 'third world', asylum seekers. But actually Danes need to learn about democracy just as much because of the way democracy works here as a sort of appendix to life. Many Danish volunteers join the house and end up with a strongly invigorated belief in the democratic process. They might still have a general distrust of politicians and feel alienated from the national democratic process, but our aim is to instill hope and to provide tools to effect change. It works both ways.

We wanted to get the asylum seekers involved in this democratic process because they are perhaps the most marginalized group in this country. As the precariat, their presence in participation is crucial. We have to ask them for forgiveness before we can even get started on the process. Most often, this forgiveness is offered to us the minute the relation changes from a 'them and us' to a 'we', the moment when one feels truly included and valued as a 'family member'.

This process we could foresee when we went from symbolic act to practical action in reality. The part we could not anticipate is what happens after that moment.

How do you create equality in a place like the Trampoline House when half of our users are so dirt poor that others will have to pay their transportation tickets? At first we thought that equality is ensured by eradicating poverty. If everyone is equally rich, then we have an equal relation. However, it is impossible to turn everybody equally rich overnight, and if you attempt to do it, the process in itself will reveal power issues which complicate the equation adding an abundance of X, Y, and Z. Still, since we could not fight poverty, we attempted at least to create equal access to the Trampoline House by way of providing transportation compensation to all users living in asylum camps. The next problem hitting us was obvious in all its clarity: 'How do you uphold equality in a group when a small party has the power to distribute transportation compensation to the majority?' Instead we quickly found ourselves in a relationship involving charity or benevolence. Charity is toxic to the idea of equality. It restores a colonial tradition. It is similar to the idea of transnational adoption: 'That we are doing them a favor by taking over their children'. The kind of inequality that you are talking about in relation to transnational adoption between colonized and colonizing countries, that same dynamic echoes in the Trampoline House and has to be negotiated and confronted. It is an unfortunate condition, but we cannot simply for that reason lean back and say that we hate the world. We need to negotiate a solution to it. And of course, in the Trampoline House, the solution is based on pragmatism, respectful dialogue, and transparency in the decision-making process.

I also wonder how you deal with this? As a transnational adoptee I imagine you must have similar considerations: I mean, what is done is done, and you have to live, so how to proceed?

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** It is really inspiring to hear you talk about the Trampoline House and how the perspective changes when one moves from theory to practice, or from ideal to real-life situations.

I agree that notions of charity and benevolence are counter-productive to equality, and that these imaginaries feature very prominently in narratives about transnational adoption as well. This is also very much what recent critiques of transnational adoption by adoptees are contesting. Transnational adoption has very much been seen as an act of benevolence and as an alternative mode of family-making. This narrative serves to support heteronormative family ideals and a self-image in Scandinavia as humanitarian and anti-racist. It also disguises the fact that transnational adoption is a form of migration that is enabled and sustained by uneven relations of power between sending and receiving countries and families as well as the large sums of money involved in the industry, which makes corruption and child trafficking an almost inevitable consequence.

During the past decade, however, a growing contingency of adult adoptees have posed various critiques of transnational adoption, and thus narratives by the adoption agencies and adoptive parents, which have long dominated, are being fundamentally challenged. The critical perspectives on transnational adoption that have emerged in Denmark and elsewhere are not simply about whether transnational adoption is right or wrong, good or bad – rather, they have provided different structural critiques and contextualized transnational adoption within larger mechanisms and ideologies of race, migration, and colonial thinking.

The right-wing turn in Danish politics and the very hostile anti-immigration and racist rhetoric in the media since 9/11 also greatly affected me, and it has made it really difficult to have a nuanced public dialogue because, as you said, dialogue can only take place on a basis of mutual respect and, I would say, on a basis of acknowledgement of the power dynamics that are embedded in any social relation. In this respect, it is interesting to think about how there are different kinds of publics. It is of course important to try to change public sentiments, even if just in order to make life here livable, but these sentiments are very resistant. Equally important, I think, is an internal empowerment within minority groups, and what has been so inspiring and reinvigorating for me is to take part in the emergent critical adoptee community here. It has a lot to do with self-definition and taking ownership over our own histories and unraveling some of the motivations and desires behind transnational adoption and what kinds of narratives they support. Another very inspiring and important development is increasing alignments and strategic affiliations between different minority groups.

**Morten Goll:** Your comment on the power dynamics that are embedded in any social relation is spot-on, and also as far as the Trampoline House is concerned. However, there is one thing I would like to ask you. When I saw *Loving Belinda*, I was struck by the repression which is clearly in the relationship:

The suppression of the adoptee seems to be rooted in all the things that are not being said. It comes from all these blind spots that one refuses to relate to. It is a very subtle form. Then there was of course the whole discourse on racism, but from my perspective it had everything to do with what was not talked about because that is where the suppression lies. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson constantly say that racism takes place elsewhere, not in their neighborhood. Of course I acknowledge that it is a mirror of the discourse in Denmark. But how important do you find this subtle form of repression...?

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** You are right that *Loving Belinda* has a lot to do with subtle forms of suppression and with all the things that are not talked about. It is about the emotional economy within the adoptive family, and it has a lot to do with desire, namely the Andersons' deep desire to be perceived as a 'normal' American family. In order to uphold this narrative, any problems in the family are blamed on Belinda's past in Denmark, whereas the trauma of the adoption itself and any unresolved issues around infertility that the parents might have are repressed.

I was interested in bringing out some of the desires and power relations in the adoptive family that are rarely discussed, but that in many ways mirror society at large – the desire for things to stay normal and the desire of the parents to retain privilege and power and to defer uncomfortable issues of racism and exploitation elsewhere. Mr. and Mrs. Anderson really glorify the United States and demonize Denmark and Danish racism, but as we know, there are tons of problems with structural racism in the United States as we have recently been reminded of with the Ferguson incident and the killing of the African American boy Tamir Rice by the police, just to mention a few cases.

**Morten Goll:** Speaking of which, I recently saw a documentary about the Afro-American G.I.s in Germany serving during World War II and in the period after. Germany was a nation founded on racism during the Nazi era, but after the war, when Germany was occupied by the allied forces, things seemed to change. Many Afro-American soldiers served in the occupying forces, and they experienced less racism in Germany than back in the United States, where they were not even permitted to sit next to whites in public buses. Many of them ended up with white girlfriends and had children, which was unthinkable in the United States at the time. As a result, they had to abandon the white girlfriend and the child, since mixed-race families were illegal in the United States. Many of these children, who were born to German mothers and African American fathers, were abandoned and given up for adoption from Germany.

There is something in the story that is so utterly absurd and that shows that racism is a relative concept. How can you say that racism was less in Germany? And also, when the African American soldiers returned home, then the German race equality suddenly took another turn because their fathers were no longer there to defend them. This form of racism is in a way more transpar-

ent than the subtle racism addressed in your film since there is no doubt that you are Danish, but what is worse: subtle or direct racism?

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** It is a really interesting example you bring up because it shows the complexity of race and racism, I think. It also shows how transnational adoption since its beginnings has been deeply entrenched within different racist, but also nationalist and patriarchal discourses and foreign military intervention. The Afro-German children, fathered by African American G.I.s and German mothers, were among the first transnational adoptees to Denmark in the aftermath of World War II. It is very similar to the beginnings of transnational adoption from South Korea. Here, the first transnational adoptees were also mainly mixed-race children of American or UN soldiers and Korean mothers. They also faced racial discrimination in Korean society after the war. It perhaps shows how systems of oppression and relations of power are very complex, and how an intersectional approach to race, gender, class, and nation is important to have in mind, and that racism needs to be viewed in relation to the social and cultural context in which it takes place. The African American soldiers who served in Germany or South Korea, and who were oppressed in the United States, often belonged to the under class. When on duty abroad, they enjoyed relative power as part of a foreign military occupying force over local women. When they left, their abandoned girlfriends and children were ostracized because they were uncomfortable reminders of national subordination to a foreign military power.

I think it is important to look at subtle and direct racism as effects of the same kind of colonial thinking and how certain hierarchies between peoples, cultures, histories, and knowledges that were inscribed as truths during the colonial project are reproduced in the present. With transnational adoption, erasure and silencing have taken place through discourses of humanitarianism and benevolence that are subtler than overt racism, but that nonetheless uphold certain relations of power and systems of meaning and representation that support Western self-perceptions and worldviews. These ingrained patterns of thinking are both very subtle and very overt, and they are so resistant because they have been foundational for Western cultural and economic dominance.

I am very interested in the relationship between power, representation, and productions of meaning, and I think this is also what I revolve around as an artist – trying to develop aesthetic strategies or tactics on the one hand in order to expose and destabilize dominant narratives and representational logics that serve to silence, exclude, or demonize certain subjects or perspectives – and on the other, trying to point to sites of emergence and to propose alternative readings or translations.

# The Emergence of Adoption Critiques among Transnational Adoptees in Denmark



Lene Myong  
&  
Jane Jin Kaisen

# The Emergence of Adoption Critiques among Transnational Adoptees in Denmark

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Lene Myong & Jane Jin Kaisen  
November 10, 2014

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Your pioneering research has been absolutely groundbreaking and pivotal for the critical perspectives on transnational adoption that have surfaced over the past decade. Would you share your reflections on some of the transnational adoption critiques that are unfolding right now in Denmark in relation to the broader public debates on the issue? In your opinion, what are some of the most significant questions raised at the moment, and what do they challenge?

**Lene Myong:** There have always been different types of debates on transnational adoption in Denmark, both before and after 1965 when the organization *Glemte Børn (Forgotten Children)*, now known as *DanAdopt*, received the first license to facilitate transnational adoptions in Denmark. The debates have changed over time, though. In the 1990s, the rights of adoptive parents and the regulation of adoption dominated public debates, even though Danish media also published stories about illegal adoptions from Romania where medical journals contained fabricated and incorrect information.

Since the early 2000s there has been a shift in perspective and stakeholders. Whereas the debates used to focus on adopters' rights and options, adoptees themselves have, to a much greater extent, claimed ownership of the discussions on transnational adoption. The fact that adoptees actively take part in the debates has also meant that new questions and critiques have been raised. So during the past ten years, a movement of adoption critique has slowly gained prominence in Denmark. Compared to ten years ago adoptees in Denmark have achieved quite a lot in terms of political visibility and agency.

The heated debates on adoption that have taken place in the Danish

public since 2012 as well as the growing critical consciousness among adoptees are often linked to *Mercy Mercy (Adoptionens Pris)*, Katrine W. Kjer's now famous documentary which was shown on Danish national television in November 2012. *Mercy Mercy* was in many ways an important event because the debate on adoption reached a wider audience than previously. In a way the documentary prompted the public to scrutinize transnational adoption from critical perspectives.

