

Travelling Home: The Scandinavian Transnational Adoptee Identity on the Move

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ABSTRACT: Globalization and migration are strong themes in contemporary Scandinavian literature. In this literature, which discusses migration in relation to complex questions about home, national identity, and the self, memoirs written by Scandinavian transnational adoptees stand out as a new intriguing literary voice. This raises the question how we can understand Scandinavian transnational adoptees as migrants and travelling subjects. By using Trinh T Minh-ha's idea of "home" as a source of movement or travelling as a starting point, this article explores the Scandinavian transnational adoptee subject as a migrant identity and as a traveller in literary works written by these adoptees. The article focuses on two physical journeys: the journey through which the transnational adoptee arrives in the Scandinavian country as an immigrant and the journey he/she takes when revisiting the country of birth as a traveller/tourist. This ends up in a discussion of how "home" could be interpreted in the complex migration identity that is the Scandinavian transnational adoptee identity.

RÉSUMÉ : La mondialisation et la migration sont des thèmes forts dans la littérature scandinave contemporaine. Dans cette littérature – qui traite de la migration en relation avec des questions complexes concernant le foyer, l'identité nationale et le soi –, les mémoires écrits par des adoptés transnationaux scandinaves se distinguent comme une nouvelle voix littéraire intrigante. Cela soulève la question de savoir comment nous pouvons comprendre les adoptés transnationaux scandinaves en tant que migrants et sujets itinérants. En utilisant l'idée de « foyer » de Trinh T Minh-ha comme source de mouvement, ou de voyage comme point de départ, cet article explore le sujet de l'adopté transnational scandinave comme identité migrante et comme voyageur dans les œuvres littéraires écrites par ces adoptés. L'article se concentre sur deux parcours physiques : le voyage par lequel l'adopté transnational arrive dans le pays scandinave en tant qu'immigrant et le voyage qu'il/elle entreprend en revisitant son pays de naissance en tant que voyageur(euse)/touriste. Cela aboutit à une discussion sur la façon dont « foyer » pourrait être interprété dans l'identité migratoire complexe qu'est l'identité de l'adopté transnational scandinave.

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Introduction

The Nordic countries host the largest per-capita populations of transnational adoptees in the world (Hübinette 2007, 117). This is typically attributed to the fact that these countries are welfare states and therefore have less need for domestic adoption, and thus transnational adoption is a more viable option for reproductively challenged couples. The increase of transnational adoption began in the 1950s, due to the Korean War, and boomed in the 1970s and 1980s. Today, approximately 90,000 transnational adoptees live in the Nordic countries (Hübinette 2007, 117). Several of transnational adoptees who arrived in Scandinavia in the 1970s and 1980s are now writing about their experiences. This article focuses on contemporary Scandinavian adoption literature as travel narrative in the context of migration.

Transnational (or international or inter-country) adoption, in the way that I use the term in this article, concerns migration/travelling as it involves a transition between two countries. Therefore, I view a transnational adoptee identity as also a migrant identity as the transnational adoptee both becomes subject to emigration (leaving the birth country) and immigration (entering the new adoptive country). This modern form of adoption migration, or the replacement of children, is characterized by coloured children from the Global South being adopted by white families in the Global North (Myong 2014, 4). Similar to the domestic or transracial adoption found in North America, “visibility” of the adoption is present “because of the racial and ethnic differences between the adoptive parents and the adoptees” (Ben-Zion 12). In this context, adoption in the Scandinavian countries, which largely consist of white populations seeking to adopt children from around the world, is not only visible adoption, but also visible migration.

By definition, transnational adoptees are immigrants in the Scandinavian countries (Hübinette 2006, 20). Still, it can be controversial to speak about adoption as child migration. Previous scholars note that, “the transracial adoptee subjectivity is perhaps one of the most intriguing forms of migrancy, above all because it is rarely categorized as a form of migration” (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011a, 227). The reason why adoption as migration is controversial may be explained by the fact that the intention of transnational adoption is permanency and complete assimilation (Yngvesson 21; Ben-Zion 12). Transnational adoption is conceptualized as a permanent removal of children from their biological family and birth country with the expectation to “convert these children religiously, socially, ethnically and nationally in order to become ‘little Swedes or Norwegians’” (Ben-Zion 12). As a result, many Scandinavian adoptees do not necessarily think of themselves as migrant subjects even though they know that

they have immigrated to Scandinavia (cf. Hübinette 2007; Myong 2009; Lundström). Therefore, some adoptees have difficulties relating to a migrant identity. Yet, as Rasmussen and Sorensen explain, “the process involves subjects radically deterritorialized and uprooted; it involves a transformation which is typically so comprehensive that the only dimension remaining of the adopted subject’s connection to his or her birth country is that of a body—but a body without memories” (2011a, 227). Due to their identity as transnational adoptees, and therefore their racial difference, they are statistically minorities, belonging to a minority group in Scandinavia (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011a, 237). At the same time, media representations, such as the Scandinavian television show *Sporløs* [Without a trace],¹ depict transnational adoptees as migrant subjects and travellers in the frame of a return narrative—where the Scandinavian adoptee subjects travel back to the country of birth to search for their biological family members and roots. In Scandinavian transnational adoption, transracial adoptees go through not only the transition between families and ethnicity/race but also between two countries. Indeed, this type of migration raises difficult and sensitive questions surrounding national identity and origin, topics that are frequently depicted in adoption literature, as is the experience of the books’ protagonists feeling Scandinavian on the inside but at the same time constantly being reminded of their birth country because of differences in appearance (Lundström 73; Yngvesson 21; Bunch and Behrendt 57).

