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# Neoliberalism, Global “Whiteness,” and the Desire for Adoptive Invisibility in US Parental Memoirs of Eastern European Adoption

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CLAUDIA SADOWSKI-SMITH

In April 2010, seven-year-old Artyom Savelyev came to the center of international attention when he arrived unaccompanied at the Moscow airport on a plane from the United States. Artyom carried a note from his US adoptive mother, Torry Ann Hansen, in which she stated that she wanted to “return” the boy to Russia because he was violent and mentally ill, and that the orphanage in Partizansk from which she had adopted him six months earlier had misled her about his condition. Amid widespread condemnation of Hansen’s actions as a form of adoption consumerism, the US media quickly shifted the focus from the mother to the boy’s mental and behavioral problems. In the only interview the adoptive family has granted, the grandmother claimed that Artyom was physically abusive and that he threatened to kill family members and burn down their house.<sup>1</sup> In story after story, experts and parents of Eastern European adoptees expressed sympathy for Torry Ann Hansen’s decision.<sup>2</sup> They speculatively associated Artyom’s behavior with reactive attachment disorder (RAD), a condition that is said to be characterized by failure to bond with parents—caused by serious interruptions in attachment in the child’s early life—and whose diagnosis has gained in popularity among US parents with adopted children.<sup>3</sup>

A similar focus on the mental and behavioral issues of adoptees has dominated US media coverage of adoptions from successor nations of the former USSR after they opened their doors to transnational adoptions in 1991.<sup>4</sup> In the following decade, children from Russia became the second largest group of adoptees after Chinese children. To date, the majority of Russian adoptees have been adopted by US parents. Ukraine, the second largest post-Soviet nation, also consistently ranked among the ten leading countries of birth for US adoptees in 1993 and from

1999 to 2010.<sup>5</sup> Even though large-scale transnational adoption to the United States has diminished from its peak in 2004—at about 22,000 adoptions—in 2009 and 2010 roughly 13,000 and 11,000 adoptions were still completed.<sup>6</sup>

As adoptions from Russia have elicited the greatest amount of US press coverage, the focus has been on adoption failures, such as Artyom Savelyev's case. In contrast, the media's attention to adoptions from China since the country first opened its door to adoption in the early 1990s has emphasized attempts by the mostly middle- and upper-class white US adoptive parents to connect their children to Chinese culture.<sup>7</sup> This differential approach to the two populations that have led adoptions to the United States since the 1990s has also dominated academic scholarship. The medical literature tends to focus on disorders among Eastern European adoptees, even though Chinese adoptees also experience health issues and developmental delays as a result of institutionalization.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, research on transnational adoption has virtually excluded Eastern European children from its emphasis on the role of race as a post-adoption risk factor. This work has focused on the historically largest group of adoptees who have come from South Korea since the 1950s and also included more recent adoptees from China.<sup>9</sup> While humanities scholarship has examined representations of transracial international adoption, work in the social sciences has explored how adoptees from Asia accommodate to US racial and ethnic identity categories after having been sheltered by their mostly white middle- or upper-class parents from many of the challenges experienced by US immigrant and racialized groups.<sup>10</sup> In fact, adoptees from South Korea who have grown into adults have shaped this focus on race through their creative and scholarly work on identity formation.<sup>11</sup>

Because adoptions from Eastern Europe have occurred more recently, similar memoirs by adoptees from the former Soviet Union do not yet exist. Adoptions from this part of the world have instead shaped the surge of a new literary genre—the parental transnational adoption memoir. Unlike the surveys and structured interviews employed in the small body of existing social science scholarship on Eastern European adoption, the use of the memoir allows parents to exert direct control over the representation of their adoption experiences. Because memoirs appear to represent verifiable experiences in the physical world,<sup>12</sup> the genre may lend itself especially well to attempts to make the event of transnational adoption “make sense by narrativizing it.”<sup>13</sup> A large number of contemporary writers who have sought to focus on representing a particular life experience have helped expand the genre of the memoir beyond the dominance of the more traditional accounts of elder public figures whose lives parallel historical events.<sup>14</sup>

As manifestations of the authors' attitudes toward adoption from the former USSR, US parental memoirs can provide insights into the missing link between the emphasis on adoption failures that has dominated the US media and the underexamined role of race in adoptions from Eastern Europe. Set in the late 1990s and early 2000s, at a time of surging US adoptions from this part of the world,

Margaret L. Schwartz's *The Pumpkin Patch: A Single Woman's International Adoption Journey* (2005), Theresa Reid's *Two Little Girls: A Memoir of Adoption* (2006), and Brooks Hansen's *The Brotherhood of Joseph: A Father's Memoir of Infertility and Adoption in the 21st Century* (2008) have been among the most influential memoirs of adoption from Eastern Europe.<sup>15</sup> While they cannot capture the entire range of US parents with children from the former Soviet Union, these memoirs cover a wide variety of adoption experiences—by a businesswoman, an expert in child maltreatment, and a creative writer. Schwartz writes as a newly minted adoption consultant, Reid's work has been endorsed by major adoption researchers, and Hansen's memoir has been touted for giving voice to the underrepresented heterosexual father's view of international adoption.

Though largely intended as chronicles of successful adoptions that counter the overall negative press coverage, these memoirs expose deeply problematic attitudes toward adoption from the former USSR that make Artyom Savelyev's case a little less unique. Most strikingly, once they explain their reasons for adoption—infertility and/or the desire to form a family—the three authors frame their choice of Russia and Ukraine as acts of consumerism designed to help them fulfill their desires to create monoracial families. This affirmation of adoption as a vehicle to satisfy the desires of *parents* represents a significant departure from the traditional characterization of international adoption as a means to serve the needs of *children*. Often cloaked in the narrative of humanitarianism, this view has dominated US transnational adoption from its inception in the postwar period and continued to characterize adoptions from Eastern Europe in the early 1990s. The notion that international adoption saves children from contexts of war, poverty, and disaster (or communism) also resurfaced in the US media coverage of Haiti's January 2010 earthquake, when news stories focused on appeals to rescue children who lost their parents or who lived in orphanages destroyed by the disaster.

In contrast to recent efforts to evoke humanitarian responses to Haiti's alleged "orphan crisis," the three memoirists depict their late-1990s and early-2000s adoptions from Eastern Europe primarily as a means to create families whose members look as though they could be biologically related. While the majority of US parents (who are of European descent) have turned to Asia and thus seemingly demonstrated a decreased interest in shared outward physical appearances with their adopted children, to the three authors the opening of post-Soviet countries presented an opportunity to search for "white" adoptees, even in the face of the increased scholarly and popular emphasis on the presumably higher risks of health problems in these children. In fact, the memoirs chronicle how parental concerns with the health of adoptees become increasingly eclipsed by the authors' desire for "white" children as a way to achieve adoptive invisibility.

The writers' view that they share *preexisting* racial identities with Eastern European children, often expressed in assumptions of cultural proximity, extends contemporary notions of "whiteness" as encompassing all those of European

descent in the United States to prospective adoptees who reside in post-Soviet countries. Their consideration as “white” even *before* their arrival in the United States sets these children apart from twentieth-century Eastern European immigrants who were selectively excluded from admission to the United States and only became “white on arrival” when they were granted access to naturalization.<sup>16</sup> Denoting racial sameness, the myth of global “whiteness” allows adoptive parents to disavow differential historical constructions of culture, race, and ethnicity in the adoptees’ home countries and to also negate growing economic disparities between themselves as members of the US middle and upper classes and institutionalized children in the countries of the former USSR whose neoliberal transitions to capitalism enabled large-scale adoptions from these nations in the first place. As a repudiation of Keynesian welfare state economics, neoliberalism favors the free functioning of markets without interference from nation-states or supranational structures. The worldwide turn to this economic theory has guided the unprecedented pace and unregulated nature in which post-Soviet countries transitioned from public property regimes to market economies, resulting in years of economic stagnation, high unemployment, and widespread impoverishment.<sup>17</sup> As growing numbers of impoverished parents relinquished their children, gutted social services and underfunded orphanages were unable to cope with the sudden influx of children requiring institutionalization. To address this problem, several post-Soviet countries permitted large-scale unregulated adoptions, thus normalizing them as preferred child welfare options rather than as measures of last resort.