However, adoption critique in Denmark does not 'originate' from *Mercy Mercy*. It has, I think, to some extent emerged from a productive intersection of activism, research, and art, where you have been a pioneer and inspiration to many. Furthermore, one should not underestimate the significance of (in)formal social networks for adoptees (e.g. *Koreaklubben*<sup>1</sup>) and the emergence of critical journalism around transnational adoption. During the past ten years a small group of Danish and predominantly non-adoptee journalists have taken on a much more critical perspective on the issue.

Back in 2003-4 when I began my doctoral work, the critical voices that I met were either grounded in academia or the art scene. You and *UFOlab*<sup>2</sup> were among the first people to express any kind of interest in what I was doing. I think the critical voices gravitated towards each other, and the continued exchange between these overlapping fields has been extremely productive in a Danish context. What has changed over the past few years is that the critiques are no longer (solely) a subcultural phenomenon. They have gone mainstream, so to speak. It is, of course, up for discussion whether or not this has been 'good' or 'bad' in terms of the critique.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Yes, the adoption critique emerged in a very interdisciplinary milieu, very much through grassroots initiatives, and I think we were all greatly inspired by each other's work and by working together.

I also think that the increasing remigration movements of adoptees to South Korea, for example, have had an immense impact on critical perspectives on transnational adoption, which you have also researched. In the early 2000s, South Korea was a nexus for critical exchanges between transnational Korean adoptees who were sent to various different countries. These exchanges materialized in critical formations and also organizational initiatives in South Korea, but beyond that, people also brought these insights and perspectives back to Denmark, USA, France, Holland, Sweden, and so on.

Also, the interfacing with other social justice movements in South Korea has played a role, I think. For instance, when Guston Sondin-Kung and I made *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger*, our intent was to portray how a growing number of critically engaged adoptees and women of the broader Korean diaspora were tracing the structurally similar ways in which transnational adoptees, but also other marginalized groups in South Korean society, such as the former 'comfort' women, and women employed for U.S. military prostitution, were mobilized through a biopolitics that did not only happen as an effect of war and militarism, but that became systematized and was sustained

by patriarchy, nationalism, and class hierarchies within Korean society. It was an attempt to provide a broader structural critique of some of the underlying mechanisms of transnational adoptions from South Korea rather than seeing transnational adoption as an isolated phenomenon. So remigration has enabled a critical tracing of the motivations behind transnational adoption, not only in the West but also in South Korea, and this, I think, is also why criticism of transnational adoption is often met with so much resistance because they uncover these larger intersecting structures.

**Lene Myong:** Yes, I agree that the different adoption critiques we see today emerge out of a transnational context. There is no doubt that the community of critical adoptees in Denmark is inspired by critiques in the United States, South Korea, and elsewhere. I also consider the phenomenon of remigration central to the formation of critical movements. The fact that adoptees have relocated to their countries of origin has produced different insights and new knowledge that has been controlled by neither adoption agencies nor adoptive parents. In this way, remigration has been absolutely crucial to the production of critical knowledge.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Yes, and thus critical links have been established as adoptees from different countries have come into contact and have been able to share perspectives. For instance, civil rights movements in the English-speaking world, which local adoptees have been able to draw from, might be an inspiration to adoptees in a Scandinavian context in the present moment.

**Lene Myong:** It is interesting to look at the diversity of adoption critiques in the United States, partly because they connect with a longer history of political mobilization among racial minorities such as the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In 1972 The National Association of Black Social Workers (NABSW) published a strong critique of transracial adoptions and the systematic removal and subsequent placement of black children with white families. Even though NABSW's critique of how transracial adoption can function as a form of structural and systemic oppression has since been vilified as inherently racist, I still think it has provided a critical context for later generations of transnational and transracial adoptees in the United States. When you look to Denmark, we do not have the same kind of history when it comes to criticizing transnational adoption or racial oppression.

I am aware that many adoptees in the United States have grown up in racial isolation within white communities – conditions that are not that different from a Scandinavian context. Yet the communities of transnational adoptees in Scandinavia have probably been further removed from and disconnected from antiracist movements, communities of color, and broader criticisms of racial inequality when you compare with adoptee communities in the United States. There are probably many reasons for this, such as the difference in racial demographics and racial formation. The adoption critiques

that are (e)merging from the U.S. and Europe, and in this case Denmark, are intertwined, but they also have different genealogies and histories.

When it comes to Denmark, left-wing criticism of migration politics has played a huge role for critical adoptees, and many of the critiques on transnational adoption are embedded within and aligned with broader critiques of the anti-immigration policies that have been implemented in Europe and Scandinavia over the past fifteen years. I would say that since the early 2000s, critical adoptees in Sweden and Denmark have worked to combine the issues of migration, racism, and transnational adoption, and adoptees such as yourself and Tobias Hübinette have made important contributions to the growing awareness of Scandinavian colonialism, racism, and color blindness. The questions of Danish racism and anti-immigration politics are pivotal to the critiques raised by adoptees in Denmark.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** I completely agree. And I think that the critique of racism can be very effective when it is directed from an adoption-critical perspective because the whole discussion on migration in Denmark has followed a very reductive 'us' versus 'them' binary. Adoption criticism destabilizes this logic from within the white intimate sphere of the family and at the same time questions the logic of adoption as heteronormative family-making by linking strategically to other forms of migration and by creating alliances with other migrant experiences.

**Lene Myong:** Yes, I agree. And what I find interesting is that the critiques of transnational adoption in Denmark have emerged during a period when Danish governments have implemented some of the strictest migration policies in Europe. When looking at *UFOLab's* early work as well as the projects which *UFOLab's* members have individually embarked on, one may argue that the critiques are closely interwoven with the anti-immigration measures and the violent and racist discourses that have marked public debates on migration in Denmark. But the anti-immigration sentiments have also proved a serious challenge to adoptee critics in Denmark because you constantly fear that your critique will be hijacked or co-opted by anti-immigration interests.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** Yes, and discussions about for instance families with children seeking asylum in Denmark and questions about family reunifications touch upon problematics within the adoption system as well. In a Danish context, the strict anti-migration policies in a sense force minorities to choose sides. It also becomes a pressing issue in relation to the adoption movement – to take a position in relation to the migration policy being pursued in Denmark.

**Lene Myong:** This is also one of the more controversial parts of the adoption critique. One thing is to view transnational adoption as a form of migration. That in itself might not be particularly controversial anymore. Controversy arises when you connect adoption to other forms of migration. This is what



I am thinking about myself. My history as a transnational adoptee migrant is not reducible to the fact that approximately 30,000 children have been adopted to Denmark since the end of World War II. My history as a transnational adoptee migrant is as much about all the migrants who are being denied entry or deported from Denmark.

I hope adoptee critics will continue to pursue a radical agenda around the issue of how we think about different forms of migration: There is a need to think about migrations as related, not as separate. Why am I – the transnational adoptee migrant – welcome in the Danish welfare state while there are plenty of migrant families who are not welcome? This fall the Danish government has proposed that people who have been granted refugee status will have to wait a year before they qualify for family reunification – this proposal will target many of the Syrian refugees who are now living in Denmark. They will have to wait longer to be reunited with their families (in many cases young children). At the same time Danish politicians are intent on securing the transnational flow of adoptee children and on fixing an otherwise broken adoption system. Again, why are some children welcome and not others? And would adoptee children be equally welcome if they migrated with their first families?

So for me some of the fundamental questions are: How is my inclusion in the Nation conditioned by the exclusion of other migrants? And what price has to be paid – e.g. in terms of assimilation, racism, and the foreclosure of kinship – when adoptees become part of the Nation? These are some of the basic questions that I try to work my critique around. I am inspired by the critical adoptees in Denmark who are actively working with these questions. For the most part the political agendas are not limited to securing rights and improving living conditions for adoptees only. There seems to be a broader perspective to the critiques and for the most part a sense of solidarity with other minority groups.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** This also disrupts the notion of adoption as an exceptional form of migration, and how it has often been perceived as being beyond structural inequalities and in a sense not even perceived as migration.

There is also both an internal and external negotiation taking place, I think: Internally amongst adoptees who are active in posing a critique in terms of how 'we', not as a homogeneous group but as a group with many different voices and perspectives, negotiate our demands, positions, and subjectivities, but also externally in terms of how we relate to a white majority in Denmark, or to majority South Korean society, as well as how we position ourselves in relation to other minorities.

**Lene Myong:** Yes, and my point is not that we should not be interested in adoptee rights or try to improve conditions for adoptees and first parents, but personally I think there is much to gain from pursuing a broader perspective and to critique not only the ways in which families are separated through

adoption, but equally so the heteronormative underpinnings of kinship arrangements and the idea of the nuclear family as always and already the best place to grow up – the ideal that we should all strive towards.

This aspect of adoption critique is also what makes it difficult. When you follow the public debates most people seem to agree – at least in principle – that family preservation measures should be supported, and that adoptees should have access to their records and information about their history. But people are not exactly rallying around a general critique of heteronormative family patterns.

Adoptee critics are also faced with other challenges. Critical attitudes towards adoption are often perceived as a sign of pathology. When voicing critique it is assumed that you must have been the victim of abuse during your childhood, or that you simply do not love your adoptive parents. Adoption critiques are often read as the consequence of how love has 'gone wrong' or as ungrateful and angry attempts to undermine love, for example within the adoptive family. Therefore, to occupy a critical position as an adoptee is precarious: The critique is often read as a sign of individual pathology and/or as an attempt to 'murder' love.

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** It makes me think of the economy of love which you have dealt with in relation to adoption. The video *Loving Belinda* was also very inspired by yours and Mons Bissenbakker's critical analysis on Adoption & Society's issue on love and attachment.<sup>3</sup>

No one wants to be an opponent of love, but criticism of transnational adoption is often perceived this way, so it is also a silencing mechanism, and I think that some adoptees might refrain from voicing structural critiques of adoption because it is viewed as a critique of their intimate family relations.

**Lene Myong:** Yes, adoption critiques are often thought to stem from a history of individual unhappiness, pathology, or trauma. This logic poses a great dilemma for adoptee critics. At this time there is an understandable push and desire among adoptees to voice (otherwise silenced) experiences of loss and trauma connected to adoption and to get rid of the happiness duty – to borrow a concept from Sara Ahmed – that sticks to adoptees. But in Denmark the discourse of loss and trauma has already been co-opted by stakeholders such as *Adoption & Society* (*Adoption og Samfund*), an influential organization for adoptive parents. *Adoption & Society* are utilizing the discourse of trauma and loss to advocate for post-adoption services, primarily psychological counseling, aimed at overcoming trauma and strengthening bonds of attachment within adoptive families with young children. Many critical adoptees think of this as detrimental to their interests because the collective pathologization of adoptees serves to privilege the affective ties within the adoptive family. So what we see here is not how pathologizing discourses work 'against' adoption, but rather how these discourses are utilized to bolster the institution of the adoptive family.