Using this contextual background and Trinh T. Minh-ha’s theoretical idea of “home” as a source of movement or travelling, this article explores how the Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors depict a complex migration identity by problematizing their migration experience through aspects of, and terminology related to, travelling. Through a close reading of Scandinavian transnational adoption literature, I address the literary negotiation of transnational adoptees’ complex migrant identities. This article argues that, as Scandinavian transnational adoptees do not find their way “home” by returning to their country of birth, some authors instead find “home” through their experience of writing the adoptee narrative. To illustrate this observation, I focus on two physical journeys. The first journey (described as the “Airport Metaphor”) is the one taken to the Scandinavian countries and towards a Scandinavian identity in which I equate Scandinavian transnational adoptees with migrants and travellers. The second journey (analyzed under the three separate headings “Returning Narrative and Assimilation,” “Narrative Strategies for Searching the Biological Roots: Family Drama, Questionnaires, and Fiction,” and “Traveller versus Tourist: Lost in Translation”) is the trip back to the birth country and towards a writing identity.

The term Scandinavian transnational adoption literature refers to literary works of fiction in prose or poetry written by Scandinavian transnational adoptees. For the purpose of this article, specific literary examples and quotations will be drawn from Swedish authors: Astrid Trotzig’s *Blod är tjockare än vatten* (1996)

[Blood is Thicker than Water], Patrik Lundberg's *Gul utanpå* (2012) [Yellow on the Outside]; Norwegian authors: Geir Follevåg's *Adoptert Identitet* (2002) [Adopted Identity], Brynjulf Tjønn's *Kinamann* (2011) [China Man]; and Danish authors: Maja Lee Langvad's *Find Holger Danske* (2006) [Find Holger Dane], and *Find Holger Danske: Appendix* (2014a) [Find Holger Dane Appendix]. These specific literary examples do not represent a collective or general experience of Scandinavian transnational adoptees, but they serve as representative examples of what this article aims to discuss.

Scandinavian Transnational Adoption Literature's Complex Categorization: Both Migration Literature and Scandinavian Literature

Migration and globalization are strong contemporary themes in Nordic literature (Bunch; Bunch and Behrendt). Previous scholarship on migration literature recognizes these new voices in contemporary Nordic literature as "important in terms of identity and integration" (Kongslie 35). As migration in Europe increases, the number of literary publications on different migrant experiences is growing. Notably, "themes of migration and exile ... express the process of acculturation, integration and identity formation. The references of reality and the comprehension of identity implicit in the texts are cultural representations of the process found in the meeting of cultures" (Kongslie 35). As a metaphor, migration is elegantly formulated by the Danish migration author Rubén Palma as the title of his short story collection: *Fra lufthavn to lufthavn—og andre indvandrerfortællinger* (2001) [directly translated, the title is "From Airport to Airport—and Other Immigrant Stories," but its English publication is titled *The Trail We Leave*, 2004]. The title captures the migrant experience of being on the move, and, in my opinion, portrays Minh-ha's idea of the migrant identity as a source that travels (Minh-ha 27; Kongslie 42).

In the context of migration literature, which discusses migration in relation to complex questions about home, national identity, and the self, texts written by Scandinavian transnational adoptees stand out as a new and intriguing literary voice on issues of migration, exile, and diaspora. Because of the unique experience of being uprooted from their birth countries, transnational adoptees stand out in relation to other immigrant groups in Scandinavia when it comes to migration. Catrin Lundström addresses this experience by highlighting the stigmatized and frequently asked question "Where you from—really?" that is frequently posed to transnational adoptees, as well as other migrants of colour (Lundström 73). This question challenges their national identity and relates to questions such as "Who are you?" or "What are you doing here?" As adoptees do not necessarily position themselves as marginalized in relation to the normative Swedishness, for Scandinavian transnational adoptees this question undermines the feeling of

being fully included (Lundström 74). As Lundström rightly points out, the answer to “Where you from—really?” is not Sweden, Norway, or Denmark even if transnational adoptees are compelled to answer with the Scandinavian national identity with which they identify (Lundström 79). Instead, the expected answer is the country of birth. This highlights the difference between many other immigrant groups in Scandinavia where individuals perhaps have a more direct connection to their country of birth and possibly perceive the “Where you from—really?” question in a different way. Furthermore, the act of asking “Where you from—really?” reminds transnational adoptees of the migration they were exposed to in early childhood and their corresponding relationship to their birth country.

Previous scholarship contextualizes adoption literature with migrant subjectivity. For instance, Tobias Hübinette (2007) investigates the transnational adoption experience by studying whiteness and racial experiences in the Swedish adoption memoir. Iben Engelhardt Andersen makes the connection between immigration and adoption by reading texts by Scandinavian transnational adoptees alongside other migrant authors, whereas Michala Yun-Joo Schlichtkrull problematizes the migrant background by arguing that texts written by Scandinavian transnational adoptees are more about social identities than a search for roots. And Kim Su Rasmussen and Eli Park Sorensen (2011a) mark the migrant position by interpreting the work of Danish transnational adoptee author Maja Lee Langvad as a form of minor literature, i.e. literature written by a minority group in a majority language.