As the neoliberal adoption market makes institutionalized children from Eastern Europe widely available, it transforms them into commodities that are valued for their ability to help form monoracial families. Their presumed “whiteness” also accords these children racial and class privilege within a US neoliberal multicultural framework, in which, as Jodi Melamed writes, notions of race function to justify the nongeneralizability of capitalist wealth.<sup>18</sup> As they are ascribed this “whiteness” even before their arrival in the United States, Eastern European adoptees are imbued with characteristics that permit US parents to ignore the neoliberal causes of their children’s traumatic relinquishment, institutionalization, and displacement from their birth countries, languages, and cultures. But these same assumptions also make institutionalized Eastern European children easily rejectable and replaceable if their health status or racial identities fail to live up to parental expectations of adoptive invisibility. As the three memoirs show, while the effects of institutionalization and the role of medical or psychological conditions in adopted children play an undeniable role in the success of transnational adoptions, the confluence of neoliberal market forces with the notion of global “whiteness” entices US parents to work at continually reaffirming rather than revising their originary expectations to the point where rejections of adoptee referrals and disruptions of adoptions become mere obstacles on the road to adoptive invisibility. Just as the emphasis on the centrality of race in transnational adoptions by Korean adult adoptees may exemplify

the failure of the traditional humanitarian adoption narrative, the significant numbers of abuse cases and adoption failures for Eastern European adoptees (especially in relationship to other adoptee populations in the United States) may represent a preliminary response to the double-sided fiction of global “whiteness.”<sup>19</sup>

### **Beyond Humanitarianism in Eastern European Adoptions**

The desire for adoptive invisibility has characterized US domestic adoption since it was first formalized in the early twentieth century, at a time when the United States also experienced mass migration from Eastern and Southern Europe. As unmarried mothers were encouraged to surrender their children, sufficient numbers of children became available for adoption to mostly middle- and upper-middle-class parents experiencing infertility.<sup>20</sup> Birth parents, private facilitators, or state-based adoption agencies tried to “match” adoptable children to prospective parents because shared outward appearance was believed to help facilitate bonding and to allow families to avoid the stigma of adoption. Until the 1940s when domestic adoptions were limited to children who were considered healthy and racially “white,” matching took into consideration a variety of factors, including the adoptees’ physical appearances, intellectual abilities, as well as their religious, national, and ethnic backgrounds. While children were assigned religious identities based on their own background or on the orientation of the welfare organization that placed them, the national origin of adoptees was taken into account whenever it was deemed legible in the children’s outward appearance (238).

Even though it had precursors in the intra-European movement of children during World War I,<sup>21</sup> in the United States transnational adoptions surged during World War II, at a time when the notion of a commonly shared “white” racial identity had already begun to encompass various European immigrant communities in the United States. Because sufficient numbers of children were available for domestic adoption, adoptions from war-ravaged European nations were seen as a humanitarian response to war. But already in the 1950s when the demand for children began to exceed the number of infants available in the United States, new regulations were implemented to allow military and government employees stationed in Western Europe and Asia to adopt children from these areas.<sup>22</sup> Following the Korean War, concerns about discrimination toward racially mixed children fathered by US soldiers inspired humanitarian responses, largely from Christian-based organizations and families, that also became linked to opposition against international communism.<sup>23</sup>

The connection between humanitarianism and anticommunism continued to shape the second wave of intercountry adoptions from Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>24</sup> But beginning in the late 1960s, when South Korean adoptions were no longer dominated by mixed-race children and began to include large numbers of social orphans relinquished by unmarried mothers, these adoptions

continued to be legitimized in humanitarian terms as rescuing destitute children from the “miseries of the Third World.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, when US adoptions from Latin American countries increased in the 1980s, largely in response to the difficulties prospective US parents were experiencing in conceiving or in adopting domestically, they were reconfigured as humanitarian efforts to rescue children from conditions of poverty. As Laura Briggs has argued, adoptions from Latin America became cloaked in sentimental narratives that invoked the specter of endangered children, desperate US adoptive parents, and a corrupt adoption system. As they invert actual power relations, in these narratives, US adoptive parents are figured as rescuing children from poverty, while birth parents are portrayed as “(at best) happily sending their children off to a land where they will have more material benefits.”<sup>26</sup>

The dramatic post-1990s surge in US adoptions from former socialist countries revived the connection between anticommunism and humanitarianism, while obscuring parental impoverishment as a major reason for relinquishment in these nations (that has become the main explanatory model for adoption from Latin America). As Lisa Cartwright has argued, the US media focus on the rise in institutionalized children in formerly socialist countries like Romania, the Soviet republics, and China constituted the early 1990s as a key moment in the formation of a mediated politics of pity prompting humanitarian aid efforts to rescue orphans.<sup>27</sup> US documentaries like ABC’s 20/20 special “Shame of a Nation” (1990) presented compelling images of children suffering in underfunded and overcrowded state-run orphanages, while also highlighting the possibility of unregulated and low-cost adoptions. Focusing on Romania, from which the largest number of documented adopted children entered the United States in 1991, the series highlighted malnourished and disabled bodies in ways that framed institutionalization as a form of disability.<sup>28</sup> As the conditions for large-scale child relinquishment were created by the policies of the Ceaușescu regime, which penalized small families, banned birth control, and criminalized abortion,<sup>29</sup> appeals to compassion that would compel viewers to rescue children from these institutions could also be cloaked in anticommunism. Would-be US parents traveled to Romania to adopt children on their own or with the help of independent facilitators, thus participating in the collective fantasy of direct transnational crisis intervention through parenthood, understood as an act of humanitarian aid.<sup>30</sup> Drawn to Romania by images of institutionalized orphans, adoptive parents soon found, however, that the vast majority of children in orphanages were not available for adoption because they were only temporarily housed there by their families or that they had severe mental or physical disabilities that deterred adopters. Adoptive parents thus started looking outside of institutions while child relinquishment surged in response to high inflation, rising unemployment, and cutbacks in state welfare benefits, which caused even wider impoverishment during Romania’s transition to a market economy.<sup>31</sup> Adoptions from the country were shaped by such high levels of abuse and corruption that, to this day, Romania is

unable to document the majority of adoptions that took place between 1991 and 1997.<sup>32</sup>

The link between mass-mediated unreflective humanitarian responses to global crises and the potential for abuses of an unregulated adoption market reemerged in the aftermath of Haiti's 2010 earthquake. As a reaction to the US media coverage that centered on institutionalized children awaiting adoption, the Governor of Pennsylvania chartered a plane to take some fifty Haitian infants from the rubble of their orphanage but ended up also removing twelve children who were not available for adoption. Shortly thereafter, ten Baptist missionaries from Idaho were arrested for attempting to move thirty-three Haitian children into the neighboring Dominican Republic without the required documents. Though the Baptists claimed the children were orphans whose homes had been destroyed in the earthquake, the parents had actually entrusted their children in the temporary care of the group in hopes of securing them an education.<sup>33</sup>

That adoptions from contemporary Haiti and early 1990s Romania relied on similar narratives of child rescue (which focused on saving institutionalized children from the effects of natural disaster or from Communist-induced disability) shows that humanitarianism is deeply dependent on association with conditions of crisis. The twenty-first-century adoption memoirs by Schwartz, Reid, and Hansen suggest that the rhetoric of humanitarianism has become unnecessary as a justification for adoptions from Eastern Europe since child relinquishment there can no longer be exclusively associated with a socialist past. Instead adoptions from Eastern Europe are now framed in explicit admissions of parents' consumerist desire for the kind of child who best fits their notions of family. One could speculate that this shift was possible because adoptions from formerly socialist countries were never primarily presented as a response to growing poverty in states in transition but as rescue missions to save children from the lingering effects of communism, figured as literal and symbolic disablement. As Lisa Cartwright writes, already by the end of the 1990s, the US media focus on disability to evoke humanitarian responses began to transform into an emphasis on hidden impairments in Eastern European adopted children that included a new attention to attachment disorders.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, justifications for adoptions from China shifted from rescuing children who were institutionalized and/or suffered from health conditions, figured collectively as disability, to an emphasis on China's one-child policy. In addition to the centrality of US constructions of race that I explore in this article, this differential focus has shaped the divergent approaches to the two populations that have been leading US adoptions since the 1990s.

As they move the rhetoric of humanitarianism to the background of their narratives, the three memoirists are free to portray their adoptions from countries of the former USSR primarily as a means to achieve a form of adoptive invisibility that they understand as a shared familial "whiteness." This emphasis on racial sameness works to cover over conditions of poverty in Russia and Ukraine that, as in other



adoption-sending countries, enable child relinquishment but, in the case of Eastern European nations, would have to be identified with their problematic neoliberal transitions from socialist to capitalist property regimes in ways that would question simplistic forms of anticommunism. While they do not completely reject humanitarianism, only remnants of this logic survive in the authors' occasional claims that, apart from fulfilling their own desires for children who look like them, transnational adoption may also improve the adoptees' economic, educational, medical, or family status. Thus, in *Pumpkin Patch*, Margaret Schwartz, a business consultant and single woman in her midforties, writes that she settled on adoption from Ukraine in the early 2000s because "I am fair skinned with hazel eyes and dark blond hair, and want my children to look like me."<sup>35</sup> Only on arriving in Ukraine and hearing of the often dire medical diagnoses of children available for adoption does Schwartz realize that, besides fulfilling her own desire for a family, she may also be "rescuing" institutionalized children from an underfunctioning medical system.