My point is not that adoptees should censor ourselves from speaking about loss and trauma, but politically it continues to be difficult to speak about these issues. I have tried to work around this by arguing that we as a society cannot assess the intervention of adoption on the basis of whether adoptees are happy or unhappy. The psychological well-being of adoptees is important, but I would like to see Danish politicians base their overall assessment of adoption on other things as well. What obviously deserves to be discussed are the political priorities that redirect ample resources into the adoption system. Could these resources be used to support other forms of liveability for children than through adoption? Why is Danish society so invested in maintaining transnational adoption?

**Jane Jin Kaisen:** With the *Loving Belinda* exhibition at Galleri Image, I was interested in highlighting the role of desire in upholding dominant logics and discourses of transnational adoption and race. This is perhaps one of the reasons art has played a significant role in adoption critiques because it has provided alternative histories or counter-narratives and images. Aesthetic strategies such as the racial reversal in the *Loving Belinda* project, or the ambiguous *UFOLab* performances, are, I think, effective aesthetic ways of exposing and destabilizing the relationship between power, representation, and productions of meaning, as well as of rendering visible or audible things that have been hidden, silenced, neutralized, or taken for granted.

**Lene Myong:** Exactly. I think artistic interventions have been absolutely central to the formation of critiques – especially here in Denmark. I do not have any good explanations as to *why*, but you and your fellow artists have definitely been able to explore uncomfortable questions in relation to adoption that have otherwise been unthinkable. In this way many of the artistic interventions have served as orientation points for adoptees who identify with a critical stance or just feel drawn to adoption critiques. Perhaps because adoptee art sets up a space where one may think critically without the normative burden of having to hash out solutions to all the problems of the world. You are allowed to ask without having an answer. This is significant especially within the field of transnational adoption which is organized around the idea of ‘solution’ – often with violent consequences.

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1. **Koreaklubben** (*The Korea Club*) is an association for and by Korean adoptees in Denmark. Founded in 1990.

2. **UFOLab** (*Unidentified Foreign Object Laboratory*) was established in 2004 by Scandinavia-based Korean adoptee artists Anna Jinhwa Borstam, Charlotte Kim Boed, Jane Jin Kaisen, Jette Hye Jin Mortensen, and Trine Meesook Glerup.

3. See for example: Lene Myong & Mons Bissenbakker (2014): “**Forstyrret kærlighed: affektiv assimilation som nyt ideal for transnational adoption**” in *Social Kritik*, no. 137, pp. 56-67.

Artistic Research as Critique  
in Jane Jin Kaisen's  
*Loving Belinda*

Marianne Ping Huang

# Artistic Research as Critique in Jane Jin Kaisen's *Loving Belinda*

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Marianne Ping Huang

## Introduction on artistic research in two formats

Reflecting on Jane Jin Kaisen's *Loving Belinda* exhibition,<sup>1</sup> I keep returning to the nature of the unease the videos provoked in me when I first watched them in the fall of 2014.

The unease in my reaction to *Loving Belinda* is different from the critical interaction I have experienced with other works by Kaisen which I find easier to approach – also in terms of emotions and affect. With *Loving Belinda* I am affected by being drawn into a discursive sphere of a claustrophobic character, without being released into other or alternative stories; an effect I know from some of Kaisen's other works. In my paper I will end by addressing this claustrophobia – created by the tension of a neutralized or normalizing discourse applied onto an affective space – as a (rather effective) practice of artistic research in Kaisen's work.

It is, however, productive to treat the investigative practice in *Loving Belinda* with reference to or contextualized by other works by Kaisen, such as *The Woman*, *The Orphan*, and *The Tiger* (2010) or perhaps even more significantly the *Dissident Translations*, Kaisen's solo exhibition at Århus Kunstbygning (October 8, 2011 through January 8, 2012), among others featuring the video installation *Reiterations of Dissent* (2011). These latter works are of another scale than *Loving Belinda*, and their investigation of geopolitical con-



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

ditions and power structures vested in migration is conducted by other means than the investigation in *Loving Belinda*. You might say that the larger-scale works expand dynamically in a variety of directions, triggered by nuclei of silenced, muted, or suppressed histories such as the Jeju Massacre of April 3, 1948 in the *Dissident Translations* project or the violation of Korean women during the World War II Japanese occupation of Korea in the film *The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger*. In the larger-scale works Kaisen conducts cross-archival investigations and presents traumas, silences, and official narratives through paneling or collaging clustered material which forms counter-narratives or “new genealogies”, a term often used by Jane Jin Kaisen in reference to the possible outcomes of artistic research into archives and discourses on migration. The muted histories and the counter-narratives exposed during the experimental processes are highly unnerving and disturbing, but also opening up to critical alternatives and genealogies – in ways comparable to the archival practices of Michel Foucault when compiling counter-narratives in the midst of the murmuring of discrete files and findings in the archive.

Kaisen has – in a conversation text with curator Cecilia Widenheim in the *Dissident Translations* publication<sup>2</sup> – spoken about her practices of artistic research as ‘translation’, ‘discursive sites’ and ‘project-based practices’, always stressing the possibilities of alternative genealogies, of other ways of narrating and of the formation of new publics for criticism through discursive and aesthetic means; I will return to this shortly.

The claustrophobic unease that keeps striking me when watching *Loving Belinda* is of another kind than the disturbance, anger, sorrow, empathy, and reflection encountered in the larger, cross-archiving works. In *Loving Belinda* a naturalizing narrative on transnational adoption is repeated almost forcefully within a narrow and dense space/time frame, pointing to a traumatized silence or muteness embodied within the close(d)ness of the adoption family circle or, in the *Loving Belinda* video (2015), in the adoptee horseback-looping in endless, symbolic circles. Of course, you also find variations between the three videos in the series, from the exposure of a humanitarian narrative on transnational adoption in the first video, *Adopting Belinda* (2006), to a racism-critical narrative and a narrative on adoption trauma and attachment disorder ‘diagnostics’ in the second and third videos, *Revisiting the Andersons* and *Loving Belinda* (2015). But still, the formal structure of an unnamed contradiction or tension between a neutralizing discourse and an affect-ridden space is repeated in all three videos. I would propose that the tense feeling of unease is created by this aesthetic framing which enhances the gap between discourse and emotion, offering no alternative narrative or new genealogy.

The larger-scale format of e.g. *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger* and the smaller, denser scale of *Loving Belinda* are two distinct and distinctly



different formats used in the same ongoing investigation of geopolitical power structures affecting both individual and collective bodies. The two formats treat critique in different ways, but inhabit the same discursive dilemmas.

### Artistic research: Project-based practices, discursive sites, new genealogies

Before expanding more on *Loving Belinda*, I will shortly address the notion of artistic research – with reference to the ways in which Kaisen herself speaks about her practices in the conversation with Cecilia Widenheim.<sup>3</sup>

Artistic research is a contested notion in traditional research and within academia, to a certain degree met with skepticism on account of a difference in methodologies (connected also to artistic research as practice-based), but also on account of artistic research being conceptualized – and to some extent institutionalized – as individualized artistic development which emanates stereotypes of White Cube Modernist artist roles and the seclusion of Art and art institutions from cross-discursive engagements. In Kaisen's work and practices (including documentation, talks, conversations, investigative processes in a variety of discursive formats besides the 'art works') we find rather exemplary a case of critical and reflective research and investigative and experimental method, explicitly going way beyond media specificity and individualized artistic process. In Kaisen's practices, artistic research covers discursive, theoretical, and evidence-based investigations, developing common discursive patterns and concepts for new knowledge, but also for the production of new subjectivities and collective bodies.

In the aforementioned conversation with Cecilia Widenheim, Kaisen points to a concept and practice of *translation* as a seminal feature in her work on contradicting histories; translations take place in processes of narrating, re-narrating, and releasing new narratives or genealogies or subjectivities from fractured or discrete material, encountered in many formats from official history over diaries, oral histories and witnessing to film, images, and found footage. What is captured or recaptured in these new genealogies (as for instance between the three generations of women in *The Woman, the Orphan, and the Tiger*) – going, as Cecilia Widenheim phrases it, from the untold to the told and retold – are silenced narratives and suppressed memories, belonging to (in Kaisen's words) "a 'diasporic' condition defined by fractured histories and the lack of concrete memories". These stories, fragments, or lacks constitute *a field for investigation*, or as it is put in the conversation, "a discursive site" defined by a set of queries or concerns that inform the artistic research and to which the research(er) responds – in formal inquiries and through aesthetic means, practices, and processes. Significantly, this discursive site constitutes an expanded field covering a variety of discursive formats, reaching from academic critique over official documents to art works and found objects and

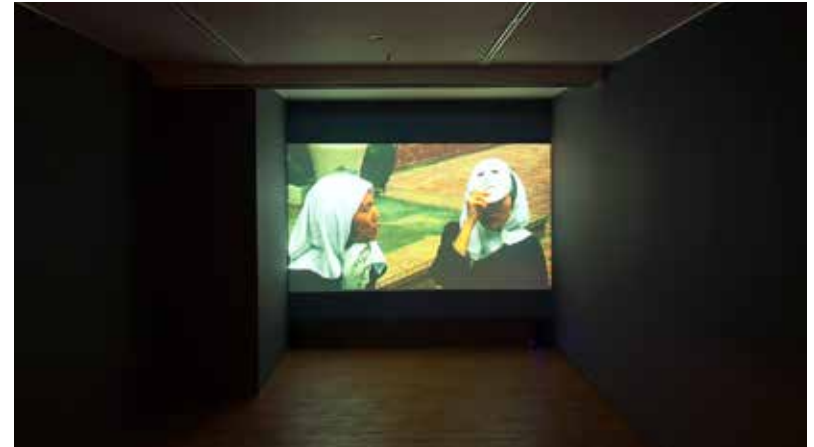


Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

archival material. Part of the artistic research will then consist in establishing repositories within this field through cross-archiving, as we may encounter it in Kaisen's work – e.g. *Reiterations of Dissent* – or notably in Pia Arke's work on colonial discourses between Denmark and Greenland, which may have informed Kaisen's work. Of importance to artistic research as such is the discursive field or site's engaging of the artist across disciplines, material prerogatives, and interconnected artworks and – over time – in iterative dialogues of inquiries and responses within a discursive collective, community, or movement, which is another way of describing the discursive site. This is, I think, rather obvious with *Loving Belinda* as with the rest of Kaisen's work. Kaisen also points to a series of recurrent features – aesthetic or discursive traits – in her research practice: combining archival material (*cross-archiving*), fictional and performative *narration*, humor and irony (*detournement*); resistance to providing singular narratives, the opening up of *multi-layered* and -perspective narratives; the atmospheric use of ephemeral *traces*, of *shadows*, and the metaphorical domain of *the ghostly*. And one may add that the *inter-connectedness of artworks* is also a significant way of practicing the discursive site: The artworks constitute interrelated reference points and may be re-iterated and re-worked over time, which is one very characteristic feature of *Loving Belinda*, as the series springs from the mock documentary *Adopting Belinda* (2006), but also references *Tracing Trades* (2006) which may be the work in Kaisen's production that engages most pointedly with the features mentioned above.