This literature, which I term Scandinavian transnational adoption literature, began in Sweden with Astrid Trotzig’s memoir *Blod är tjockare än vatten* in 1996. Scandinavian transnational adoption literature does not constitute a genre of its own but is written in genres such as prose, poetry, and drama. Further this literature contains stylistic features seen in witness literature, autofiction, documentary, intertextuality, and intermediality—styles that are also common in other forms of Scandinavian literature. Though naturally similar in form, there is some variation in terms of style and genre of transnational adoption literature between the Scandinavian countries. While Swedish adoption literature typically presents a relatively complete adoption story, Norwegian and Danish adoption literature are different in style and make use of the fragmental nature of adoption to create a scrapbook-like product: for example they include references to popular culture such as that found in comic books. By addressing the same adoption-related topics, such as the search for identity and family members and the right to legal documents about an adoptee’s personal history, Scandinavian adoption literature relates to the American genre of “adoption life writing,” which started with Jean Paton’s *The Adopted Break Silence: Forty Men and Women Describe their Search for Natural Parents* (1954), Florence Fisher’s *The Search for Anna Fisher* (1973), and Jean Lifton’s *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter* (1975) (c.f. Hipchen and Dean).

In general, Scandinavian adoption literature is a blended genre that features styles of autobiography, diary writings, journalistic texts, exile narratives, autofiction, documentary, and travel narratives. The variety of style and form of adoption narratives might be due to the fact that, as Engelhardt Andersen observes, “much ‘adoption literature’ is about the attempt to piece together the personal story” (7). Piecing together a personal story might indeed be an impossible task as many transnational adoptees do not know enough about their past to provide an “authentic” text for their readers. The result is a text that is fragmented and consists of a mixture of genres, styles, and forms as well as a strong influence of intertextuality and intermediality (c.f. Bao). In the Scandinavian context, previous Scandinavian authors could also inspire the mixed formatting of transnational adoption literature, an example being Sonja Åkesson (1966) who is similarly known for using other media and fragmented texts in her poetry. This style can also be linked to contemporary authors like the Danish artist Claus Beck-Nielsen (2003) and the notion of identity as something heterogeneous as opposed to fixed. Consequently, Scandinavian adoption literature not only offers stories of orphan children with migration experiences but also adds to the alternative perceptions of modern Scandinavian identities including sexuality, gender identity, and family relations (Schlichtkrull). This literature is both unique in its context of adoption and migration, but is also very Scandinavian, in that it aligns with Scandinavian trends in theme and form, for example, family, identity, gender, sexuality, and self-focus.

Analyzing literature written by authors of migrant background has some challenges. One challenge is the fact that the terminology used to describe immigration and the literature it has produced is out-dated and therefore carries negative associations. The point of view of a migrant author as being non-Scandinavian and non-white upholds the “us versus them” dichotomy that designates a marginalized literature with the intention to highlight the “body” behind the text (“body” as a signifier of a racial other), which inherently overlooks the aesthetics of the text (Kongslien; Andersen). Yet, to ignore the body behind the text runs the risks of excluding topics that relate to the immigrant experience, descriptions of new cultural encounters, and the ability to see “the majority society from the point of view of the margin” (Kongslien 35).

The Airport Metaphor

The migration metaphor, “from airport to airport,” explores the transnational adoptee as a traveller and views airports as a place of a second birth. Scandinavian transnational adoption literature often contains descriptions of situations in which adoptees travel alone, as young lonely travellers. For example, in *Blod är tjockare än vatten*, the Swedish author Astrid Trotzig depicts herself as a young traveller:

Den 19 juni 1970 utfärdades ett tremånaders inresetillstånd till Sverige. Dagen därpå skrevs ett läkarintyg att jag var frisk och redo att flyga över halva jordklotet, till en annan värld.
(29)

[A three months' permit to enter Sweden was issued on June 19, 1970. The following day, a doctor's certificate was written to certify that I was healthy and ready to travel across the globe, to another world.]

Plötsligt är jag här. I Sverige. I detta land bland långa blonda. På andra sidan jordklotet.

Den 22 juni 1970 landade jag i Sverige, fem månader gammal. Med mig hade jag en vit sidenväska med färggranna brodyrer. En sådan alla adoptivbarn från Sydkorea med sig till sitt nya hemland. Som ett minne av det land där de var födda.
(30)

[Suddenly I am here. In Sweden. In this country amongst tall blondes. On the other side of the globe.

I arrived in Sweden on June 22, 1970, five months old. I carried with me on my trip a white silk purse with colourful embroidered edging. All adoptees from South Korea bring such a bag to their new home country. As a memory of their country of birth.]

Baby Astrid gets clearance to travel to Sweden, her adoptive country. In Trotzig's depiction, it seems like the travel clearance concludes her transnational adoption as it has been decided that she will go to Sweden. By depicting herself as a traveller, Trotzig creates the image of an orphan immigrating to a new country for citizenship. With her, she has a small white silk bag containing small things intended to remind her of her native country and where she comes from. This small white silk bag later becomes a Korean national symbol, which Trotzig later finds to be a difficult artefact with which to relate. Although it is meant as a symbolic memory of her birth country, Astrid will not be able to remember or relate to its symbolism being only five months old at the time of her adoption.