Similarly in *Two Little Girls*, child maltreatment expert Theresa Reid explains her desire for "adoption privacy"—which she defines as the ability to "retain the prerogative of disclosing our adoption status to the world"—as the main reason why she and her husband Marc, a pediatrician, choose to adopt from Eastern Europe.<sup>36</sup> Reid explains that the couple selected Russia in the mid-1990s because her husband's family comes from the area. She admits that her "primary goal" is "to build a healthy family," even though she also fashions a child rescue story, according to which adopting a girl from Russia could possibly save her from "end[ing] up a victim of the international sex trade" (18). About her second adoption from Ukraine in 2002 Reid writes, however, that it was motivated "not primarily to do good in the world, not primarily to rescue an unknown-but-already-loved child, but primarily to complete our family as we saw fit" (66).

Writer Brooks Hansen in *The Brotherhood of Joseph* casts his motivation for adopting from Eastern Europe in even more explicitly selfish terms. After four years of unsuccessful fertility treatments, he and his wife see themselves as the "aggrieved party . . . the sick ones . . . the ones in need."<sup>37</sup> Only when they get further along in the adoption process does Hansen begin to realize that "there were the children, too" (91). The couple rejects adoptions from Korea in favor of, first, Romania and then Russia, because, as Hansen writes, "all our reasons for considering Korea were borne of fear, not excitement—and what excited me was the idea of adopting a child from a part of the world to which I felt a visceral connection."<sup>38</sup>

### **Rejections of Referrals and Disrupted Placements**

Throughout much of their narratives, the three writers cast themselves in the role of adoption consumers who have the right to select healthy, "white" children from an international adoption market, even if it means working with unethical adoption providers that circumvent the few rules regulating transnational adoption from the

former USSR to the United States. The authors choose Russia and Ukraine not only because they think that “white” children are available there, but also because in the 1990s and early 2000s these two countries encouraged large-scale adoptions of children to overseas parents within an explicitly neoliberal context after other former socialist countries, such as Romania, had already ended or restricted international adoption. Russia permitted adoptions through largely unlicensed agencies as well as through independent and uncertified providers, such as lawyers and other adoptive parents. Ukraine even allowed parents to select adoptable children from a photolisted database at the Ministry of Education and then visit these children in their orphanages to make a final decision.

At the time, the US government made no significant attempts to curb its citizens’ adoption consumerism. Unlike the US child care system, which focuses on involuntarily relinquished children, no public infrastructure exists that facilitates transnational adoptions. Instead international adoption extends the domestic practice of placing voluntarily relinquished children through largely unregulated third parties or private commercial or nonprofit agencies.<sup>39</sup> Until the United States ratified the Hague Adoption Convention in 2008 and designated a central entity that accredits and approves adoption service providers in member countries, the US government generally only became involved in international adoptions at the point of granting visas to adoptees under the so-called “orphan process.” Under this process, transnational adoption is considered a private legal matter between adoptive parents and a foreign court, into which US authorities cannot intervene.<sup>40</sup>

Schwartz, Reid, and Hansen choose to work with US agencies or individuals that violate the few existing rules governing Russian and Ukrainian adoptions. Schwartz describes that she turned to Ukraine—instead of other Eastern European nations where “white” children are supposedly also available—because of the country’s extremely liberal adoption procedures that at the time of her writing, between 2001 and 2003, allowed high parental involvement in the selection of children. Asserting her neoliberal consumer choice, Schwartz writes, “I want to be the one to decide what children I bring home. Many countries, including Russia, pre-select children for adoptive parents. It is illegal in Ukraine to do this; instead people go directly to the orphanage and select the child they want.”<sup>41</sup> Schwartz also chooses to work with an independent facilitator, Cathy Harris, who bases her expertise solely on her own experiences of having adopted five children from Ukraine. Harris’s contacts in Ukraine bribe officials and engage in other questionable practices to speed up the adoption process; as Schwartz writes, one of the facilitators even “told me that I was not to discuss financial terms with anyone except him, nor was I to mention his name at the NAC or other government agencies” (80).

Once she arrives at Ukraine’s Ministry of Education, Schwartz rejects several children based on their medical diagnoses or on information about their health that she thinks she can glean from their photolisted appearances. But when Schwartz meets the reportedly healthy girl whom she selected at the Ministry, the author

immediately diagnoses her with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), a condition that other adoptive parents have warned her is widespread among Eastern European adoptees. In the absence of a documented history of maternal alcohol consumption or a physician's confirmation, Schwartz's diagnosis is based solely on her own assessment of the child's facial features. In a key moment of her memoir, Schwartz highlights the centrality of the child's appearance for her consumerist decision-making, writing, "I felt as if I were looking at a fabric sample and had to decide if I wanted to buy the whole bolt without seeing what was under all the folds" (95).

The other two authors also reject adoptable children whose appearances (as ascertained in photos, videos, and meetings) appear to signal potential problems with their health status or racial identities. The children's appearance thus becomes central to the parents' adoption consumerism; it figures as a diagnostic tool that allows parents to choose children that are "right" for them and reject those who are not. As Lisa Cartwright has shown, while the visual style of international adoption was originally designed to document abandoned or lost children, today parents use visual representations to assign ethnic and racial identities as well as health and ability status to the pictured prospective adoptees.<sup>42</sup> While parents' attempts to ascertain the health status of adoptees can be partially explained by the unreliability of the provided medical information, which can become a major cause in adoption failures, their efforts to deduce adoptable children's racial "fit" to the preexisting family entirely serves their desire to attain adoptive invisibility.

When Reid receives her first referral, she almost rejects the girl because her picture does not resemble the child Reid had imagined she would conceive. That she is searching for a daughter who looks as though she could be her biological kin highlights Reid's view of an adoptee as a substitute for the child she cannot have. This view evokes perhaps more well-known parental fantasies of replacing a lost child, which are grounded in an often-unconscious economy of seriality and substitution. Because in the unconscious the boundaries between discrete entities are permeable, different children can be condensed into one and the same child, regardless of their concrete biological or psychic differences.<sup>43</sup> The adoption market promises to fulfill such parental fantasies of substitution by transforming children into replaceable commodities.

But the referred adoptee's appearance not only clashes with Reid's preconceived notion of a child who looks as though she could be biological kin, it also severely complicates Reid's fantasy of a shared "white" identity with Eastern European adoptees. This child is too blonde (and, what's not said, "too white") to fit her husband Marc's ethnic background, which, readers find out, is actually Jewish, not just "Russian." In fact, the picture of the little blonde girl brings to Reid's mind "grainy images of the anonymous hordes who persecuted Europe's Jews."<sup>44</sup> But Reid quickly downplays her brief recognition that race and ethnicity have different histories in Europe, which would complicate her view of a shared racial identity

between the couple who see themselves as simply “white” and the girl they are adopting from a country of the former USSR.

Reid’s fantasy of a shared racial identity also fails to consider the volatile US history of “whiteness,” from which Eastern European immigrants—who would have come from similar geographies as the referred child—were partially excluded until World War II and into which Jewish immigrants’ experiences in Europe and their struggles to secure the benefit of “whiteness” in the United States fit only uncomfortably.<sup>45</sup> Even though Eastern European–descended people were legally considered “white” and allowed to naturalize, their selective exclusion from certain jobs, housing, and entry into the United States was based on pseudoscientific racial theories that claimed innate and ineradicable differences among diverse European national origins. In fact, particular stress fell on the delineation of Eastern European immigrants who were perceived to be of the “Slavic races.”<sup>46</sup> The notion of a pan-European “white” racial identity only emerged around the middle of the twentieth century and transformed certain national (formerly understood as racial) and religious distinctions into ethnic and cultural differences. Only at that time could descendants of Eastern and Southern European immigrants claim full inclusion in a “white” racial identity following high rates of intermarriage, or they could forge what Mary Waters has called a “symbolic ethnicity” by selectively choosing elements from disparate European backgrounds.<sup>47</sup> In Reid’s case, the perceived “misfit” between the referred child’s appearance and that of the adoptive parents ends up shaping the couple’s entire experience in Russia. Even as they witness a host of other unethical practices by their placing agency, the couple is preoccupied with comparing the looks of the child they are adopting with what they perceive as the more favorable appearances of other children, especially those who have dark curly hair and dark eyes like the couple.<sup>48</sup>

During her second adoption, designed to produce a sibling for her daughter, Reid again prioritizes her desire for shared appearances—this time among the siblings—and does so even at the expense of concerns about the prospective adoptee’s health. When they no longer qualify for adoption from Russia because of their age, the couple chooses another agency with a brand new program in Ukraine, but only after they receive a money-back guarantee if they fail to locate a suitable adoptee. This agency works with Ukrainian attorneys who violate official rules by “reserving” a child in the Ministry’s database even before she becomes officially available for adoption. When the child is nevertheless claimed by a Ukrainian citizen, Reid settles on another girl, called Sniezhana (“little snowflake”). Even though they are happy to have found a child, the couple increasingly develops such serious concerns about the girl’s physical and mental health—and her outward dissimilarity from their first daughter—that they consider terminating her adoption and leaving her in the orphanage. In ways that resemble other adoptive parents’ reactions to Artyom Savelyev’s case with which I began this essay, Reid even identifies with another US family who abandoned their five-year-old adopted boy at the Kiev airport

because, as reported by the Ukrainian adoption facilitators, they “could not find relation with him.”<sup>49</sup> Reid describes her sympathy for this couple in the following way: “We were a little in awe of what it took to do what they had done. Did it show extreme callousness or had they perceived (or thought they perceived) in their week with this child a profound inability to connect?” (261).