### Interlude: Tracing Trades

*Tracing Trades* investigates Korean-European relations through the trade of people between Asia and Europe – and traces amongst others the possible model for Peter Paul Rubens' drawing *Korean Man* from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Tracing Trades* is paradigmatic to Jane Jin Kaisen's way of investigating migrational and geopolitical patterns, crossing geographies in tracing the trajectories of sending (or selling) and receiving (or buying) on the map of trading routes.

The opening sequence and voice-over in *Tracing Trades* is emblematic of the losses created in these trading processes and the dilemmatic and haunting lacks and lacunas that will inhabit both individual and collective identities as a result:

*A supplemental population. That was completely integrated, of course, completely assimilated, but never completely enough. It's impossible to be a completely White Westerner. You cannot return. It's impossible now. The adoption, the process, the state of adoption, made it impossible.*<sup>4</sup>

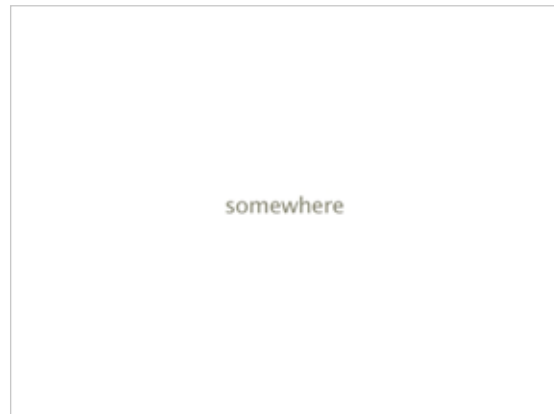


Fig. 20



Fig. 21

The dilemma voiced at the opening of the *Tracing Trades* is – exactly – traced through many perspectives on cases and fractured histories, one of which is a possible genealogy connecting Korea and Italy, emanated through the ghostly telling of Peter Paul Rubens’ drawing and its contextualizing documentations. Two main focuses frame the many perspectives, both explicitly performative and investigative: One is the “Department of Alien Affairs” committee which, gathered around a screening of documentation, establishes a gaze on and critical discussion of white Western colonial habits. The Asian men around the table scrutinize the Peter Paul Rubens case, but also zoom in on stories of Nordic colonialism such as the notorious orientalism of Tivoli where the so-called caravans – ethnographic displays of ‘real’ humans from Japan, China, and ‘Africa’ – were exhibited (as were Sami people in Germany during the same period). The other performative focus is established by an artist researcher persona, putting on her ‘radical investigation suit’ and displaying her tools: flight logos signifying migration routes, gloves for handling archival material and an overall artistic research suit (resembling protective suits for investigating contaminated spaces, but also mimicking stereotyped hoods and dresses for activist interventions). The mock investigation scaffolds the discursive site, and the material displayed underpins the fact that effective infrastructure – be it routes leading to trading centers and markets, or charity or welfare politics opening up to transnational adoption and smoothing the transactions by humanitarian discourses – eases the way for all trade, also the trade in human beings.

If one should look for an immediate context and reference work for the *Loving Belinda* series within Kaisen’s own work, the most obvious and first choice would be *Tracing Trades* which also contains the reference to Minnesota where the Andersons of *Loving Belinda* are located, as the comparative case for transnational adoption studies to the case of Denmark:

*Like Denmark and Sweden, Minnesota is predominantly a white homogeneous society which is often in need of children. These factors are combined with a high tolerance for certain ethnic minorities and a strong Lutheran Christian foundation. Like Minnesota, Sweden and Denmark also had the prepared infrastructure to cater to international adoption.*<sup>5</sup>

### ***Loving Belinda*: Mock documentary, chamber play, affective space**

The three videos in the *Loving Belinda* series are of the same format, cast, and genre orientation, they are of almost equal length, their scenography displays the private sphere of the nuclear family – mimicking or referring to the family photograph – and they all display a kind of mock or non-documentary, thus deconstructing the interview format, be it a journalistic or a research interview, in which they are all set.

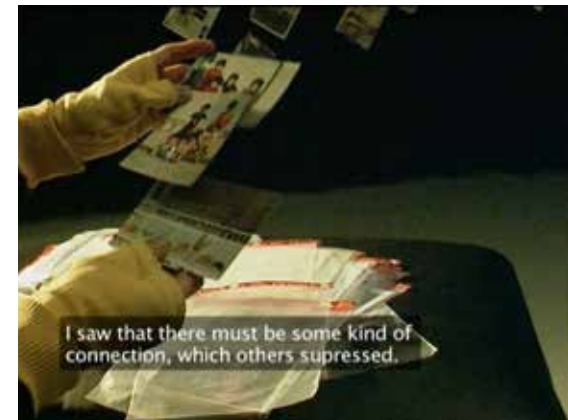


Fig. 22



The mock documentary refers to the performed or dramatized interviews, but also to the fact that Jane Jin Kaisen applies a detournement of the racial patterns of adoption in making the adoption parents Asian-American, whereas the adoptee is a Scandinavian child of Danish origin. This feature opens up the discursive site to investigations into otherwise unspoken economic and cultural preconditions – that larger-scale transnational adoption can only take place within certain economic structures, through strong social and legal infrastructures and based on cultural and racial hegemonies. The blind spot for whiteness is constitutive to transnational adoption, the race of white Western adopting parents is never addressed, whereas race and culture of adoptees are very much part of the trade. In this manner, the *Loving Belinda* series in many ways refers to Kaisen's other investigations.

But, as I have inferred, they also differ from the larger, collaged works in being dense – in a way concentrating complex lacks and losses into a smaller, much more explicitly dramatized format. The three videos forming the *Loving Belinda* series may formally and as dramaturgic pieces be compared to the chamber play which is constituted in a small and intimate scenic space for a dense dramaturgy, with few actors and poignant dialogue, foregrounding psychological dilemmas and affective intensities. The chamber play peaks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with experimental dramaturges such as Max Reinhardt and notably August Strindberg. With its minimalist setting, but highly dense and affective material, the chamber play creates claustrophobic effects.

The features of the *Loving Belinda* series that mimic the dramaturgic space of the chamber play may be what constitute the intense unease bordering on discomfort that I experience when watching the videos, and which is enhanced by the family photograph in the *Loving Belinda* exhibition – *The Andersons*, which is an even 'stiller' version of unsolved dilemmas and unclear emotions. Whereas the detournement of racial patterns points to *Loving Belinda* as mirroring transnational and global dilemmas, the comparison with the chamber play may take us into the more tightly knit emotional economies of adoption families, through subdued or covered up intensities running in the willfully neutral or normalized discourse on adoption displayed by the Andersons:

*No – it's really just another way of becoming a family. It's quite normal. We're very much alike. We're very open about adoption in our family, we talk about adoption. It's so diverse here in the U.S. – but thinking about countries in Europe, thinking about Denmark...*

As the interviews evolve, the performed factitiousness of language and discourse is disclosed as an ongoing covering up of cultural blind spots and individual sore spots; and as neutral and polite as the wording and rhetoric

may be, tension grows as the camera keeps focusing on mimic and gestures – mother caressing child, father steadying his hands – and on Belinda, who is not given voice until the last question in *Revisiting the Andersons*:

*Do you ever think about being adopted?*  
- Yes.

### Performing a situation as contemporary tactic

Affect is what cannot be contained by discourse, yet also not be named or expressed as emotion – this is the underlying assumption for understanding *Loving Belinda* as performing and investigating the affective space between a willful – and powerful – normalizing discourse, uttered and repeated over and over again to establish the single history, and the fractured histories and incomplete memories that are constitutive to the discursive site of and individual lives formed by transnational adoption and migration. The overpowering covering up of dilemmas, played out without closure and in a dense format, explains the unease and discomfort that will only grow in intensity as we move from the humanitarian discourse in *Adopting Belinda* to discourses of racism and cultural hegemony in *Revisiting the Andersons* and of self-deceit and economies of love in *Loving Belinda* in which Belinda on horseback, looping perpetually in the background, symptomizes the iterations of trauma.

Whereas emotions belong to a subject as a psychological inner phenomenon, affects constitute subjectivities through intersubjective relations between actions and expressions in situations; the affect-ridden (which, I think, is so very recognizable in *Loving Belinda*) then consists, as explained by Frederik Tygstrup in "Affekt and rum",<sup>6</sup> in the shift from the localization of a distinct emotion and inner state to a less clearly defined field of a common atmosphere: 'the situation' (as in the expression: "We have a situation"). Thus, in *Loving Belinda*, affect is not only what cannot be contained by discourse or expressed as emotion. What we experience is that affect is relational and constituted between bodies. The claustrophobic space of *Loving Belinda*, with no room for bodily or emotional release, contracts the narrative fractures and incompleteness – that are left more space in Jane Jin Kaisen's larger work – into a highly uncomfortable intimacy traversed by a mute, affective economy.

Revisiting the discursive site of Jane Jin Kaisen, one may compare the investigation and display of the affective economy in *Loving Belinda* with the works of contemporary authors such as Maja Lee Langvad and Athena Farrokhzad, both of whom address how whiteness, transnational migration, or adoption affect identity and belonging, and both of whom investigate this discursive site through gaps and fissures in language and discourse as these traverse families and friendships. The affective structure of 'the situation', as

described with reference to *Loving Belinda*, is constitutive to Athena Farrokhzad's *Vitsvit* (2013) where the family sphere is both formed and fractured by conflicting utterances and discursive dilemmas on whiteness and assimilation that constrict the room for identity and action of the writing (or recording) I, whilst growing in tension. The writer is both cornered and steps back, leaving room for the serialized voicings of her family. The serialization – that we also recognize from *Loving Belinda* – takes on a very powerful form in Maja Lee Langvad's *Hun er vred (She is Angry)*, (2014), where an inquiry into the split and extended relational space of the adoptee is conducted as tireless exercises on discursive dilemmas, each utterance beginning with “She is angry”. The discursive site and its numerous dilemmas cannot, however, be exhausted; on the contrary it seems to expand, re-incorporating the dilemmas and leaving the speaker stuttering in her anger until the point of almost choking on it.

‘The situation’ played out in the dramatized family sphere of *Loving Belinda* as well as in the works of Farrokhzad and Maja Lee Langvad is constituted in the dilemmatic hurt of being completely assimilated as in being completely neutralized by discourse and yet being unable to flee the embodiment of the lack of belonging – this unfolds as stuttering claustrophobia and anger due to the irreversible temporality embodied in these dilemmas.