Trotzig depicts a typical starting point for Scandinavian transnational adoptees' migrant identity. The opening quote in Minh-ha's book *Elsewhere, Within Here: Immigration, Refugeism and the Boundary Event* describes the core of the migrant identity and subjectivity as a "travelling self" that I apply to my reading of Scandinavian transnational adoptees as migrant subjects and travelling selves. Minh-ha depicts a travelling conscious self thus:

Every voyage can be said to involve a re-string of boundaries. The travelling self is here both the self that moves physically from one place to another, following "public routes and beaten tracks" within a mapped movement; and, the self that

embarks on an undetermined journeying practice, having constantly to negotiate between home and abroad, native culture and adopted culture, or more creatively speaking, between a here, a there, *and* an elsewhere.
(Minh-ha 27)

It is important to remember that transnational adoptees often have no memory of their first encounter with an airport and tend to depict a travelling conscious self more generally.

Building upon the migration metaphor “from airport to airport,” it is interesting to see how, according to Rasmussen and Sorensen, “airports function as a symbolical place of birth that represent the socially constructed identity” in adoptee writing (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011a, 244). In the Norwegian author Geir Follevåg’s novel *Adoptert Identitet*, the new identity emerges the moment the adoptee arrives by airplane in the adoptive country. Follevåg depicts his arrival to Norway as a second birth: “Flyet landar på Fornebu. Eg blir født for andre gong i det eg møter kvinna som står og venter på meg ... Snart heiter eg Geir Follevåg” [The plane lands at Forebu. I am born for a second time as I meet the woman who has been waiting for me ... Soon my name is Geir Follevåg] (9). Geir’s adoptive mother greets him at the airport and brings him home, to a new house where his dad waits. This marks a “clean break” between the past and the future (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011a, 244). At this point in the migration metaphor, the migrant identity is intact, but in order to fully achieve the purpose of adoption, the child must assimilate into the new family situation including a new society and a new country. The past should more or less be cut off (Yngvesson 45; Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011b, 302; Ben-Zion 12).

The airport metaphor that has garnered most attention in Scandinavian transnational adoption literature is the Danish author Maja Lee Langvad’s manipulated birth certificate, which is published in *Find Holger Danske*. Langvad’s debut, is most often described as conceptual poetry. In *Find Holger Danske*, Langvad depicts the concept of two births by including pictures of two birth certificates: the first birth certificate lists her place of birth as Korea by unknown parents, whereas the second, a manipulated birth certificate, shows that she was born at Copenhagen’s Kastrup Lufthavn [Katsrup airport] to the parents Anton Jeppe Lngvad and Inge-Lise Langvad. While Langvad agrees with other adoptee authors’ “critique of the silencing of birth parents, she directs her attention to the airport as the metaphoric birthplace of the adoptee” and visualizes even further how the past is erased and cut off (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011a, 236). The first birth certificate provides us with the information that Lee Chun Bok (Langvad’s Korean name) is born in Seoul City in Korea on January 21, 1980, whereas the second birth certificate informs us that the birth of Maja Lee Langvad (Langvad’s Danish name) takes place on March 27, 1980, at Kastrup airport. In other words, we get a change of name, a new place of birth, and, interestingly, a change of weight and length.

A shift in the placement of the child has been made: from the birth home in Seoul to the receiving home Nygårdsterrasserne. Perhaps the most significant change is the shift of parental status: from the unknown, biological Korean parents to the adoptive Danish parents Inge-Lise Langvad and Anton Jeppe Langvad. With these changes, the child detailed on the second birth certificate is no longer an orphan. In other words the new certificate is the birth of a Danish identity, a Danish child. Through Langvad's depiction of doctored birth certificates, the institutional construction of her identity is highlighted: she is born in Denmark, and, simultaneously, her migrant identity is erased.

The title of the Danish migrant author Rubén Palma's collection of short stories *Fra lufthavn til lufthavn* [From airport to airport] captures the migrant experience of being on the move. It is also a powerful metaphor of life in a transit hall, which in Scandinavian transnational adoption literature is a metaphor that also serves as a transition between national and ethnic identities. Kongslien's observation that "Palma somehow expands this notion to give it more of a general validity in human life" (Kongslien 42) becomes valuable in relation to an existential perspective and to the feeling of being in exile. Marc Augé, who coined the term "non-place," specifically used airports as an example of "non-place." Augé distinguishes place from non-place, writing "place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed" (Augé 86). This incomplete polarity fits well with the Scandinavian transnational adoptee migrant identity as "the traveller's space may thus be the archetype of *non-place*" (Augé 86).

Authors of Scandinavian transnational adoption literature illustrate their migrant experience through depictions of travelling. Airports play a particularly significant role in adoption literature's portrayals of travelling, as they are symbols for the location of an adoptee's second birth. The migrant identity is further complicated when airports are viewed as a transit hall between two nations and two ethnic identities. When interpreted as a "non-place," airports indicate that the adoptee's first identity is not fully erased and that the second identity is never fully complete.