Whereas Reid eventually overcomes her reservations about adopting Sniezhana, Hansen’s memoir culminates in the rejection of a healthy infant whom he perceives to be racially different from himself and his wife. In their quest for adoption, the Hansens settle on an agency that miraculously refers them a six-month-old healthy infant, even though children without reported medical conditions are rare among those available for adoption from Russia, most adoptable children at the time were at least eight months old, and the Hansens had previously rejected several referrals on the basis of the children’s reported medical diagnoses. During his first meeting with this boy, Hansen remarks on the child’s physical resemblance to his wife, especially his dark hair color and olive skin tone. But Hansen also notes a more distressing feature: the boy’s eyes “showed a slightly more Asian than Indo-European influence; that pleat at the edge pulled to a nearly Oriental length.”<sup>50</sup> After spending a few hours with the child, the couple rejects his referral. Affirming the difference between adoption humanitarianism and his consumerism, Hansen states that the couple would have made a different decision if “this boy’s parents had been good friends of ours and they’d died in a car crash” (172). To provide a “clear-cut, easy-to-understand reason” for why they felt as though the referred baby boy “was not meant to be [their] son,” the Hansens name “confusion about the boy’s race.” As Hansen writes, “the referral had listed him as Caucasian, but there was reason to think this might not have been entirely true.” Hansen’s statement that the couple’s decision against forming a transracial family was “part of the reason [they had] come to Russia” (190) reveals their failure to understand how differently the concept of race works outside of the United States, specifically their ignorance that population shifts in the Soviet Union resulted in a high degree of cultural mixing among peoples of Asian, European, and Middle Eastern heritages that make attempts at assigning ethnic and racial identities to children from this region a complex process.<sup>51</sup>

The rejection of this child leads the Hansens to prioritize their desire for an adoptee who looks “Caucasian” in spite of possible health issues. In violation of another of the few rules, their agency refers to them another baby boy who is still in the hospital rather than already institutionalized in an orphanage. This child suffers from first-degree prematurity and other health problems. The Hansens nevertheless decide to adopt him, even though prematurity was one of the medical diagnoses that had caused them to reject another referral when they were still in the United States. Hansen admits, “if we had seen his numbers on a referral back in the safe confines of our apartment in New York, we would have made a paper airplane out of it.”<sup>52</sup> While Hansen’s memoir does not provide updates on the boy’s post-placement condition, on his blog he has reported his recent efforts to adopt another child from the same

region because the last two years of his life with his adopted son had been so fulfilling. As in Reid's case, Hansen writes that the couple's desire to adopt a baby girl is grounded in the wish to "find [their first child] a sister, and ourselves a daughter," yet he never mentions the prospective adoptee's needs.<sup>53</sup>

### **US Neoliberal Multiculturalism, "Whiteness," and Fictions of Shared Ethnicity**

Even though their transnational adoptions are marked by the search for a racially based adoptive invisibility, some of the writers initially pay lip service to what appears to be the contradictory idea that their adopted children may need to maintain cultural connections to their countries of birth. At the beginning of her narrative, Schwartz thus imagines locating "people who speak Ukrainian near where we will live" and sharing Ukrainian Christmas stories and ornaments with her adopted children.<sup>54</sup> The belief that "birth culture" is important for adoptees has emerged from the public activism and the cultural productions by Korean adult adoptees. Widely articulated in scholarship on adoptions from Asia, this notion now also shapes the practices of the adoption industry, which stresses the necessity of "birth culture" more intensely for adoptees from Asian than Eastern European countries.<sup>55</sup> Thus, despite her initial pronouncements to the contrary, Schwartz's post-adoption account of the four months she spends with her children never once chronicles attempts at maintaining any part of her children's connection to Ukraine.<sup>56</sup> In contrast, following the admonitions of the adoption industry, the majority of parents of children from Asia enrolls their children in language classes or exposes them to some of the foods and holidays of their birth countries. Because these practices are grounded in assumptions that culture encompasses stable traditional practices, they often uncritically construct what Margaret Homans has called "a simulacrum . . . 'birth culture.'"<sup>57</sup>

Yet such notions of a simulated (racialized) "birth culture" intersect perfectly with assumptions enshrined in current forms of US neoliberal multiculturalism. Here race works not only as a euphemism for culture, but also as a means to normalize growing economic inequities through the creation of privileged and stigmatized racial formations. While individuals or entire racialized communities who are exploited for or cut off from capitalist wealth are represented as outsiders to liberal subjectivity, other raced and unraced subjects who conform to middle- and upper-class capitalist norms are rewarded.<sup>58</sup> Practices associated with the notion of "birth culture" are designed to produce children whose assumed biculturality intersects with their class privilege (acquired through membership in the adopted middle- or upper-class US family) to make them the ideal symbol of US neoliberal multiculturalism. Transforming adopted children into privileged multicultural subjects through "birth culture" helps to imagine them as inheritors of their adoptive parents' national culture (and class status) and as individuals who simultaneously manage to retain their pluralist inheritance.<sup>59</sup>

While the absence of an established Eastern European “birth culture” makes it difficult for those adoptive parents who may want to retain their children’s connections to their countries of birth, the three memoirists exemplify the opposite efforts to eradicate their children’s national differences as possible grounds for their ethnicization in the United States. Like many other adoptive parents, the authors change their children’s first names in an attempt to naturalize their adoptees’ new identities, but they highlight this practice as integral to their desire to prevent the ethnic “othering” of their children, usually by incorporating them into the parents’ own symbolically constructed “white” ethnic “heritage.”<sup>60</sup> The memoirists thus change names that they consider “too” Russian or Ukrainian (often to names prevalent in their own family) so that their children’s national difference will not be transformed into an Eastern European ethnic identity that differs from the one they have symbolically created for themselves (129).

Schwartz assigns her children names from her own European-descended family in order to give them “part of [her] heritage so they will grow up knowing that they belong to a family with whom they will be forever entwined.”<sup>61</sup> Reid believes that her second daughter’s name, Sniezhana, is “too difficult . . . for an American child to pronounce,”<sup>62</sup> and the Hansens rename their son Sergej to shield him from “teachers asking . . . about [his name] every year on the first day of school.”<sup>63</sup> Not much seems to have changed since the time of massive Eastern European immigration when, as David Roediger reports, children with “difficult” names, chiefly Eastern European-sounding or long names, were humiliated in public school as late as the 1940s.<sup>64</sup> The authors seem to fear that their children will face similar problems in the contemporary United States when their names could become grounds for ethnicization that evoke remnants of twentieth-century Eastern European immigrant identities. Although thought to be “white” by “color”—a concept that preceded the notion of “ethnicity”—the national origins of these immigrants made them part of the “Slavic races” (and thus selectively excludable from immigration as well as certain jobs and housing). Even though such differences would today be legible in the form of a (“white”) Eastern European ethnic identity that is already being claimed by contemporary immigrants from Eastern Europe who have come since the 1970s and especially since the 1990s, the memoirists appear to consider indices of their children’s national origins primarily as obstacles to achieving the desired adoptive invisibility for their families.