*A supplemental population. That was completely integrated, of course, completely assimilated, but never completely enough. It's impossible to be a completely White Westerner. You cannot return. It's impossible now. The adoption, the process, the state of adoption, made it impossible.*<sup>7</sup>

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1. The *Loving Belinda* exhibition at Galleri Image (January 9 through March 8, 2015) presents three videos, *Adopting Belinda* (2006), *Revisiting the Andersons* (2015), and *Loving Belinda* (2015), as well as a color photograph titled *The Andersons* (2015).

2. Jane Jin Kaisen, Cecilia Widenhim & Yasuko Ikeuchi (2011): **Dissident Translations**. Århus Kunstbygning. The catalogue is available online at: <http://www.janejinkaisen.org/catalogue.pdf>.

3. Op. cit.

4. The voice of Tobias Hübinette in *Tracing Trades*.

5. Op. cit.

6. *Affect and Space*, K&K 116, 2013.

7. The voice of Tobias Hübinette in *Tracing Trades*.



Framing the Migrant Body

Louise Wolthers

# Framing the Migrant Body

Louise Wolthers



Fig. 23

In her multimedia works Jane Jin Kaisen addresses the complex historical intersections of transnational adoption and various forms of diaspora, colonization, immigration, and emigration. Her work also mimics and performs how imagery – not least photography – functions as exercises of power in the visualization of subjects and bodies in colonialism, orientalism, imperialism, and capitalist globalism. Sometimes using visual mimicry as a strategy Kaisen produces an empowering, critical counter-narration, which is evident in *Adopting Belinda* and *Loving Belinda*. In other works, such as *Tracing Trades*, the artist engages critically with historical archives, bringing forward visual proof of both the assimilation and the exclusion of migrated bodies in Scandinavia, Korea, and the U.S.

The history of photography is loaded with examples of how the medium has been used to classify and objectify the non-Western, non-white, or simply the subaltern subject. The photographic heritage from colonial history is by now a well-known illustration of this; in Scandinavia, however, the thorough,



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26

critical discussion of the colonial past is still sparse and exceptional. One of those notable exceptions was the large exhibition and research project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism*,<sup>1</sup> and here *Tracing Trades* was shown for the first time, establishing convincing links between transnational adoption and Scandinavian colonialism. *Tracing Trades* accumulates and interweaves large amounts of archival imagery and photography from U.S., Korean, and Danish history, including Th. N. Krabbe's canonical, late 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs from Greenland which are contextualized by contemporary research.<sup>2</sup>

*Tracing Trades* and several of the photographic documents included in the film were also shown at the exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives (SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger)* in 2007 at the National Museum of Photography. *TRACING* was an investigation of photography's role in the construction of national history combining images from the collection with contemporary art that challenges the established histories.<sup>3</sup> The museum's collection holds a considerable representation of colonial photographs from Greenland, and Kaisen commented on Krabbe's imagery by mounting images from her private archive of family snapshots together with some of his photographs. Standing in front of these visual meetings across time and place, the viewer would occasionally be able to hear the audio track from *Tracing Trades*, shown in the next room. For instance one could hear a voice-over stating how the first proponents of Scandinavian adoptions argued that Scandinavia and the Nordic countries would be ideal places for non-Western adoptees since they had not had any colonial empires and would not repeat colonial stereotypes or reproduce discriminatory racism. The voice belongs to pioneering Swedish adoption researcher Tobias Hübinette, who also argues that Greenlandic and Asian people look alike to Scandinavians who got used to Asian features through the increasing adoptions of Koreans while not being aware of their own colonial history. Hübinette suggests that when the first Korean adoptees came to Denmark and Sweden in the 1950s, they must have reminded Scandinavians of Sami and Inuit people – as well as the repressed colonial past.

One of Kaisen's interventions into the historical colonial representation is the framed 'sibling collages' which she had placed between two of Krabbe's group photos in the exhibition. The frame holds an older black-and-white photograph of her adoptive father's siblings, and a more recent color photograph of Kaisen's Korean siblings. A cut-out image of a boy in pyjamas (Kaisen's father as child) is inserted into the older photo – he was sick and therefore absent when the children were to be portrayed. This is mirrored in Kaisen's later gesture of inserting an image of herself as an infant into a group portrait of her biological Korean siblings, from whom she was separated. The difference between the two collages lies not only in the reason for the absence of the sick child and the adopted baby in the original photos, but also in the actual physical distance between them and their siblings. The obvious crude

manipulation with a paperclip refers to the staged character of both family and colonial photography. Furthermore, the paperclip functions as a subtle mimicry or mockery of the privilege of constructing a photographic ‘truth’.

At first glance the combination of Krabbe’s skilled black-and-white silver-gelatine renderings of Inuit inhabitants at North Star Bay 1906 and the family snapshot of a Korean adopted child outside a house in Denmark in the 1980s might seem over-the-top. However, as we note similarities in posture and staging we also begin to consider the power of photography as a tool in the construction of identities and ideas of belonging. Krabbe’s photographs and similar imagery from the colonial past were means of classifying and framing the colonial body as a silenced and passive other in a subjugated territory, and the private family photograph functions as documentation and ‘proof’ of the adopted body as part of the affective unity of the family.

Furthermore, the exhibition installation suggests that the Korean child, too, is a colonized subject. She is dressed in a red-and-white tracksuit with the words ‘Danish Dynamite’ (a 1980s slogan for the national soccer team) printed vertically on both shirt and pants. Even the pattern of her socks is in red-and-white colors. This is probably on the occasion of her birthday, underlined by the Danish flags planted on each side of the entrance and mirrored in the door’s glass panels, thus surrounding the child. The abundance of signs of ‘Danishness’ is almost an erasure of her Korean birthday and origin. Whereas the Krabbe images assert an exotic otherness of the non-white, non-Western body (and thus perform an explicit racialization), the Danish Dynamite image can be seen as a reflection of society’s common, naturalized color blindness as it is experienced by a large proportion of non-white adoptees in Denmark and Scandinavia. Several researchers, activists, and artists like Kaisen have shown that the expectations for non-Western adoptees to fit in, be part of the white, Danish family entity and society, are based on a general inability and unwillingness to accept the complex challenges of assimilation and problems of racism that minorities experience.

Kaisen’s own image archive illustrates the negotiations of identity and belonging happening in the various contexts of the photographs. These negotiations are particularly significant to the way in which migrating subjects are either screened in or screened out of a society. Adoptees can be described as desirable migrants but involuntary emigrants, and their entry into the new home country should be as smooth and efficient as possible.

This image shows a trinity of figures which we might assume to be the new adoptive parents with the adoption agency representative, or at least an accompanying caretaker in the middle. The Korean infant herself is only visible as a small figure with fuzzy black hair in the arms of the new Danish mother. That this is a happy and important moment is not only suggested by the expressions of the three adults, but also by the fact that the photograph has been taken and kept.



Fig. 27



Fig. 28



Fig. 29

According to the label of the photograph we are in an airport. The presence of shopping carts prompts the reading that a form of commodity is being exchanged here: Korean children adopted into European families through an agency. The blond ‘mediator’ in the middle of the image is handing over postcards depicting an airplane from the Korean airline company which probably also brought the child to Europe. Thus, there is a formal and symbolic link in this snapshot between the hands of the women, the airplane on the postcard, and finally the baby: She has traveled, been in-passing, and now she is here. Korean Air Lines is the only signifier of her country of origin.

One of the postcards holds handwritten, basic records of the child’s journey: When she ate, when she wet herself, that she smiled but also had a cold. The first entry, which we can assume is from the very beginning of her journey, notes both the Danish time and the Korean time, the next entry just adds ‘local time’, and the following only notes the time without any definition of time zone: The baby is already here.

The entries are in different styles of handwriting, and the notes are evident of the vulnerability and total dependence of a small infant. They signify both care and control. The scribbling’s juxtaposition with the printed text advertising KAL’s “unforgettable services” represents the clash between the children’s lack of agency and the communication, transaction, and exercise of agencies happening between the adoption services and the future adoptive family. Finally, the fact that these simple records are just scribbled on a postcard, and not for instance in a more standardized file format, stresses that the transition and migration of the baby need to be swift and easy – and not slowed down by too elaborate bureaucratic registrations.



Fig. 30

A transnationally adopted child is given a passport and a residence permit, where an ID photo is required. In this ID photo the baby seems to be photographed laying down, her head on a white pillow. She is not really aware of the registering process, in other words it is not voluntary, but the photograph validates this document which holds just a few other data. Her height is 54 cm. She was born on May 28, 1980 in Seoul. Her name is Hye Jin BOO, and it is also written in Korean letters – however, only in parenthesis. The Korean name and identity are relegated to the past and bracketed out in the assimilation process. The residence permit is part of the procedure of being screened into Danish society, and it guarantees future access to the welfare society’s basic rights and privileges.

As researcher Hübinette explains in *Tracing Trades*, almost all ‘immigrants’ of Korean descent in Scandinavia are adoptees (Denmark for instance has 8,000 Korean adoptees, but only a few hundred immigrants of the same origin), which is much easier than being any other kind of migrant. Adoption is an extremely controlled process of assimilation contrary to other forms of immigration.

The mobility of all migrants and travelers is dependent on a process



of sorting, identification, and location, which is rendered efficient and almost unnoticeable for privileged citizens. In the case of 'desirable migrants' such as children being adopted into a Scandinavian family, the process of entering the country and becoming a new citizen is generally swift and unproblematic. The 'immigration' is obviously not initiated by or voluntary on the part of the child, rather the adoptee is being screened into society to accommodate the need of the receiving family. Once the parents have been approved for adoption, the procedure of acquiring a passport for an adopted child is smooth. Contrary to this, the mobility and ability to cross the border into Scandinavia for other non-white, non-Western subjects is made increasingly difficult. So is the possibility of migrants, in particular of course irregular migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, to acquire permits and access basic care as well as medical and legal assistance. All migrating bodies are identified, registered, and monitored – both at the border crossing points and once inside a country.