Returning Narrative and Assimilation

Scandinavian transnational adoption literature is a narrative of adoption, but it is also a travel narrative and, possibly more importantly, a returning narrative. The term returning narrative refers to when the adoptee travels back (or returns) to their country of birth. Recent publications in Scandinavia exemplify the returning narrative, for example Anne Kyong-Sook Øfsti's *Si at vi har hele dagen* (2014) [Tell Me That We Have All Day], Eva Tind Kristensen's *HAN* (2014) [HIM], Maja Lee Langvad's *Hun er vred* (2014b) [She is Angry], and Lisa Sjöblom's *Palimpsest* (2016) [Palimpsest]. All of these titles are travel narratives and returning narratives

about an adoptee protagonist that include both a physical journey and an inner-emotional journey. The first journey, detailed previously in the airport metaphor, follows the adoptee to the Scandinavian countries and towards a Scandinavian identity. The second journey is the adoptee's return trip to their birth country and towards a writing identity. Rasmussen and Sorensen describe this experience of returning as "an experience of radical disjunction between the past and the present, the mind and the body, the West and the East—one that threatens to destabilize the world of the adopted subject" (Rasmussen and Sorensen 2011b, 301). For Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors, visiting the birth country is both a personal emotional project and a professional writing project.

The transnational adoptee is pinned between the expectation that adoptees erase their past upon arrival in Scandinavia, but at the same time, also have a genuine interest in searching for their roots. Langvad, in *Find Holger Danske*, is critical of the belief that transnational adoptees are not expected to search for (or show interest in) their background,² because this belief is based on the assumption that transnational adoptees should fully assimilate to their adoptive parents' Scandinavian country and erase their background. Schlichtkrull explains that there are certain expectations and established ideas as to what it means to be a transnational adoptee and that these ideas are rooted in the biological family and family relations. Schlichtkrull argues that the transnational adoptee, though assimilated into Scandinavian society and culture, are still considered to be the Other due to their racial difference. Racial tension and the questioning of biological origin emphasize the fact that the transnational adoptee carries an exciting migrant identity and therefore also a very exciting life story. As Schlichtkrull points out, this idea of biological roots is presented as a feel-good story where the unhappy adoptee reunites with the biological family and afterwards becomes happy. Indeed, the representation of the adoption story shows an extremely limited perspective of the transnational adoptee's migrant position as a split identity and fosters the idea that the transnational adoptee becomes happy and complete by searching for the biological family—finding themselves, so to speak (Schlichtkrull).

Some adoptees critique the representation of the happy adoption story. One heart-breaking example is the Swedish author Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom's *Palimpsest* (2016). In *Palimpsest*, the protagonist, Lisa, manages to find her birth mother despite lies and errors in the adoption documents, only to learn that her birth mother does not reciprocate her wish to have a relationship. Another critique of the idealized representation of the happy adoption story is one of financial gain, or the fact that there are strong financial motivations in telling the story in this happy way. For instance, in *Gul utanpå*, Patrik Lundberg shows ambivalence towards the fact that he is forced to sell his life story and present himself as the "link between West and East," as he applies for scholarships to go to Korea for

studies. In *Hun er vred* [*She is angry*], Langvad takes a radical stance by comparing her friend's participation in the TV-show *Sporløs* with the practice of prostitution. These authors illustrate the uncomfortable, and possibly exploitative, economic incentives involved in publishing adoption stories. In Scandinavia, there is currently no governmental funding available for transnational adoptees who want to travel to their birth country, which means that television shows (such as *Sporløs*) are one of the only ways for many adoptees to financially afford to travel to their birth country. The commercial goal to sell books and the fact that the transnational adoption story is a gripping and dramatic life story calls to question the possibility of narrating an alternative, less idealized, and more honest adoption story.

Narrative Strategies for Searching for Biological Roots: Family Drama, Questionnaires, and Fiction

As many adoptees are orphans, the search for the biological family is sometimes a hopeless, impossible, and therefore unsuccessful project. Consequently, Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors apply different narrative strategies as they depict the desire to find out from where and whom they came. A common narrative strategy used in the search for the biological family is the "family drama." The search for the biological family is the overarching story plot, which often plays out as a sort of detective story as the author has to piece together a family drama. This is illustrated by the publisher's description of the Swedish author Patrik Lundberg's novel *Gul utanpå*, which plays on the search for the biological parents as the main plot of the story and the cliff hanger of whether Patrik, the protagonist orphan, will eventually find his biological family and be happier than he has ever been. Readers who anticipate family happiness to be the theme of *Gul Utanpå* are disappointed. Though Patrik succeeds in finding his biological parents, readers are disillusioned because Lundberg complicates his experience of meeting his biological parents with his own struggles with masculinity, whiteness, and sexuality. Lundberg plays with narrative expectations in his story, namely, that he will find his biological parents. At an early stage in this search it seems like everything is falling into place as the adoption agency finds his biological parents and is just about to set up a meeting. To the reader's displeasure there has been a mistake, and it turns out that the person Patrik thought was his biological father is an uncle. Patrik ends up meeting with parts of his biological family and learns that his biological mother is mentally ill and that he will probably never meet her. Patrik's difficulties compound as he has a hard time balancing the relationship to his biological family with the relationship to his Scandinavian identity.

