

Article

Nostalgia, Motherhood, and Adoption: Two Contemporary Swedish Examples

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Abstract: This paper explores the notion of nostalgia in two recent Swedish narratives of transnational adoption: Christina Rickardsson's *Sluta aldrig gå*, 2016, (published in English as *Never Stop Walking* in 2017), and Cilla Naumann's *Bära barnet hem* ("Carrying the Child Home", 2015). The two narratives deal with adoption from South America to Sweden, include autobiographical content, and enable a comparison between an adoptee memoir (Rickardsson) and a parent-authored text (Naumann). Both texts center on maternal images, but the analysis suggests that Rickardsson's narrative echoes the *borderland nostalgia* characteristic of adoptee writing. The adoptee memoirs, being *reflective* in mode and *restorative* in purpose, occupy a borderland between the two forms of nostalgia described by Boym (2001), while interrogating the temporal, spatial and affiliative boundaries of transnational adoption. Naumann's nostalgic enterprise incorporates the mirrors, doubles and ghosts of *reflective* nostalgia. These representations are a fruitful means to represent the "other" family, and the alternative lives that were left behind in the process of adoption. Ultimately, her text suggests the limitations of the autobiographical mode and illustrates the capacity of fiction to provide a symbolic register in which to articulate the unspeakable aspects of adoption.

Keywords: transnational adoption; nostalgia; motherhood; autobiography; Naumann; Rickardsson

Transnational adoption inevitably includes loss: for the adoptee, a country and parent(s) are left behind and perhaps unknown and even unknowable. But there are losses involved for the adoptive parents, who live with the "shadow presences" (Kendall 2005, p. 163) of their children's birth families, as well. This paper explores the notion of nostalgia in two recent Swedish narratives of transnational adoption: Christina Rickardsson's *Sluta aldrig gå: från gatan i São Paolo till Vindeln i Norrland* (published in Swedish in 2016, and in English as *Never Stop Walking* in 2017), and Cilla Naumann's *Bära barnet hem* ("Carrying the Child Home" my translation, 2015).

Christina Rickardsson's memoir of her childhood in São Paolo and subsequent adoption in Sweden, her first published work, was an instant success. It has attracted a great number of readers both in Sweden and abroad, as the book has been translated into several languages, and there are plans to adapt the story to the screen (Aschenbrenner 2018, p. 19). Cilla Naumann is a well-established author with more than 15 published novels, a handful of which are written for young adults. Questions of family, memory, and intercultural encounters are recurrent concerns in Naumann's works. In 2015, *Carrying the Child Home* was published to great acclaim. This is a novel with autobiographical elements depicting the author's return with her adopted son to the place of his birth, Bogotá, Colombia.

These recent, widely read works suggest that the topic of transnational adoption, and the concomitant questions of kinship and how to establish a fruitful relationship to the past, is relevant to a large reading public. Both narratives deal with adoption from South America to Sweden, include autobiographical content, and enable a comparison between a parent-authored text (Naumann), and a text by an adopted child (Rickardsson).

While much has been written about the search for roots and belonging in transnational adoption narratives (Homans 2013; Callahan 2011), less focus has been placed on the affective register of the life narratives. In a previous article on the role of nostalgia in the life narratives of transnational/transracial adoptees (Jane Jeong Trenka's *The Language of Blood* (Trenka 2003), and *Fugitive Visions* (Trenka 2009); Astrid Trotzig's *Blod är tjockare än vatten*/"Blood is Thicker Than Water" (Trotzig 1996); and Sofia French's *På jakt efter Mr. Kim i Seoul*/"Looking for Mr. Kim in Seoul" (French 2005)), I have analyzed the complex longing for *home*, and sense of *inbetweenness* that characterizes these narratives, as well as the feelings of melancholy, longing, and loss they articulate, through the framework of nostalgia (Ahlin 2018). Svetlana Boym's distinction between *restorative nostalgia*, which "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps"; and *reflective nostalgia*, which "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym 2001, p. 41) are useful concepts in such an analysis. To Boym, restorative nostalgics are concerned with the recovery of origins, while reflective nostalgics show that "longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another" (pp. 49–50). For the adoptee memoirists, what motivates their search journey is often a desire to recover the lost *home*: to connect with lost family members and the country of birth. For them, the past is thought to hold a "truth" about their origins and early years that promises to be restorative. However, as their narratives progress they find that homecoming is "perpetually deferr[ed]" (Boym 2001, p. 49) in a way that resonates with reflective nostalgia. The exploration of the meaning of memory and affect also suggest the reflective element of the narratives.

