

ineradicable voices: narrations toward rerooting



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A collaborative oral history research-creation project

**Based on the life stories of individuals who experienced transracial
and/or intercountry adoption**

Zeina Ismail-Allouche, Individualized PHD (INDI), Concordia University.

A Word from Collaborators

Amandine Gay, collaborator, adoptee, filmmaker

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

Daniel Drennan ElAwar

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

Hiba Sleiman, performer, collaborator

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

Ibtissam El Assaad, collaborator, friend, consultant

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

Jad Orphée Chami, collaborator, composer

How do we become a microphone for otherness? Amplify another person's life story? How can oral history performance contribute to the preservation and transmission of testimonies of adoption?

I am immensely thankful for the opportunity to listen to these essential narratives and to learn and grow as an artist, an immigrant and an identity-seeker.

Jen Cressey, collaborator, witness/listener, artist

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

Jennifer Mitchell, adoptee, collaborator, artist, entrepreneur

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

kimura byol-nathalie lemoine, collaborator, adoptee, artist, activist, archivist

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

Krista Visser, adoptee, collaborator, teacher

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

Louise Bédard, collaboratrice, chorégraphe et interprète

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

Mona Merhi, writer, theatre maker, collaborator

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

Sandy El Bitar, performer, artist, collaborator

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

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

Vicky Boldo, collaborator, adoptee, cultural support worker

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My sincere and deepest gratitude to:

- Every beautiful individual (who experienced transracial and/or intercountry adoption) who entrusted me with their life stories yet ongoing struggle.
- Candid collaborators who dedicated time and endured the encounter with the untold and unshared.
- The advisory committee that kept on reminding me of what is core; ethical representation.
- The supervisory committee, I would not have been able to endure the learning process without their support.
- The INDI program, Concordia University.
- The Indigenous peoples of Canada for welcoming me on their unceded lands.
- The brave Indigenous women who embraced me and welcomed me in their circle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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