Contrasting Lundberg and his use of the family search as a narrative strategy, Maja Lee Langvad excludes the actual search for her biological family in her

adoption narrative. Although questions about her biological parents are raised in her first publication *Find Holger Danske*, no actual search process is depicted in the follow-up *Find Holger Danske Appendix*. In *Find Holger Danske*, Langvad uses written questionnaires to narrate the search for her roots. For example, she asks her birth mother complex questions like: “Hvorfor bortadoperede du mig?” [Why did you give me up for adoption?] (Langvad 2006, 11) and “Hvis jeg en dag beslutter mig for at opsøge dig: /a. Vil du håbe, at du lever? /b. Vil du håbe, at du er død?” [If I decide to search for you: /a. Do you wish you were alive? /b. Do you wish you were dead?] (Langvad 2006, 9). In *Find Holger Danske Appendix*, however, we reencounter the remade birth certificates and the questionnaires, which are now also addressed to a biological father and a biological sister. In the *Appendix*, the style is the same and Langvad employs the same tough questions that in reality would be highly sensitive to ask, for example “Ville du ønske, at jeg ikke havde opsøgt dig?” [Do you wish I never searched for you?] (Langvad 2014a, 9). In this set of questions, Langvad addresses issues of social class and sexuality as factors that could potentially complicate relations with her biological parents. An example of social class: “Ser du gerne, at jeg hjælper dig økonomisk? Og hvis ja: Hvilket beløb vil efter din mening værre passende?” [Do you wish that I would help you financially? If yes: What do you regard as an appropriate amount?] (Langvad 2014a, 10). And an example of her sexuality: “I det tilfælde at jeg fortalte dig, jeg er lesbisk: Ville du da ikke længere se mig?” [If I told you that I am a lesbian: Would you not want to see me anymore?] (Langvad 2014a, 10). Langvad’s depictions show that the questions sometimes can be more important than the answers. Ironic happy family pictures of Langvad and her biological parents stand in contrast with these difficult questions: one image is of the family riding ponies and another is of Langvad making the peace sign with her fingers. The images imply, especially the peace sign, that all is well, there are no underlying conflicts, and that there is indeed a happy ending. The same year *Find Holger Danske Appendix* was published Langvad also published *Hun er vred* (2014) [She is Angry], a testimony written with equal proportions of rage and irony in which the complex relationship to her birth family is included and further explored through anger: “Hun er vred på sin biologiske mor over, at hun forlod hende” [She’s angry with her biological mother because she abandoned her] (Langvad 2014b, 59). Langvad’s works, particularly their focus on her biological parents, expose the author’s desire to write against the exploitative desire for a happy ending that typifies the popular media portrayal of Scandinavian adoption narratives.

Another creative way of deconstructing the search for an adoptee’s roots and the happy ending is found in Brynjulf Tjønn’s *Kinamann*. Tjønn uses a fictionalized family to fill in the gaps of the reunion narrative. Like many Scandinavian transnational adoptee texts, this novel consists of two parts. The first part depicts Gjermund’s (Tjønn’s alter ego and the novel’s protagonist) childhood and the experience of growing up as a racial Other in a small town in

the rural Norwegian countryside. In the second part of the novel, Gjermund travels to Korea. Gjermund travels not for the purpose of finding his biological parents but instead to write, although the author does make it clear that the protagonist is aware that the search for biological family is an anticipated plot point for consumers of adoption narratives. Tjønn's writing resembles Scandinavian diary fiction written by the famous authors Arne Garborg (*Trætte Mænd* 1891), Søren Kierkegaard (*Forførelers Dagbog* 1843), and Hjalmar Söderberg (*Doktor Glas* 1905). Almost immediately upon Gjermund's arrival in Korea, he goes to McDonalds where he coincidentally meets a young man who is his Doppelgänger. As Gjermund knows that he has a biological brother that he was separated from at adoption, this meeting sets the stage for what becomes a rat race in which Gjermund is convinced that this young man could be his biological brother. This encounter changes the novel's literary mood into more of a detective story, a mystery that needs to be solved. Everything falls into place for Gjermund when the man who might be his biological brother actually had a brother who was put up for adoption. Tjønn, similar to Lundberg, relies heavily on suspense typical of the adoption narrative: Will the orphan finally find his biological family and roots?

The answer to this question in *Kinamann* is "no." The potential Korean biological brother in the story instead serves as a vision of what Gjermund's life could have been like had he not been adopted by his Norwegian parents. This fictionalized Korean version works at McDonalds and has a wife and two kids. Minh-ha explains that "identity is largely constituted through the process of Othering" (37). I therefore interpret Tjønn's text as a literary depiction of Minh-ha's theoretical idea "Other than myself, My Other Self" as he depicts another version of himself, or his "Other self." In this way, Tjønn replaces a real life story with fiction in order to provide the reader with a suspenseful narrative. Gjermund, as the narrator, stages a second potential narrator, his "Other self," not as a transnational adoptee in Norway but as a regular Korean man who was never put up for adoption but fantasizes about what it might have been like to grow up in Norway as an adoptee.³ Tjønn's narrative strategy demonstrates my argument that adoption is an inherently fictionalized concept. As the adoption story is filled with gaps and unknowns, the only way that the adoptee can make sense of these gaps is through fiction.