While the notion of “birth culture” is very problematic because it helps reinforce neoliberal multiculturalism’s attempt to obscure the inequities of global capitalism through a focus on racial difference, for racialized adoptees this concept at least acknowledges tensions among the children’s new US American and their “birth” identities and marks the impossibility of a complete erasure of their past as they become part of their new family, nation, and economic class. In the case of Russian and Ukrainian adoptees, however, the lack of emphasis on the children’s “birth culture” exemplifies how the global extension of US assumptions about a

privileged “whiteness” buries economic disparities among and within nations in the myth of an assumed racial homogeneity among adoptees and their parents. That is why Hansen is completely taken aback when a Russian judge asks him if the couple had considered that their adopted son “probably came from a different social class than we did.” He writes, “I almost didn’t even understand the question. . . . we didn’t consider [the adoptee] to be of any class.”<sup>65</sup> As the adoptees’ national and class differences from their parents—and their importance for the creation and maintenance of global inequities that allow the exchange of children—are hidden in notions of a shared racial identity, the children are also placed in the role of ideal immigrants who are expected to fully assimilate to US majority cultural, linguistic, class, and ethnic norms. Even though the writers do not address the impact the adoption industry has had on their decision-making process, many adoption providers have similarly encouraged the belief in the infinite adaptability of Eastern European adoptees. One adoption provider’s website, for example, asserts that “adaptation to the new family, culture, and language takes place very rapidly—usually within just a few months. Unless children are taken to special classes (say, from the local Ukrainian/Russian community), they soon forget how to speak their native language.”<sup>66</sup>

The myth of shared “whiteness” that requires the erasure of adopted children’s national origins as potential grounds for ethnicization also works to hide the conditions that have led to the surge in relinquished children in the former USSR and their subsequent circulation in the international adoption market. Reid ends her book by rejecting calls urging international adopters to donate the money they spent on the process so that children can instead stay with their birth families. She writes, “Would we have done a better thing if we had taken [their adopted daughter] from the orphanage and given her back to her birth mother, with the thirty-five thousand dollars or so we spent in the adoption process? . . . But a) we’re not that noble; b) that one-time gift would not have altered the *crushing cultural conditions* that had so harmed her birth parents and would harm their children; and c) even with such a gift, her birth parents could never have given her the opportunities to fulfill her potential that we have given her.”<sup>67</sup> Reid’s attribution of the surge in institutionalized children to “crushing cultural conditions” contradicts another of her brief asides that “many of the children in the orphanage are there only temporarily [because] their parents can’t feed them” (122). Hansen appears similarly ignorant of the causes for child relinquishment in post-Soviet countries. In his conversations with an orphanage director, Hansen thus cannot grasp why the birth mother of his adopted child is labeled “indigent” because she did not provide an address when she left her child in the hospital. Applying US-based middle-class notions of maturity, Hansen writes that under this definition, “half of the twenty-year-olds I’ve known were indigent.”<sup>68</sup>

Both authors ignore parental destitution as the major reason for child relinquishment in the post-USSR, even though it is acknowledged for other adoption-sending countries. Although some of the children residing in Russian and Ukrainian



orphanages have escaped parental abuse or neglect, the overwhelming majority are social orphans with at least one living parent.<sup>69</sup> The majority of these relinquishing parents are young, single, female migrants who have come to urban centers but cannot afford the housing they need to provide for their children and to retain their parental rights after they place their children in an orphanage. These women are unable to hold a job and simultaneously take care of their children in the absence of the extended families they left behind and in the context of adequate public child care services.<sup>70</sup>

Instead of acknowledging these economic realities, Reid justifies her ability to adopt from the former USSR by refashioning the sentimental birth-mother discourse that has become especially important to adopters from Eastern Europe. As Heather Jacobson has found, while parents who adopt from China emphasize their desire to maintain their children's "birth culture," adoptive parents of children from Eastern Europe generally tend to limit discourses about their adoptees' birth countries to the absent birth mother. In these narratives, which are centrally present in Schwartz's memoir, the adoptee is cast as a gift that the birth mother made directly to the adoptive parents, independently of the actual, often-unknown conditions of relinquishment.<sup>71</sup> Reid employs this narrative to affirm her own privilege as a (first-world) adopter in relationship to the (second-world) birth mother without having to consider the causes of this inequity. She writes, "I empathize with Natalie's birth mother, but my determination to parent is stronger than my empathy. I grieve for her loss, and I revere her for her gift to me. But I am thankful to the depths of my being that I am raising Natalie, and not she. . . . But that's life this time, and I thank all of the powers in the universe that I am the lucky one."<sup>72</sup>

### **Global "Whiteness," Neoliberal Markets, and Adoption Trouble**

The memoirists' affirmations of an adoption consumerism that denies the neoliberal conditions surrounding large-scale adoptions from the former USSR and that normalizes rejections of adoptable children as mere obstacles on the path to adoptive invisibility help contextualize abuse cases of Eastern European adoptees in the United States. In fact, connections between the three memoirs and the adoption failures that have dominated US media coverage of Eastern European adoptions are surprisingly explicit. Cathy Harris, the independent adoption provider Schwartz selected, has gained notoriety for facilitating the adoption of several children who ended up becoming high-profile abuse cases in the United States around the same time that she was working with Schwartz. In 2001 and 2003, Harris facilitated the adoptions of three children for John Krueger, who had already been accused of child molestation. In 2007, Krueger was convicted to seventy-five years in prison for sexually abusing his eight- to eleven-year-old charges as well as the adopted child of acquaintances. In response to his conviction, Ukraine tried to outlaw single-parent adoption.<sup>73</sup> In addition, Harris facilitated an adoption for Peggy Sue Hilt. In a highly

publicized case, in 1991 Hilt was convicted to twenty-five years in prison for killing her other adopted two-year-old Russian daughter.<sup>74</sup>

As the search for adoptive invisibility can lead parents to prioritize adoptees' physical, racial, and ethnic "fit" over other desirable attributes, these children may exhibit unexpected health issues, which increase the chance of difficulties with adaptation to their new placements and the possibility of adoption failures. After rejecting the girl she had diagnosed with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), Schwartz adopts two other unrelated children who have reported health conditions that she believes are minor compared to FAS. On returning home, Schwartz is thus wholly unprepared for the many doctors' visits and medical expenses as well as her children's developmental delays and the length of time it takes them to understand and speak English. Schwartz is surprised that her twenty-month-old son, who appeared to simply have a lazy eye, turns out to have Coats' disease, which requires two surgeries and leaves him blind in that eye. The second two-year-old boy has hydrocephalus, a condition where fluid builds up inside the skull. Schwartz never indicates that she understands that this condition can, like FAS, lead to serious physical and mental disabilities, such as short-term memory loss, problems with physical and visual coordination, and epilepsy. Schwartz also never seems to grasp the highly problematic nature of adopting two unrelated children at the same time, which is a practice that Ukraine outlawed shortly after Schwartz's adoption.

Reid's second adoption of a child from Ukraine initially also appears problematic. Sniezhana (renamed Lana) does not turn out to have any of the feared medical or neurological disorders that initially predisposed Reid and her husband to consider terminating their parental rights. Instead Lana exhibits excessive familiarity with strangers. Even though Reid does not remark on this parallel, probably because Lana's behavior is more pronounced, earlier in her memoir she had described how her older adopted daughter had similarly gone "easily to the other mothers" and showed an "apparent murkiness about who her mommy is."<sup>75</sup> These behaviors are typical of institutionalized children who are discouraged from attaching themselves to a particular caregiver and thus may fail to understand that affective responses to a specific person are expected from them after adoptive placement.<sup>76</sup> The mainstream treatment of such attachment issues focuses on changing the behavior of the caregivers, especially on increasing their responsiveness and sensitivity to the children. As Reid writes, Natalie's behavior improved when Reid stayed home with her, and she even realizes that Lana's problems might also be mitigated if Reid spent more time with her rather than hiring babysitters.<sup>77</sup>

In spite of this recognition, however, Reid prioritizes her desire to finish her memoir over the needs of her newly adopted second child. Instead Reid diagnoses Lana with reactive attachment disorder (RAD), a condition she had not assigned to her first adopted child. As Rachael Stryker has argued, the RAD diagnosis allows adoptive parents to define their child's post-placement behaviors—especially their failure to reward parents with love and attachment—as pathology, thus legitimizing

parents' original expectations for family formation and locating the primary source of problems within the children.<sup>78</sup> As it marks the wish for a less troublesome road to attachment between adoptive parents and their children, the RAD diagnosis can obscure adoptees' difficulties with adapting to their new placements as well as their traumas of relinquishment and institutionalization, which are compounded by language barriers. Not only do adopted children from countries of the former USSR not speak English, developmental delays may also make them less proficient in their own mother tongues. Reid even vaguely realizes that Lana's behavior may be symptomatic of her institutionalization and her difficulties in adjusting to her new placement, admitting that she has "no idea what this child has gone through—spending her first years the focus of no one's love, crossing the world with perfect strangers, working her way into our tight-knit little family."<sup>79</sup>