Today, identification documents, e.g. passports, look different than in 1980; now a range of other biometric data, such as fingerprints, accompanies the ID photo in Danish and other EU passports. Airport design and technology have obviously also changed over the past 35 years, with new forms of security measures and screenings, most notably full-body scanners. Biometrics and so-called smart surveillance technology are also applied on several other levels of border control, digital registering, and data tracking in the EU. The continuous investment in surveillance technologies opens up for constantly new ways of both facilitating the mobility of attractive travelers and obstructing the movement of unwanted migrants who are subjects to involuntary, targeted screening and monitoring. A recent law proposal from *Sverigedemokraterna* (the *Sweden Democrats*) is just one of many examples of this: In order to expose fraud among young refugees and immigrants claiming to be underage, the right-wing party argues for a 'scientific' age determination through mandatory X-rays of teeth and wrists.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of photography's neutrality and objectivity lives through the whole history of the medium and links contemporary lens-based surveillance to 19<sup>th</sup> century 'scientific' documentations of indigenous people in colonial territories. And just as colonial photography was inscribed by racist stereotypes, the usage of surveillance imagery is never neutral; rather it is targeted towards marginalized and already vulnerable subjects resulting in scrutiny, harassment, and discrimination.<sup>5</sup> Advanced lens-based and smart surveillance as well as the more intense, targeted registering of non-white, non-Western bodies is already in operation within the individual EU countries as well as at Europe's external borders which are managed by a complex of regulations and agents such as Frontex and the recently developed surveillance system Eurosur. All of these technologies and legal practices are effectuated in order to screen out subjects. The registering of identities that is also an enabling and caring 'surveillance' which acknowledges an individual's citizenship and the related entitlements is still reserved for the desirable migrants, such as adoptees.



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

We are currently experiencing intensified surveillance and border controls all over Europe, which goes hand in hand with increasingly aggressive immigration policies, based on affective argumentations of fear, threat, and security. The immigrant is affectively imagined either as a virtual composite 'face of terror'<sup>6</sup> threatening the security of the state or as a part of continuous hordes of asylum seekers threatening the stability of the welfare state and the homogenous society. These images are used and developed not only by right-wing political parties, but also by mainstream media as well as agents in border management.

X-rays, body scanners, and 'the face of terror' are part of the motley visual culture of our contemporary society of fear and surveillance. I want to finally return to Kaisen's family snapshot of the Danish Dynamite-dressed Korean girl and suggest that it not only functions as a valuable intervention into the colonial archive, but also in our current visual context, where migrant bodies are constantly framed and derived of agency. By re-inserting this private image into a political context, the artist Jane Jin Kaisen insists on reclaiming the agency that was removed from the adopted infant. She can be said to actively take the position as an involuntary emigrant and to welcome an empowering disruption of society's forced homogeneity. Not only on behalf of other adoptees but also of those migrants who are efficiently and constantly screened out.

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1. More information is available at <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org>.

2. **Thomas Neergaard Krabbe** (1861-1936) was a Danish doctor and amateur photographer who between 1889 and 1909 traveled to Greenland and lived there for an extended period of time, partly as a delegate for the Danish health authorities. From 1893 he photographed parts of the country and its population.

3. I curated the exhibition as part of my doctoral work; for a thorough description of the show, including Kaisen's work, see my dissertation: **Blik og begivenhed. En diskussion af fotografiets historiske potentialer med nedslag i krig, koloni og kommerzialisme 1860-1920**. Københavns Universitet, 2008, pp. 273-312.

4. [http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Ovriga-dokument/Ovrigt-dokument/aldersbestamning-av-immigrante\\_H2021127](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Ovriga-dokument/Ovrigt-dokument/aldersbestamning-av-immigrante_H2021127).

5. See for instance S. Magnet and T. Rodgers: **"Stripping for the State: Whole body imaging technologies and the surveillance of othered bodies"** in *Feminist Media Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Routledge 2012.

6. See K. A. Gates (2011): **Our Biometric Future: Facial Recognition Technology and the Culture of Surveillance**. NY University Press.

Curating Anti-Racist, Pro-  
Migration & Decolonial Projects

Tone Olaf Nielsen

# Curating Anti-Racist, Pro-Migration & Decolonial Projects

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A presentation by Tone Olaf Nielsen

I would like to begin by thanking Jane Jin Kaisen for inviting me to contribute to this pertinent seminar with these amazing speakers.<sup>1</sup> There is currently a lot of debate in Danish public and social media about racism, migration, and colonialism – unfortunately, rather un-nuanced – so Jane's exhibition and seminar bring forth crucial counter-arguments.

I would like to share with you how I, as an independent curator for the past 15 years, have tried to create platforms for anti-racist, pro-migration and decolonial art, action, and critique in the hope of contributing to establishing a genuine 'system critique' in Denmark and effecting social change. I describe myself as an independent activist curator and educator and am based in Copenhagen.

I use curating to address the root causes of social, economic, and environmental inequalities, and I use the exhibition medium to present other ways of organizing the world. My practice is based on a firm belief in the ability of artistic and curatorial work to contribute to social and political transformation.

I will present a sample of projects I have curated over the years – many in collaboration with fellow curators and artists – which have addressed topics such as democracy movements and activist strategizing in Los Angeles, racism and xenophobia in Denmark, the silenced history of colonialism in the Nordic region, and coloniality in contemporary Ireland and Northern Ireland.

## Minority Report

In 2004 I co-curated a large-scale exhibition project titled *Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark* together with Danish artists and curators Trine Rytter Andersen, Kirsten Dufour, and Anja Raithel. Taking as its point of departure the major nationalist turn and rise in racist and xenophobic sentiments in Denmark around 2000, the aim of the exhibition was to delve into the increasing legitimization of racist and intolerant

discourses and policies and further investigate their grounds and conditions, mechanisms and functions, directions and forms. As such, *Minority Report* set forth to explore what social and political developments had paved the way for the increasing xenophobia in Denmark; which ideological and psychological operations it rested on; and how it was practiced within the social, political, educational, cultural, and juridical fields.

Unfolding in different locations in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, *Minority Report* presented a total of 63 Danish-based and international visual artists and filmmakers as well as 53 theorists, politicians, musicians, performers, networks, and cultural organizations from Denmark and abroad, who all from very different social and political backgrounds had worked thoroughly with the questions of racism and intolerance. Through visual art, film, music, performance, lectures, debates, hearings, workshops, and text, the exhibition initiated a transnational and interdisciplinary encirclement of racism and intolerance in Denmark, which due to the diverse starting points of the participants was able to raise new kinds of questions in the hope of invigorating the dominant discussion on immigrants, refugees, and migrants in Denmark at the time.

For a month, the city of Aarhus was transformed into a vital and vibrant platform for debate upon which the problematics of racism, intolerance, and conviviality were visualized, analyzed, and exchanged from the perspective of minority as well as majority groups in close dialogue with the audiences. Jane Jin Kaisen participated in *Minority Report* with the experimental documentary *Orientity*, which was conceptualized together with artist Khaled D. Ramadan and presented as part of a larger multimedia installation by Chamber of Public Secrets, a production unit on critical art and culture.

*Minority Report* concluded that with the political institutionalization of nationalist policies and the subsequent social legitimization of racism and xenophobia, Denmark had developed a blind spot towards its intolerance of immigrants in general and Muslims in particular, which has enabled the majority of its politicians and citizens alike to continuously repudiate all accusations of having grown more nationalist, xenophobic, discriminatory, and unequal. There simply was, and still is, no official acknowledgement of Denmark being otherwise.

## Rethinking Nordic Colonialism

In March 2005, I co-founded the curatorial collective *Kuratorisk Aktion* (*Curatorial Action*) together with curator Frederikke Hansen. Our aim was to take curatorial action against the injustices and inequalities produced and sustained by the order of exploitative global venture capitalism. In 2009, postcolonial art historian Mirjam Joensen from the Faroe Islands joined the collective.

Our curatorial action against the capitalist world order began at home, more specifically with the history of Nordic colonialism and its contemporary



Fig. 33

aftereffects. From 2005-12, *Kuratorisk Aktion's* projects were all driven by a desire to understand why the colonial legacies of the Scandinavian countries have remained structurally invisible, and to what degree colonial relations of rule continue to haunt the present.

Our first project to engage these questions was the transnational, cross-disciplinary project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, which we curated for NIFCA in 2006, to which Jane contributed pivotal work linking transnational adoption to colonial dynamics.

During the project's five different acts, which unfolded in Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Finnish Sápmi, we invited 56 postcolonial practitioners from across the globe to help us examine three questions on-site in the former Scandinavian colonies:

- 1) Why has the colonial history of the region – unlike the colonial legacies of, for instance, Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain – to a large extent been silenced or rendered invisible by the Scandinavian countries that gave rise to it and by the international community as well, and what interests drove Nordic colonialism?
- 2) What effects has Nordic colonialism had on both sides of the colonial divide, and can we still find traces of the colonial dynamic in the relations between the Nordic member countries today and in the neo-nationalist, neo-racist, neo-fundamentalist, and neo-heteronormative sways that have haunted the region since the early 2000s?
- 3) As a result of colonialism's series of cultural clashes, what mixed identities, languages, and cultures have emerged in the postcolonial condition that the region now finds itself in, and how do they challenge heteronormative capitalist conceptions of 'cultural purity' and 'ethnic superiority' so prevalent in Europe at present?

Jane Jin Kaisen participated in *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* together with Tobias Hübinette, a Swedish/South Korean researcher on transnational adoption, critical race and whiteness theory.

For *Act 3: Living (in) the Postcolonial*, which took place in The Faroe Islands, they produced a multimedia archive installation titled *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia*, the video *Adopting Belinda*, and an experimental film titled *Tracing Trades*. They also did a two-part performance. The first part, *Transmitting: (Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation*, was performed in the Faroe Islands Art Museum during the exhibition opening on May 12, 2006, while Part 2, a multimedia lecture-performance titled *(Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation: The X-Raced Mut(at)ed Speak* took place at the Nordic House the following evening.

Combined, their contribution provided a thought-provoking counter-history of transnational adoption by examining the phenomenon in the context of colonial repression and orientalist imaginaries in Scandinavia.



After *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* followed five additional projects on Nordic colonialism during the period of 2007-12: *The Road to Mental Decolonization* (Tromsø Gallery of Contemporary Art, Norway, 2008-10), *Metropolitan Repressions* (SUM: Magazine for Contemporary Art, # 4, 2009), *TUPILAKOSAURUS: Pia Arke's Issue with Art, Ethnicity, and Colonialism, 1981-2006* (different art and cultural history museum venues in Copenhagen, Nuuk, and Umeå, 2010), *Troubling Ireland: A Cross-Borders Think Tank for Artists and Curators Engaged in Social Change* (different locations in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, 2010-11), and *TUPILAKOSAURUS: An Incomplete(able) Survey of Pia Arke's Artistic Work and Research* (Copenhagen: Kuratorisk Aktion, 2012). In retrospect, our body of projects on Nordic colonialism represented some of the first attempts to write a comprehensive aesthetic history of the region's colonial past and had four specific outcomes:

Firstly, the projects in different ways made it clear that the history of Nordic colonialism continues to be extensively repressed and made invisible because its oppressive elements are incompatible with Scandinavia's (self-)image as the cradle of social democracy and the modern welfare state. Not just the Scandinavian populations, but a quarter-century of global postcolonial studies as well, have simply been unable to imagine colonial dynamics crossing the colonial North-South divide and unfolding internally in the presumably wealthy North.