My readings of select Scandinavian transnational adoption narratives demonstrate the challenges that the Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors face when writing narratives of root searching and family reunification. Similar to other migrant authors that, according to Minh-ha, "are thought to write by memory and depend to large extent on hearsay" (28), Scandinavian transnational adoptees are expected to remember accurately and to write an authentic text about their adoption. As both adoptee and migrant authors they direct "their look toward a long bygone reality," and "supposedly excel in reanimating the

ashes of childhood and the country of origin” (Minh-ha 28). The use of the genres of autobiography and autofiction therefore suit Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors since within these genres these authors can create shelter and comfort. As the genre is connected to a real, lived experience, Scandinavian transnational adoption literature is not purely fictional but has an autobiographical component that resembles witness literature and “ethnic autofiction” as their story departs from the author’s personal experience (Bunch and Behrendt 19, 57). By writing ethnic autofiction, Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors focus on their split identity, feeling Scandinavian on the inside but possessing a racialized Other exterior. Ethnic autofiction contributes to a more general discussion about racial/ethnic identity in a globalized world. Employing these narrative strategies allows the Scandinavian transnational adoptee to complete their fragmented story (c.f. Bunch and Behrendt 19). Minh-ha makes a similar point about migrant authors, explaining that in order “to preserve this abode,” or for adoptee authors to find their home in Scandinavia, they “have to open [their story] up and pass it on. For, not every detail of their individual lives bears recounting in such ‘autography,’ and what they choose to recount no longer belongs to them as individuals” (Minh-ha 28). In other words, passing on their stories is a way to find resolution and reconciliation. Consequently, their personal stories become larger than themselves, or their own individual stories, and contribute to the collective, larger genre of migration literature. Scandinavian transnational adoption literature plays on the audience’s expectations of family reunion and is intentional in its use of the author’s life stories in order to depict and discuss a modern, Scandinavian migrant identity.

Traveller versus Tourist: Lost in Translation

My investigation into the adoptee author’s migrant identity makes use of Minh-ha’s distinction between traveller and tourist in order to discuss how the transnational adoptee depicts a conflicted interaction between these two different ways of visiting the birth country. This prompts another discussion, one about how the notion of home is depicted in relation to the feeling of being dislocated. In this section, I demonstrate how the Scandinavian language can be a home for the adoptee.

In the context of migrants travelling back to their birth countries, Minh-ha details the difference between traveller and tourist in the following way:

The traditional traveler’s tragedy is that he is an imitable and imitated explorer. Therefore, in order to not be confused with the tourist, the traveler has to become clandestine. He has to *imitate* the Other, to hide and disguise himself to inscribe himself in a counter-exoticism that will allow him to be a non-tourist that is,

someone who no longer resembles his falsified other, hence a stranger to his own kind.
(Minh-ha 40-41)

When some Scandinavian transnational adoptees visit their birth country, they do so with the intentions and interests of a traveller as opposed to a tourist. An example of this traveller mentality is found in Tjønn's *Kinamann*, as he makes a concerted effort to blend in when walking the streets of Seoul.

Min første tur i Seouls gater: ... Jeg har bestemt meg for å gå rundt og kjenne på denne følelsen jeg har lengtet etter hele livet: Å være anonym. ... Jeg vill være i ett med dem.
(Tjønn 197-198)

[My first stroll on the streets of Seoul: ... I have decided to walk around and experience the feeling that I have been longing for my whole life: To be anonymous. ... I want to be one with them.]

Oddly enough, in order “to be one with them” he singles himself out as being different. Tjønn's language use poses a postcolonial dilemma: “dem” [them] is the Korean population and the narrative subject, “jeg” [I], is inevitably a part of the “Westernized we.” The protagonist traveller, as depicted in his language use, is a “Westernized we” with a desire to go native, or to blend in with the Other. Tjønn has fantasies about being the Other, while simultaneously distancing himself from Koreans, the group that he is imitating: “Her er jeg bare en helt vanlig koreansk mann i mengden. ... Men unnsett hvor jeg går, ... er det en asiat i veien” [Here I am just one of many normal Korean men ... but no matter where I go ... there is an Asian standing in my way] (Tjønn, 198). Adoptees feel alienated in relation to their birth country (and biological family) as they discover that they have very little in common with their biological relatives and the culture of their birth country, even though they blend in flawlessly in regards to their outer appearance and aren't singled out as they are in Scandinavia. The cliché “lost in translation” suits the perspective of the transnational adoptee, both linguistically and culturally.

Other transnational adoptees similarly know very little about the country in which they were born, and when they travel there they find, to their befuddlement, that they are tourists. This is found in nearly all adoption return-narratives in Scandinavia as they all take part in tourist events, either alone or in groups of other tourists or adoptees. Examples include: Trotzig (*Blod är tjockare än vatten*) who visits the Korean country side, Langvad (*Hun er vred*) who celebrates the Korean holiday Chusenok, Lundberg (*Gul utanpå*) who travels around Korea and other Asian countries, and Tind (*HAN*) who visits North Korea