When they receive a RAD diagnosis for their adopted children, some parents subscribe to controversial attachment therapies directed at changing not their own but their adopted children's behaviors. In contrast to the most commonly practiced therapies that focus on improving parent-child relationships and teach positive parenting skills to aid attachment, more controversial attachment techniques consist of confrontational therapies and therapeutic-parenting training. Promising that their children can be disciplined to become emotional assets in the home by attaching themselves to adoptive parents, these techniques condition children to comply with parents' expectations and also train parents to turn their house into "therapeutic homes" that provide constant discipline to children.<sup>80</sup> Because some of the attachment techniques are physically coercive, their application may explain some cases of adoptee deaths at the hands of their adoptive parents. For example, the mother of two-year-old David Polreis who beat the boy to death in 1996 was working with an attachment center and claimed in her legal defense that the boy had severe RAD. Six-year-old Viktor Alexander Matthey (Viktor Sergievich Tulimov) died in 2000 of cardiac arrhythmia due to hypothermia after his adoptive parents had engaged in the prolonged use of what some experts describe as attachment-parenting techniques, such as dehydration, whippings, and confinement in an unheated and unlit pump room. Eight-year-old Dennis Merryman (Denis Uritsky) was starved to death in 2005 as a form of attachment parenting; he had lost two pounds from the time he had been adopted five years before.<sup>81</sup> The narratives of child pathology that the adoptive parents used in their legal defense portray them as long-suffering potential victims of the children's abhorrent behavior, which could only be corrected by the application of controversial attachment therapies.<sup>82</sup> The majority of the documented abused Eastern European adoptees died within six months to a year of their placements in the United States—during the time of their most intense adjustment.<sup>83</sup> Artyom Savelyev had also lived with his adoptive family for six months, and his mother was reported to have contacted an attachment specialist.<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

In their search for adoptive invisibility, the three authors endorse an unbridled adoption consumerism that is enabled by the myth of global “whiteness” in conjunction with a largely unregulated adoption market between the United States and certain Eastern European countries. Shifting the emphasis in representations of transnational Eastern European adoptions from the early 1990s’ focus on anticommunist humanitarianism to an instance of parental consumerism allows the authors to ignore the neoliberal transformations in the former USSR that have contributed to their children’s relinquishment by impoverished birth parents and their eventual transnational adoption by well-to-do US Caucasian parents. It is significant that Reid’s explicit affirmation of adoption consumerism has been met with the support of parts of the adoption community. In addition to the “usual suspects” like Harvard professor Elizabeth Bartholet who has consistently worked against efforts to regulate transnational adoption, the director of the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute and associate editor of *Adoption Quarterly*, Adam Pertman, has also endorsed Reid’s book. Pertman’s support indicates that even more mainstream advocates of transnational adoption apparently find nothing objectionable in Reid’s extended affirmations of neoliberal adoption consumerism in search of adoptive invisibility.<sup>85</sup>

Recommendations for ameliorating the neoliberal character of transnational adoption have included calls for tighter regulations. Under pressure from adoption advocates, adoptive parents, and the adoption industry, however, the US government has instead generally worked to *ease* legal restrictions guiding the entry of adopted children in the United States. This trend was most recently manifested in the passage of new adoption regulations for Haitian children. A few weeks after the earthquake, the US Department of Homeland Security issued unprecedented regulation permitting Haitian children to enter the United States under special humanitarian visas. Similarly, when Western European nations halted adoptions from Guatemala in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to concerns about corruption, black-market trading, and child trafficking, US agencies and individuals increased their adoptions from this country.<sup>86</sup>

Transnational adoptions have become regulated in international agreements like the Hague Adoption Convention and by governments of individual relinquishing countries. Romania has ended transnational adoption, while Guatemala and Kazakhstan have halted new adoption until the implementation of a Hague Convention-compliant system. Reforms on an international level and by individual nations have focused on outlawing adoptions through unregulated agencies or facilitators, which are central to the neoliberal adoption market. The Hague Adoption Convention requires adoption service providers to be accredited in order to practice in a Convention country. Following Artyom Savelyev’s abandonment, Russia and the United States negotiated an agreement that limits adoptions to US-accredited

agencies working in compliance with the Hague Convention, requires adopters to undergo mental health tests, and establishes that all adopted children keep their Russian citizenship until they turn eighteen. Long desired by Russia but resisted by the United States, the agreement was signed in 2011 and requires adoption agencies and adoptive parents to report on their children's health and living conditions.<sup>87</sup>

A more tightly regulated adoption market may not only help prevent more cases of disrupted placements and adoptee abuse. It may also correct some US parents' view of adoptable children as consumer items to be plucked selectively—in accordance with parental criteria of desirability—from underperforming parts inside the second world and reinserted into first-world economies as members of US middle- and upper-middle-class families. Coupled with the US myth of shared “whiteness,” such consumerist attitudes allow parents to abdicate responsibility for understanding the neoliberal conditions that have enabled their children's relinquishment and to erase their children's national, cultural, and linguistic differences from the majority US culture. The view of Eastern European children as simply “white” undoubtedly confers onto them immense and immediate racial privilege by severing possible associations with the historical vestiges of an older “in-between” racialized identity assigned to twentieth-century Eastern European immigrants or with the newer notion of an emerging Eastern European ethnic and cultural identity in the United States. But these three adoption memoirs also highlight the downside of efforts to incorporate Eastern European children into US neoliberal “whiteness.” The assumption that recent arrivals from Eastern Europe share a preexisting racial identity with their European-descended US parents can cause substantial harm. Adoptive children are expected to fully assimilate to the majority “white” US society and to conform to the needs of their US families for adoptive invisibility, which include hopes for reciprocal attachment. When these expectations fail, some adoptees, like Artyom Savelyev, evidently become rejectable and even “returnable,” and such decisions provoke an outpouring of sympathy rather than criticism from parts of the adoption community. In addition to the adoption failures, adoptee abuses and deaths that have dominated US media accounts, we have yet to see how Eastern European adoptees, once they find their public and artistic voices, will react to their commodification in the parental quest for adoptive invisibility.

## Notes

I would like to thank Joni Adamson, Heather Jacobson, and Marianne Novy as well as the anonymous readers of *JTAS* for their invaluable help in strengthening the arguments presented in this essay.

<sup>1</sup> Kristin M. Hall, “Russian Boy Terrified Family, Adopted Grandmother Says,” *TheStar.com*, April 10, 2010, <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/793378--russian-boy-terrified-family-adopted-grandmother-says>.

<sup>2</sup> For examples of sympathetic parental reactions to Torry Ann Hansen’s actions, see KJ Dell’Antonia, “I Did Not Love my Adopted Child: The Painful Truth about Adoption,” *Slate*, April 13, 2010, <http://www.slate.com/id/2250590/>; Sarah Kershaw, “In Some Adoptions, Love Doesn’t Conquer All,” *New York Times*, April 16, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/fashion/18Adopt.html>; and Lou Whitmire, “Ohio Family Knows Tennessee Mom’s Plight,” *Zanesville Times Recorder*, April 16, 2010, <http://www.zanesvilletimesrecorder.com/article/20100419/NEWS01/4190302>. Hardly anyone mentioned that the very public spectacle of his “return” repeated Artyom’s earlier experiences of relinquishment. And Russian government officials have claimed that Artyom’s worst trauma occurred in his adoptive home, where he was often punished and everything was prohibited, including raising his voice, playing, or leaving the house. When Artyom arrived in Russia after his six-month absence, he initially did not understand or respond to his native language. See Peter Savodnik, “Who Will Write the End to Russian Orphan’s Story?” *AOL News*, July 2, 2010, <http://www.aolnews.com/world/article/who-will-write-the-end-to-russian-orphans-story/19530144>.

<sup>3</sup> This is the definition of RAD used in Rachael Stryker, *The Road to Evergreen: Adoption, Attachment Therapy, and the Promise of Family* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>4</sup> The focus on problem behaviors of Eastern European adoptees often relies on the expertise of questionable “adoption experts,” such as Joyce Sterkel who runs the “Ranch for Kids” in Montana. In a December 8, 2007, *Newsweek* article on the death of Nina Hilt at the hands of her adoptive mother, Sterkel was quoted as saying, “It’s a horrible thing, but I understand how some people end up killing these kids. . . . They have no empathy, no affection, no love. My heart goes out to these parents because they don’t know what to do.” Pat Wingert, “When Adoption Goes Wrong,” *Newsweek*, December 8, 2007, available online at *The Daily Beast*, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2007/12/08/when-adoption-goes-wrong.html>. Sterkel was also invited on a 2010 CBS *Early Show*, entitled “Adoption Outrage,” devoted to the Artyom Savelyev case. Here she stated that adoptive parents of children with health and mental disorders have few options for terminating their parental rights, thus justifying Torry Ann Hansen’s actions. Psychological and medical scholarly research, however, has found small differences between adopted and nonadopted individuals in terms of problem behaviors, mental health referrals, academic achievement, and cognitive performance. See, for example, Femmie Juffer and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, “Behavior Problems and Mental Health Referrals of International Adoptees: A Meta-Analysis,” *JAMA: Journal of the American Medical Association* 293, no. 20 (2005): 2501–15; and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, Femmie Juffer, and Caroline W. Klein Poelhuis,

“Adoption and Cognitive Development: A Meta-Analytic Comparison of Adopted and Nonadopted Children’s IQ and School Performance,” *Psychological Bulletin* 131, no. 2 (2005): 301–16.