And when the history of Nordic colonialism has occasionally been acknowledged, it has most often been portrayed as being 'exceptional' to the histories and processes of other colonial powers: a 'softer' and more 'charitable' and humane form of colonialism. In turn, this continuous repression or 'whitewashing' has allowed colonial dynamics of the past to reproduce themselves into the present as sways of nationalism, racism, and sexism towards the immigrant populations, towards refugees, and towards migrant workers. Secondly, this uncovering allowed the Nordic project participants and audiences on both sides of the colonial divide to self-identify as 'postcolonial' for the very first time, and to thus associate themselves with the bigger history of Western imperialism.

Thirdly, the projects revealed an urgent need for new processes of geopolitical and mental decolonization, since not all the region's member countries and indigenous peoples are yet sovereign or fully self-determining – Greenland, The Faroe Islands, the Åland Islands, and Sápmi to be exact. As a result, the region's populations are still haunted by colonial patterns of thinking and acting.

Lastly, the projects' engagement with Nordic colonialism did indeed reveal horrific stories of oppression and exploitation, but also legacies of agency, resistance, and hybrid forms of identity and social organization, which may prompt us to unthink hegemonic binarisms, normative values, and fixed categories like nation-state and citizenship, if we dare engage them.

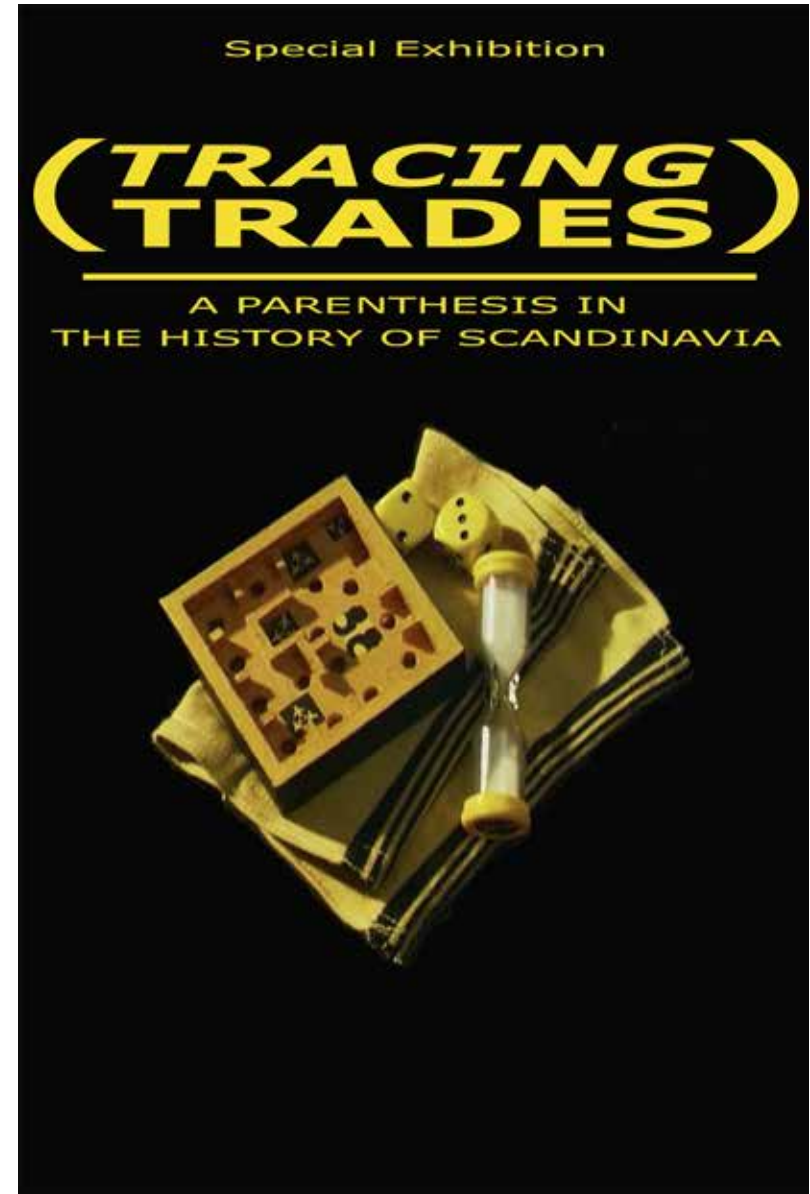


Fig. 34



## The Trampoline House

Parallel with my work with Nordic colonialism, I began to engage issues of migration together with my partner, socially engaged artist Morten Goll, and in 2009 we helped establish the Trampoline House, a user-driven refugee justice community center located in Copenhagen's Northwest district.

The Trampoline House project took its starting point in the fact that more people than ever before are displaced from their homes because of climate disasters, war, conflict, persecution, or poverty.

Most receiving countries have responded by increasing their border controls, tightening their immigration policies, incarcerating refugees and asylum seekers, and deporting people without residence permit. The large migratory and refugee flows have resulted in a whole "migration management" industry: Judicial and political procedures and technologies that nation-states use to try to regulate transnational migration and to exclude unwanted immigrants. In Denmark, which has a population of roughly 5.5 mill., there are currently between 20,000 and 40,000 undocumented migrants residing and working in the country without being registered. Many of them live a precarious life as homeless in the streets. In Denmark, there are also currently 7,900 asylum seekers waiting in remote asylum centers for their asylum application or deportation to be settled.

There, they are provided with a bed, clothes, a little pocket money every two weeks, cafeteria food three times a day, and different activation programs. In 2013, the average stay was 1.5 years, while 727 asylum seekers had waited more than 3 years, and 29 had waited more than 15 years!



Only a few asylum seekers every year meet the requirements to be allowed to work or find their own accommodation outside the centers. The majority does not. They remain in the centers day in and day out, month after month, waiting for a resolution and growing ill from the pacification and loss of power to control one's own life situation.

Following Giorgio Agamben's writings on the figure of the refugee and structure of the camp, Danish theorist Mikkel Bolt has described the Danish asylum centers as literal 'camps', each of them an architectural manifestation of Danish state racism designed to keep 'undesirables' on the outside.

The Trampoline House was formed in reaction to this racist system and was conceived as a concept during a series of workshops for asylum center residents and socially engaged artists that Morten Goll initiated in 2009 in collaboration with artist Joachim Hamou and myself. Together, all the workshop participants developed the idea to create a user-driven community center where refugees, asylum seekers, forced migrants, Danish citizens, and other residents of Denmark could meet, engage in activities together, and exchange knowledge. A house that should work:

1) To break the social isolation of refugees, asylum seekers, and forced migrants in Denmark and through legal counseling, education, and community provide these precarious groups with information and tools needed for them to better their difficult life situations.

2) To inform the Danish public about the conditions of refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants in Denmark and motivate to a just, solidary, and



Fig. 35

sustainable refugee and asylum policy.

3) To jumpstart the inclusion of new residents in Danish society and help them through Denmark's three-year 'Integration Program'.

In November 2010, following a very tough period of fundraising and trying to keep the workshop group together, we finally raised enough funds to realize our concept, and on November 27, 2010, the Trampoline House opened to the public. The house is currently open four days a week and offers legal counseling, language classes, a daily soup kitchen, various workshops, debates, public hearings, community, and much more. It is financed by private and state funds and has an average of 350 visits a week by 100 refugee users and interns, 30 non-refugee interns and volunteers, and four employed staff members (me being one of them).

## CAMP

To conclude, I would like to briefly mention my upcoming project. On April 17, 2015, *Kuratorisk Aktion* will launch CAMP (Center for Art on Migration Politics), a nonprofit exhibition space for art engaging questions of displacement, migration, immigration, and asylum in four leased spaces inside the Trampoline House. The center will produce exhibitions on migration and displacement with renowned international artists as well as less established practitioners, with predominately migrant or refugee backgrounds.

CAMP will work to increase insight into the life situations of migrant and displaced persons, and to discuss these in relation to the overall factors that cause migration and displacement. The objective is, through art, to stimulate greater understanding between displaced people and the communities that receive them, and to stimulate new visions for a more inclusive and equitable migration, refugee, and asylum policy. CAMP will be the first center of its kind in Scandinavia and with it, we hope to create a space where audiences, both with and without migrant backgrounds, are able to identify with the living conditions of displaced people and find inspiration for an alternative migration political agenda.

CAMP will be a platform for artists who represent displaced and migrating people's experiences and shed light on the struggles that refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, trafficked, and enslaved people fight every day.

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1. Tone Olaf Nielsen presented this paper during 'LOVING BELINDA Seminar: Tactics in Contemporary Art Addressing Race, Migration, and Coloniality', Godsbanen, Århus, January 10, 2015. The seminar was organized in conjunction with the exhibition 'Loving Belinda' at Galleri Image. The other speakers were: Lene Myong, Louise Wolthers, Marianne Ping Huang, and Jane Jin Kaisen.













Kernefamilien er stadig idealernes motorvej

Fig. 36

Stjålne børn på jagt efter deres forældre

Fig. 37

**Barnløse opgiver  
at adoptere**

Fig. 38

**Kina optrevler endnu  
en børnesmuglerring**

Fig. 39



**FN advarer mod børneeksport**

Fig. 40

**»Det største traume  
er adoptionen«**

Fig. 41

**'Lokket, købt  
eller stjålet'**

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Fig. 45

**At skaffe  
og skaffe sig af  
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**Adoptionens  
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**»Det er en menneskeret at kende sin identitet«**

Fig. 48

**Ulovlige mødre føder børn, der ikke findes**

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**Færre end nogensinde vil adoptere**

Fig. 50

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Newspaper headline, “Homoseksuelle tættere på retten til adoption” (Homosexuals closer to the right to adopt). *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, December 21, 2007: 3

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**Fig. 13**

Installation view, *Island of Stone #1-3*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, October 8, 2011 – January 8, 2012. Photo credit: Guston Sondin-Kung.

**Fig. 14**

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**Fig. 18**

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**Fig. 19**

Video stills, *Tracing Trades*.

**Fig. 20**

Video stills, *Tracing Trades*.

**Fig. 21**

Video stills, *Tracing Trades*.

**Fig. 22**

Video stills, *Tracing Trades*.

**Fig. 23**

Korean Air Postcard given to the artist's parents by the flight escort upon her arrival in Kastrup Airport, August 26, 1980. Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006. Curated by Kuratorisk Aktion: Tone Olaf Nielsen & Frederikke Hansen.

**Fig. 24**

Installation view of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives* [SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger], The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, March 2 – May 26, 2007. Curated by Louise Wolthers.

**Fig. 25**

Photograph of the artist as a child (center) juxtaposed with silver-gelatin photographs from the series *Greenland* by Th. N. Krabbe, 1936.

Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives* [SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger], The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, March 2 – May 26, 2007. Curated by Louise Wolthers.

**Fig. 26**

*Missing*, photo collage, 2006. Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives* [SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger], The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, March 2 – May 26, 2007. Curated by Louise Wolthers.

**Fig. 27**

Photograph of the artist on her 6th birthday (left) juxtaposed silver-gelatin photographs from the series *Greenland* by Th. N. Krabbe, 1936.

Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives* [SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger], The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, March 2 – May 26, 2007. Curated by Louise Wolthers.

**Fig. 28**

Photograph of the artist on her 6th birthday.

Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *TRACING Photography's Narratives* [SPOR af fotografiets fortællinger], The National Museum of Photography, Denmark, March 2 – May 26, 2007. Curated by Louise Wolthers.

**Fig. 29**

Photograph from the artist's family's photo album depicting the Kastrup airport arrival hall, August 26, 1980. Cropped.

Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006. Curated by Kuratorisk Aktion: Tone Olaf Nielsen & Frederikke Hansen.

**Fig. 30**

Korean Air Postcard given to the artist's parents by the flight escort upon her arrival in Kastrup Airport, August 26, 1980.

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**Fig. 31**

Glass vitrine containing the artist's adoption documents ('Residence permit' and 'Statement of releasing guardianship') next to Swedish breakfast advertisement poster. Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006. Curated by Kuratorisk Aktion: Tone Olaf Nielsen & Frederikke Hansen.

**Fig. 32**

Detail of glass vitrine containing the artist's adoption documents ('Residence permit' and 'Statement of releasing guardianship'). Exhibited as part of the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia* in the group exhibition *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006. Curated by Kuratorisk Aktion: Tone Olaf Nielsen & Frederikke Hansen.

**Fig. 33**

Video stills, *Orientity*.

**Fig. 34**

Front cover of leaflet for the viewer to take when entering the multimedia archive installation *Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia*.

**Fig. 35**

Documentation of the performance *(Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation*, Performed at *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006. Curated by Kuratorisk Aktion: Tone Olaf Nielsen & Frederikke Hansen.

**Fig. 36**

Newspaper headline, "Kernefamilien er stadig idealernes motorvej" (The nuclear family is still the ideal). *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 26, 2011: 4

**Fig. 37**

Newspaper headline, "Stjålne børn på jagt efter deres forældre" (Stolen children in search of their parents). *Politiken*, August 7, 2011: 9

**Fig. 38**

Newspaper headline, "Barnløse opgiver at adoptere" (Childless give up adoption). *Kristeligt Dagblad*, October 18, 2011: 3

**Fig. 39**

Newspaper headline, "Kina optrevler endnu en menneskesmugling" (China unravels yet another human smuggling). *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, December 9, 2011: 2

**Fig. 40**

Newspaper headline, "FN advarer mod børneeksport" (UN warns against child export). *Politiken*, July 29, 2012: 1

**Fig. 41**

Newspaper headline, "Det største traume er adoptionen" (The biggest trauma is the adoption). *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, October 23, 2012: 3

**Fig. 42**

Newspaper headline, "Lokket, købt eller stjålet" (Tricked, bought or stolen). *BT*, November 27, 2012: 2

**Fig. 43**

Newspaper headline, "Unicef: Det er toppen af isbjerget" (UNICEF: It is the tip of the iceberg). *Politiken*, December 26, 2012: 9

**Fig. 44**

Newspaper headline, "Tusinder af tyske mulatbørn blev adopteret illegalt til Danmark" (Thousands of German mulatto children were adopted illegally to Denmark). *Politiken*, September 1, 2013: 1

**Fig. 45**

Newspaper headline, "Adoptionens dunkle historie" (The dark history of adoption). *Information*, September 13, 2013: 12

**Fig. 46**

Newspaper headline, "At skaffe og skaffe sig af med børn i den globale ulighed" (To acquire and dispose of children in the global inequality). *Information*, November 11, 2013: 14

**Fig. 47**

Newspaper headline, "Adoptionens tid er forbi" (The era of adoption is over). *Information*, December 5, 2013: 10

**Fig. 48**

Newspaper headline, "Det er en menneskeret at kende sin identitet" (It is a human right to know one's identity). *Berlingske Tidende*, February 13, 2014: 8

**Fig. 49**

Newspaper headline, "Ulovlige mødre føder børn, der ikke findes" (Illegal mothers give birth to children that do not exist). *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, May 22, 2014: 18

**Fig. 50**

Newspaper headline, "Færre end nogensinde vil adoptere" (Fewer than ever want to adopt). *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*, June 21, 2014

**Fig. 51**

Newspaper headline, "En bevægelse af voksne adopterede" (A movement of adult adoptees). *Information*, October 28, 2014: 6

## List of Artworks

### **Adopting Belinda (2006)**

SD Video 4:3, single channel. 8:35 minutes. Color.

Concept: Jane Jin Kaisen, Tobias Hübinette

Directed and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen

Cast: Elke Olaf Goll, Morten Goll, Tobias Hübinette, and Jane Jin Kaisen

Photography: Tone Olaf Nielsen, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld

First exhibited: *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006

### **Revisiting the Andersons (2015)**

HD Video 16:9, single channel. 12:14 minutes. Color.

Directed, edited, and conceptualized: Jane Jin Kaisen

Cast: Elke Olaf Goll, Morten Goll, Tobias Hübinette, and Jane Jin Kaisen

Photography and color correction: Guston Sondin-Kung

First exhibited: *Loving Belinda – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Galleri Image, Denmark, January 9 – March 8, 2015

### **Loving Belinda (2015)**

HD Video 16:9, single channel. 9:29 minutes. Color.

Directed, edited, and conceptualized: Jane Jin Kaisen

Cast: Elke Olaf Goll, Lene Myong, Tobias Hübinette, and Jane Jin Kaisen

Photography & color correction: Guston Sondin-Kung

First exhibited: *Loving Belinda – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Galleri Image, Denmark, January 9 – March 8, 2015

### **The Andersons (2015)**

Color photograph, 93,3 x 142 cm.

Photographer: Guston Sondin-Kung

First exhibited: *Loving Belinda – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Galleri Image, Denmark, January 9 – March 8, 2015

### **Tracing Trades (2006)**

SD Video 4:3, single channel. 38 minutes. Color / B&W

Concept and script: Jane Jin Kaisen, Tobias Hübinette

Directed and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen

Voice-over: Tobias Hübinette, Jane Jin Kaisen, Alfredo Cramerotti, and Berry Wickenden

Photography: Jane Jin Kaisen, Carl Johan Sennels, and Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld

First exhibited: *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006

### **Tracing Trades – A Parenthesis in the History of Scandinavia (2006)**

Multimedia archive installation: Various materials and work components, including audio guide, leaflet, four cardboard charts, books, posters, newspaper clippings, archive photographs, private photo archive, adoption documents, passport, objects, etc. Dimensions variable.

First exhibited: *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism – A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12 – June 4, 2006

**The Woman, The Orphan, and The Tiger (2010)**

HD Video 16:9, single channel. 72 minutes. Color / B&W

Directed, conceptualized, and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung  
Voices and research assistance: Grace M. Cho, Isabelle, Jane Jeong Trenka, Jennifer Kwon Dobbs, Maja Lee Langvad, Mihee-Nathalie Lemoine, Myung Ki Sook, Pak Chun Sung, Rachel, Soni Kum, Tammy Chu, Yu, Young Nim

Photography: Jane Jin Kaisen & Guston Sondin-Kung

First exhibited: *MFA#2*, The Wight Gallery, University of California Los Angeles, USA, April 1-9, 2010

**Island of Stone #1-3 (2011)**

HD Video 16:9, 3-channel video installation. 15:45 minutes. Looped. Color

Directed, conceptualized, and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen, Guston Sondin-Kung

Cast: Yang Yun Mo, Choi Sung Hee, elderly couple from Gangjeong village

Photography: Guston Sondin-Kung, Jane Jin Kaisen, and Kim Min Su

First exhibited: *Dissident Translations – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, October 8, 2011 – January 8, 2012

**Reiterations of Dissent (2011)**

HD Video 19:9, 5-channel video installation. Duration of each video: 8:57 – 10:02 minutes (total duration: 59:01 minutes). Looped. Color / B&W

Directed, conceptualized, and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen

Voices and research assistance: Hyun Ki Young, Kim Seong Nae, Huh Yeong Seon, Kim Kyung Hoon, Jeong Gong Chul, Kim Dong Man, Song Seung Mun, Koh Nan Hyang Kim Dong Chun, Kim Jong Min

Photography: Jane Jin Kaisen, Guston Sondin-Kung

First exhibited: *Dissident Translations – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, October 8, 2011 – January 8, 2012

**Retake: Mayday (2011)**

HD Video 16:9, 3-channel video installation. Duration of each video: 9:34, 14:07, 15:41 minutes (total duration: 39:22 minutes). Looped. Color / B&W

Directed, conceptualized, and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen

Cast: Kim Dong Man, Song Seung Mun, Koh Nan Hyang

Photography: Guston Sondin-Kung, Jane Jin Kaisen

First exhibited: *Dissident Translations – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, October 8, 2011 – January 8, 2012

**Light and Shadow (2011)**

Multimedia installation: 22 framed triptych texts (70 x 36 cm), *Dictionary, Vocabulary, Maps* (3 framed photo prints, each 23,5 x 72 cm), *Leave Early and Come Back at Dusk* (color photograph, 80 x 115 cm), *A Textual Basis* (The artist's fallen hair collected over nine months, mounted onto white board and framed, 82 x 123 cm)

First exhibited: *Dissident Translations – Jane Jin Kaisen*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, October 8, 2011 – January 8, 2012

**(Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation: The X-Raced Mut(at)ed Speak**

2-part multimedia performance, approximately 40 minutes.

Concept and script: Jane Jin Kaisen, Tobias Hübinette

Performers: Jane Jin Kaisen, Tobias Hübinette

Performed: Part 1: *(Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation*, The Faroe Islands Art Museum,

Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 12, 2006. Part 2: *(Dis)ComfortAN(d)AlieNation: The X-Raced Mut(at)ed Speak*, The Nordic House, Tórshavn, The Faroe Islands, May 13, 2006

**Orientity (2004)**

SD Video 4:3, single channel video. 20 minutes. Color / B&W

Conceptualized and edited: Jane Jin Kaisen, Khaled D. Ramadan

Cast: Jane Jin Kaisen

Photography: Jane Jin Kaisen, Khaled D. Ramadan

First exhibited: *Minority Report: Challenging Intolerance in Contemporary Denmark*, Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark, September 25 – October 24, 2004

**Jane Jin Kaisen**  
**LOVING BELINDA**

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