as a member of a tourist group that only visits tourist attractions. Tjønn depicts the feeling of being a tourist as, “jeg tenker igjen at dette kunne vært hvor som helst i verden, ... dette kunne være New York, London, København, dette kunne vært Oslo, Barcelona, Tokyo” [I realize that this could in fact be anywhere in the world ... this could be New York, London, Copenhagen, this could be Oslo, Barcelona, Tokyo] (Tjønn 199). Tjønn describes the feeling of being disoriented, he feels he could be anywhere in the world and that there is nothing special with being in Seoul. Tjønn continues to label his experience as touristy. “Jeg sitter her som en hvilken som helst turist og ser apatisk rundt meg” [I sit here like any random tourist and look around apathetically] (Tjønn 199). He emphasizes that he is in a place that doesn’t feel like home to him, instead it is an unknown, “i et område jeg ikke kjenner” [in a place I don’t know] (Tjønn 199). It is not only the feeling of being displaced that is depicted but also the sense of being physically lost: “Jeg reiser meg. Hvor skal jeg gå? I hånden har jeg reisehåndboken. Men kartene i boken sier meg ingenting” [I get up. But where should I go? I have the guidebook in my hand. But the maps inside don’t tell me anything] (Tjønn 199). When lost, Tjønn tries to find his way back: “Jeg forsøker å gå samme vei som jeg kom, men kjenner meg ikke igjen” [I try to go the same way that I came, but I don’t recognize the way] (199). This particular sentence could be interpreted in several ways. To be lost can be both about geographical navigation as well as about a spiritual journey, and Tjønn is literally and figuratively trying to move his body in the right direction. In the wider context of adoption return narratives, this sentence describes the purpose of the journey back to the birth country as well as the confusion and the feeling of dislocation.

Like many transnational adoptees, Tjønn shows no particular interest in where he actually is, to him this is a place “som heller ikke begeistrer meg, som ikke imponere meg” [that also doesn’t excite me, that doesn’t impress me] (199). Tjønn depicts a sense of being out of place and a total feeling of dislocation, concluding that “alt jeg vil er egentlig bare å reise hjem til Norge” [all I really want is to travel home to Norway] (199). Tjønn ends up doing the next best thing, which is going back to the hotel; he desires “å dra hjem til hotellet, sitte på rommet, skrive meg tom” [to go home to the hotel, sit in the room, write myself empty] (199).

In an article interview entitled “Hittade ett hem i språket” [Found a home in the language], Swedish transnational adoptee author Mara Lee speaks openly about her trip to her birth country of Korea. Having never had a relationship to her birth country, the encounter was a culture shock for Lee. Lee describes a feeling of dislocation that is similar to the one found in narratives like Tjønn’s. She explains, “Jag ville se om jag hade där att göra, men det hade jag verkligen inte. ... plötsligt blev språket något oerhört viktigt. Det var som om det endast var där jag kände mig hemma. Jag kanske inte hörde hemma där eller här geografiskt, men i språket hade jag åtminstone en trygghet, något som var mitt” [I

wanted to see if I had any business there, but I definitely didn't ... suddenly language became extremely important. It was as if it was only there I felt at home. I may not belong here or there geographically, but in the language I at least had some safeness, something that was mine] (Fremin). The experience of revisiting her birth country fostered Lee's interest in writing. For Lee, the geographically "here" and "there" seems less important as a descriptor of home. Just as Tjønn goes "home" to write, Lee's words resemble Minh-ha's about finding an adobe in writing, or finding a home in language and literature.

Conclusion

Using Minh-ha's idea of home as a travelling source, this article illustrates that authors of Scandinavian transnational adoptee narratives are simultaneously authors of migrant narratives. Scandinavian adoptee authors depict themselves as travellers: first as lonely travellers through the image of the orphan child on an airplane making the long journey to their adoptive parents in Scandinavia. Second, authors of Scandinavian transnational adoption literature draw on the migration metaphor (from airport to airport) and the adoption metaphor (the second birth) in order to describe themselves as born with a migrant subjectivity and as travellers. Additionally, the idea of the airport as a non-place shows how Scandinavian transnational adoptees are caught in-between, both literally at the airport and theoretically in a liminal, third space. The literary depiction of returning to the birth country is another way that Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors write a migrant identity. The main purpose of this journey is often to search for a possible biological family, a mission that proves to be difficult, and in some cases impossible. To accomplish this task and/or to find ways of narrating a successful search, Scandinavian transnational adoptee authors employ different narrative strategies, such as: exploiting the expectation that the adoption literature must be based on real experiences or be represented by witness literature; using the search for the biological family as the main plot; excluding the search itself and instead depicting the complications resulting from having found the biological family members; drawing on actual experiences as well as the expectation that that adoption literature must be based on real experiences; using the genre of witness literature; or using fiction or untruths in order to fill in missing gaps in the story. Finally, this article highlights the complex cultural encounter that Scandinavian transnational adoptees depict in their return narratives in which they, due to complexity of their hybrid identity, end up as tourists in the country of their birth. When travelling in their birth countries, transnational adoptees attempt and desire to mimic the native population but, due to their Scandinavian upbringing and Westernized identity, fail to do so. Since Scandinavian transnational adoptees do not seem to find their way home by returning to their country of birth, some authors instead find home in their

writing. This is indeed a complex resolution as the transnational adoptees, in contrast to Scandinavian migrant authors, consider the adoptive language to be their native language. Nevertheless, it is through writing the adoptee experience that these authors find home. Though it is impossible to “go home” through the writing of the adoptee experience, it is possible for Scandinavian adoptee authors to “be home.”

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
2. Langvad does search for, and finds, her biological parents and this is detailed in *Find Holger Danske Appendix* (2014a) and *Hun er vred* (2014b).
3. A similar approach is found in Shanti Holmström’s *Mitt okända hemland* (1998) [My Unknown Homeland] where the protagonist Shanti, tired of not being able to answer questions about her biological mother, creates a story about her biological mother being a famous Bollywood star.

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