<sup>5</sup> According to Holt International, from 1992 to 2002, approximately 30,000 children were adopted from Russia. Their numbers were only surpassed by Chinese adoptees (with 34,000 adoptions). In addition, about 4,000 children were adopted from Ukraine during that same decade. Holt International, “International Adoption Statistics,” <http://www.holtinternational.org/insstats.shtml>. For adoption statistics from 1996–2010, see also US Department of Homeland Security, “Yearbook of Immigration Statistics,” <http://www.dhs.gov/files/statistics/publications/archive.shtm#1>.

<sup>6</sup> Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Statistics | Intercountry Adoption,” US Department of State, [http://adoption.state.gov/about\\_us/statistics.php](http://adoption.state.gov/about_us/statistics.php).

<sup>7</sup> Heather Jacobson, “The Media and Adoption Decision-Making” (presentation, American Studies Association, San Antonio, TX, November 21, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> As Heather Jacobson writes, “comparative medical studies on the post-adoption status of international adoptees have found that craniofacial abnormalities and eczema are more prevalent among Chinese adoptees, while gastrointestinal infections and neurological signs are more frequent among Russian adoptees. However, the literature generally asserts that the most important factors for health issues and delays are the length of time children spend in institutionalized care and the intensity of pre-adoptive deprivation” (Jacobson, “Media and Adoption Decision-Making”). Thus, Russian adoptees may manifest a larger number of psychological and behavioral issues because they tend to be adopted at older ages (after longer stays in institutions).

<sup>9</sup> For exceptions, namely social sciences scholarship that has examined Eastern European identity formation in the United States (and Australia), see Heather Jacobson, *Culture Keeping: White Mothers, International Adoption, and the Negotiation of Family Difference* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2008); Deanna Linville and Anne Prouty Lyness, “Twenty American Families’ Stories of Adaptation: Adoption of Children from Russian and Romanian Institutions,” *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 33, no. 1 (2007): 77–93; and Rhoda Scherman and Niki Harré, “The Ethnic Identification of Same-Race Children in Intercountry Adoption,” *Adoption Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (2008): 45–65.

<sup>10</sup> For humanities work, see, for example, David L. Eng, “Transnational Adoption and Queer Diasporas: Two Mothers,” *Social Text* 76 (2003): 1–37; Margaret Homans, “Adoption Narratives, Trauma, and Origins,” *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (2006): 4–26; Marianne Novy, *Reading Adoption: Family and Difference in Fiction and Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); and Mark C. Jerng, “Recognizing the Transracial Adoptee: Adoption Life Stories and Chang-rae Lee’s *A Gesture Life*,” *MELUS* 31, no. 2 (2006): 41–67. For social sciences work, see, for example, Richard M. Lee, “The Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Research, and Counseling Implications of Cultural Socialization,”

*Counseling Psychologist* 31, no. 6 (2003): 711–44; Richard M. Lee, Harold D. Grotevant, Wendy L. Hellerstedt, Megan R. Gunnar, and the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, “Cultural Socialization in Families with Internationally Adopted Children,” *Journal of Family Psychology* 20, no. 4 (2006): 571–80; and Dong Pil Yoon, “Intercountry Adoption: The Importance of Ethnic Socialization and Subjective Well-Being for Korean-Born Adopted Children,” *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Social Work* 13, no. 2 (2004): 71–89.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Jane Jeong Trenka, *The Language of Blood* (St. Paul, MN: Borealis Books, 2003); Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinvere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, eds., *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006); and *First Person Plural*, dir. Deann Borshay Liem (San Francisco: NAATA, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Larson, *The Memoir and the Memoirist: Reading and Writing Personal Narrative* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2007), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Laura Briggs, “Making ‘American’ Families: Transnational Adoption and U.S. Latin America Policy,” in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 609.

<sup>14</sup> Leigh Gilmore, “Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity,” *Biography* 24, no. 1 (2001): 128.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret L. Schwartz, *The Pumpkin Patch: A Single Woman’s International Adoption Journey* (Louisville, KY: Chicago Spectrum Press, 2005); Theresa Reid, *Two Little Girls: A Memoir of Adoption* (New York: Berkley Books, 2006); and Brooks Hansen, *The Brotherhood of Joseph: A Father’s Memoir of Infertility and Adoption in the 21st Century* (New York: Modern Times, 2008). Earlier US memoirs of Eastern European adoption include Patty Dann, *The Baby Boat: A Memoir of Adoption* (New York: Hyperion, 1998); Robert Klose, *Adopting Alyosha: A Single Man Finds a Son in Russia* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); and Janis Cooke Newman, *The Russian Word for Snow: A True Story of Adoption* (New York: St Martin’s, 2001). While the authors of the earlier memoirs already eschew humanitarianism as a major motivation for their adoptions from Eastern Europe, rely on independent adoption facilitators rather than agencies, and foreground cultural proximity between parent and child through their own (often several generations removed) immigrant backgrounds, they do not as clearly employ the same consumerist logic of global “whiteness.”

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the various scholarly terms used to describe the racialized position of twentieth-century Eastern and Southern European immigrants, see David R. Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 12–13. On scholarly debates about twentieth-century notions of whiteness, see Thomas A. Guglielmo, *White on Arrival: Italians, Race, Color, and Power in Chicago, 1890–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).



<sup>17</sup> See Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 2007), 299–301.

<sup>18</sup> See Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Social Text* 24, no. 4 (2006): 1–24.

<sup>19</sup> According to Miller et al., between 1996 and 2007, eighteen internationally adopted children died in the United States of causes related to head trauma, suffocation, or neglect at the hands of their adoptive parents in suspected or proven cases of abuse and/or neglect. Fourteen of the children were adopted from Russia, two from China, and two from Guatemala. In addition, an unknown number of other Eastern European adoptees in the United States have been abused, with only some cases attracting media attention. See Laurie C. Miller, Wilma Chan, Robert A. Reece, Linda Grey Tirella, and Adam Pertman, “Child Abuse Fatalities Among Internationally Adopted Children,” *Child Maltreatment* 12, no. 4 (2007): 378–80. Since the publication of the article by Miller et al., three more Russian children have died at the hands of their adoptive US parents: fourteen-month-old Nikolai Emelyantsev, twenty-one-month-old Chase Harrison, born as Dmitry Yakovlev, and seven-year-old Ivan Skorobogatov, renamed Nathaniel Craver. See, for example, Carrie Craft, “Several Russian Children Murder Cases Have Been by an Adoptive Parent,” About.com, [http://adoption.about.com/od/adoptionrights/p/russian\\_children\\_murdered\\_by\\_adoptive\\_parent.htm](http://adoption.about.com/od/adoptionrights/p/russian_children_murdered_by_adoptive_parent.htm).

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 147.

<sup>21</sup> Laura Briggs and Diana Marre, “Introduction: The Circulation of Children,” in *International Adoption: Global Inequalities and the Circulation of Children*, ed. Diana Marre and Laura Briggs (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Kirsten Lovelock, “Intercountry Adoption as a Migratory Practice: A Comparative Analysis of Intercountry Adoption and Immigration Policy and Practice in the United States, Canada and New Zealand in the Post W.W. II Period,” *International Migration Review* 34, no. 3 (2000): 911–12.

<sup>23</sup> See Kathleen Ja Sook Bergquist, “Operation Babylift or Babyabduction? Implications of the Hague Convention on the Humanitarian Evacuation and ‘Rescue’ of Children,” *International Social Work* 52, no. 5 (2009): 621–33.

<sup>24</sup> The 1960s clandestine “Operation Peter Pan” was designed to “rescue” the children of parents opposing the Castro government and later expanded to include children whose parents believed rumors that their children would be shipped to work camps. US parents’ desires to adopt South Vietnamese children, many of mixed-race origin and fathered by US military personnel, at the end of the Vietnam conflict in 1975, were framed in terms of humanitarianism and anticommunism and as a response to a shared

sense of guilt for the US involvement in Vietnam. See Allison Varzally, "Vietnamese Adoptions and the Politics of Atonement," *Adoption & Culture* 2 (2009): 161.

<sup>25</sup> See Tobias Hübinette, "Korean Adoption History," in *Community 2004. Guide to Korea for Overseas Adopted Koreans*, ed. Eleana Kim (Seoul: Overseas Koreans Foundation, 2004): 12–19.

<sup>26</sup> Briggs, "Making 'American' Families," 612.

<sup>27</sup> Lisa Cartwright, "Images of 'Waiting Children': Spectatorship and Pity in the Representation of the Global Social Orphan in the 1990s," in *Cultures of Transnational Adoption*, ed. Toby Alice Volkman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 188.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 194, 197. While Romania allowed only thirty intercountry adoptions in 1989, in 1990, the year after the execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu, it let more than ten-thousand children leave the country. See Ethan B. Kapstein, "The Baby Trade," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (2003): 116. Romania remained a significant source of children adopted to the United States; in 1999 and 2000, it ranked fifth after Russia, China, South Korea, and Guatemala. Holt International, "International Adoption Statistics," <http://www.holtinternational.org/insstats.shtml>.

<sup>29</sup> See Samantha L. Wilson, "Post-Institutionalization: The Effects of Early Deprivation on Development of Romanian Adoptees," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 20, no. 6 (2003): 473–83.

<sup>30</sup> Cartwright, "Images of 'Waiting Children,'" 194–97.

<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Dickens, "The Paradox of Inter-Country Adoption: Analysing Romania's Experience as a Sending Country," *International Journal of Social Welfare* 11, no. 1 (2002): 77.

<sup>32</sup> See Kate Connolly, "Romania lifts Lid on Babies for Sale Racket," *Guardian*, October 30, 2001, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/oct/31/internationalcrime>; Romanian-Reporter, "Romania's Lost Orphans Adopted Abroad Are They Dead or Alive Now; Who Knows, Who Cares?" Pound Pup Legacy, January 12, 2010, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/41930>.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Michael Rowe, "Did U.S. Baptists Cross the Line Between 'Good Intentions' and Child Kidnapping in Haiti?" *Huffington Post*, February 4, 2010, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-rowe/crossing-the-line-between\\_b\\_447024.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-rowe/crossing-the-line-between_b_447024.html); and Ginger Thompson, "Questions Surface After Haitian Airlift," *New York Times*, February 23, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/24/world/americas/24orphans.html>.

<sup>34</sup> Cartwright, "Images of 'Waiting Children,'" 201–2, 206.

<sup>35</sup> Schwartz, *Pumpkin Patch*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 91.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 96–97. After Hansen and his wife reject the possibility of adoption from Korea, they work with an independent lawyer (of “Eastern European extraction” [99]) who falsely promises assistance with an adoption from Romania despite the 2001 moratorium. Here Hansen already reveals his preference for “unproblematic” white Eastern European identities that guides his later behavior in his choice of Russian adoptees. Even though he finds it an example of “the last bastion of unapologetic prejudice,” Hansen decides that the couple does not want to adopt a Roma child to avoid having “to pack all those crystal balls in your luggage. That, and you probably don’t want your own kid trying to pick your pocket all the time” (99). When they do not advance in their quest to adopt from Romania, Hansen faults the moratorium and the “virulent and xenophobic anti-international adoption lobby that exists in Romania, whose position seems to be that we foreigners want to use their children as sex toys” (101).

<sup>39</sup> Kerry O’Halloran, *The Politics of Adoption: International Perspectives on Law, Policy and Practice* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer, 2006), 210.

<sup>40</sup> The Child Citizenship Act of 2000 grants adoptees automatic US citizenship when they enter the United States as lawful permanent residents. Under the Hague Convention, private adoptions from nonmember states under the older orphan process continue.

<sup>41</sup> Schwartz, *Pumpkin Patch*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Lisa Cartwright, “Photographs of ‘Waiting Children’: The Transnational Adoption Market,” *Social Text* 21, no. 1 (2003): 89.

<sup>43</sup> Gabriele Schwab, “Replacement Children: The Transgenerational Transmission of Traumatic Loss,” *American Imago* 66, no. 3 (2009): 285.

<sup>44</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, 105.

<sup>46</sup> David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (New York: Verso, 2008), 153.

<sup>47</sup> Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, 198; and Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>48</sup> Reid’s adoption agency fails to communicate reports about the health status of some of the referred children and allows a board member to circumvent Russian law requiring that both parents travel to the country to adopt.

<sup>49</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 260.

<sup>50</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 160–61.

<sup>51</sup> Cartwright, "Photographs of 'Waiting Children,'" 86.

<sup>52</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 202.

<sup>53</sup> Hansen's blog is at "Brooks Hansen," <http://www.brookshansen.com/>.

<sup>54</sup> Schwartz, *Pumpkin Patch*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Heather Jacobson similarly found that some parents with children from Russia spoke of themselves as committed to keeping their children's birth culture but did not actually engage in it for fear of drawing attention to the adopted status of their children (*ibid.*, 129).

<sup>57</sup> Homans, "Adoption Narratives," 4–26. For work examining parents' efforts to maintain their adopted children's "birth culture," see also Sara K. Dorow, *Transnational Adoption: A Cultural Economy of Race, Gender, and Kinship* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Signe Howell, *The Kinning of Foreigners: Transnational Adoption in a Global Perspective* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); and Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*.

<sup>58</sup> See Melamed, "The Spirit of Neoliberalism."

<sup>59</sup> Briggs, "Making 'American' Families," 611.

<sup>60</sup> Heather Jacobson also found that parents changed adoptees' first names that were considered too ethnic and retained them only if they thought they did not impinge on other people's acceptance of their children (Jacobson, *Culture Keeping*, 169).

<sup>61</sup> Schwartz, *Pumpkin Patch*, 120.

<sup>62</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 181.

<sup>63</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 216.

<sup>64</sup> Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, 194.

<sup>65</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 232.

<sup>66</sup> Rick DeLong, "Adopting Children from Ukraine," TryUkraine.com, <http://www.tryukraine.com/info/adoption.shtml>.

<sup>67</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 72–73, emphasis mine.

<sup>68</sup> Hansen, *Brotherhood of Joseph*, 222.

<sup>69</sup> Judith Record McKinney, "Russian Babies, Russian Babes: Economic and Demographic Implications of International Adoption and International Trafficking for Russia," *Demokratizatsiya* 17, no. 1 (2009): 19–40.

<sup>70</sup> See O. G. Isupova, “The Relinquishment of Newborns and Women’s Reproductive Rights,” *Russian Education and Society* 46, no. 4 (2004): 41–58.

<sup>71</sup> Schwartz writes, for example, “Tonight I will say a special prayer of thanks to the boys’ birth parents who cared enough to surrender their children so that they could find their forever home. . . . tell them that I will always be grateful for the gift they have given to me, and I will treasure their children until my dying day” (Schwartz, *Pumpkin Patch*, 153).

<sup>72</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 71–72.

<sup>73</sup> “Boys Adopted by John Krueger,” Pound Pup Legacy, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/15182>.

<sup>74</sup> “Forever Family Forever Dead Update Nina,” Pound Pup Legacy, <http://poundpuplegacy.org/node/19468>.

<sup>75</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 50.

<sup>76</sup> See Olga Tunina and Rachael Stryker, “When Local Myths Meet Global Reality: Preparing Russia’s Abandoned Children for International Adoption,” *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 86 (2001): 143–49.

<sup>77</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 264–65.

<sup>78</sup> See Stryker, *Road to Evergreen*, 7, 12, 80, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Reid, *Two Little Girls*, 267.

<sup>80</sup> See Stryker, *Road to Evergreen*, 12–17.

<sup>81</sup> Rachael Stryker argues that the Polreis family’s attempt to use RAD in their legal defense brought public attention to this diagnosis (*ibid.*, 24). For more on Viktor Matthey, David Polreis, and Dennis Merryman, see, for example, “Nikto Ne Zabyt – Nichto Ne Zabyto” [Nobody Is Forgotten – Nothing Is Forgotten], <http://nobodyisforgotten.blogspot.com/>; and Advocates for Children in Therapy, “Victims of Attachment Therapy,” <http://www.childrenintherapy.org/victims/victims.html>. See also Carrie Craft, “Russian Child Murder Cases,” About.com, <http://adoption.about.com/od/adoptionrights/p/russiancases.htm>.

<sup>82</sup> Stryker, *Road to Evergreen*, 4.

<sup>83</sup> Miller et al., “Child Abuse Fatalities,” 379.

<sup>84</sup> Hall, “Russian Boy Terrified Family.”

<sup>85</sup> The inside jacket of *Two Little Girls* features Pertman’s blurb for the book: a “beautifully crafted, deeply insightful, painfully honest, and sometimes disturbing book. . . . I couldn’t stop turning the pages.” And Bartholet writes, “A moving, wise, and

powerful account of the agony, joy, and moral complexity at the heart of parenting by choice that adoption is.”

<sup>86</sup> Kelley McCreery Bunkers, Victor Groza, and Daniel P. Lauer, “International Adoption and Child Protection in Guatemala: A Case of the Tail Wagging the Dog,” *International Social Work* 52, no. 5 (2009): 655.

<sup>87</sup> See Fred Weir, “Russia’s Medvedev to Sign International Adoption Accord,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 22, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0622/Russia-s-Medvedev-to-sign-international-adoption-accord>; and “Russia Re-opens Door to International Adoptions,” *RT*, July 14, 2011, <http://rt.com/news/prime-time/adoption-russia-us-agreement/>.

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