Thus, the adoptee memoirs, being reflective in mode and restorative in purpose, occupy a borderland between the two forms of nostalgia described by Boym. This *borderland nostalgia* means that the retrospection of, for example, Trotzig and French is a "near nostalgia", which is less concerned with collective or cultural memory, and more with the role of personal memory in nostalgia. Nostalgia is traditionally associated with dwelling on memories of the past and of a former self that offer a sense of consolation in times of change. However, for the adoptee writers it is often the dearth or absence of memories that triggers melancholy and nostalgic retrospection. The notion of the borderland implies not only the geographical borders that are crossed in transnational adoption, but also the border between pre- and post-adoption life, which is a significant element of the nostalgia articulated in adoptee life writing. The borderland thus resonates with the sense of in-betweenness—of navigating between past and present, between cultures and ways of life—that is articulated in the adoptee memoir.

It is also important to note the prospective quality of *borderland nostalgia*: the authors aim to bridge the gap between the past and the present not in order to inhabit the past, but to use it as a springboard to the future. A typical characteristic of the adoptee memoir is that it is written not at the end of a long eventful life, but rather at a time in life when a reconciliation with the past is needed in order to fully embrace the future. Like many other memoirists of transnational adoption,¹ Rickardsson was in fact quite young, 32 years old, when her memoir was published. To this observation, we may add Dennis Walder's assertion that exploring nostalgia is not necessarily to be excessively attached to the past, but a way to negotiate the influence of the past on the present. Nostalgia may thus function as "a step on the path of knowledge" (Walder 2012, p. 9) concerning private and public history in the adoptee memoir, where retrospection is connected to introspection and progression rather than conservatism. Finally, *borderland nostalgia* is evocative of the crossing and blurring of national, cultural and affiliative limits that characterize transnational adoption. The following analysis of Christina Rickardsson's reconstructed memories suggests that her narrative largely conforms to the notion of *borderland nostalgia*, with the important distinction that Rickardsson has actual memories of pre-adoption life that can be recovered.

¹ See for example the works of the Swedish authors Astrid Trotzig, Sofia French and Patrik Lundberg, or American Jane Jeong Trenka, Soojung Jo and Katy Robinson.

How then does the nostalgia of the adoptive parent compare with the *borderland nostalgia* of the adoptee? My analysis suggests that while spatial, temporal, and familial boundaries are interrogated in Cilla Naumann's text as well, *Carrying the Child Home* primarily echoes the register of the reflective nostalgics who, as Boym proposes, "see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts" (Boym 2001, p. 251). Genre is key to understanding the different purposes of retrospection in the two texts: unlike Rickardsson, who uses the memoir form, Naumann employs a mix of fiction and autobiography. The inclusion of fictional elements indicates that she is not so much concerned with recovering memories or establishing a true version of the past, as with exploring the losses and alternative pasts that are part of transnational adoption. The most important theme of her narrative is separation—specifically mothers' separation from their children—and it is depicted through nostalgic tropes of mirrors and shadows. The combination of recollection and fiction has a particular resonance with nostalgia since the object of "loss" involved in nostalgia "is a product of imagination and memory. Nostalgia, in other words, names the affect attached to what one *imagines* that one remembers of what is no longer present—a longing for that which is no longer 'there' both in space and time" (Worby and Ally 2013, p. 468). This observation indicates that nostalgia always involves the fictional and, conversely, that the fictional mode lends itself well to articulations of nostalgia. In the following analyses, we will see how this relationship between imagination and memory plays out in the two texts, but first a few more remarks about autobiography are required.

1. Autobiography: A Nostalgic Genre

One of the key points of this study is the relationship between nostalgia and life writing. Laura Marcus observes that autobiography "might be viewed as by definition a nostalgic genre and even the most nostalgic of literary forms" (Marcus 2018, p. 12). The hallmark of autobiographical writing is a preoccupation with the past, at times idealized, at times represented in terms of loss, or melancholy. This retrospective mode suggests that the present can only come into being by way of the past. Memory is central to autobiography as memories are evoked, questioned, constructed, and/or worked through in the project of writing one's life. The nostalgic is often seen as suffering from a surfeit of memory, which makes her/him unable to move on. On the other hand, having too little memory of one's past can also lead to a preoccupation with one's history: with uncovering the actual facts behind dimly recalled events; the establishment of these events in their accurate temporal dimension, or the assertion of the identity of significant, lost family members and friends. A common feature of narratives dealing with transnational adoption is the search narrative, that is, the return to the adoptee's country of birth in search of family. Very often, it is the biological mother who is the prime object of this search (see, for example, Katy Robinson's *A Single Square Picture* (Robinson 2002), Jane Jeong Trenka's *The Language of Blood* (Trenka 2003), or Soojung Jo's *Ghost of Sangju* (Jo 2015)). Both *Never Stop Walking* and *Carrying the Child Home* feature this kind of journey leading to an actual reunion between birth mother and child.

The journey motif is common in autobiographical writing, particularly the metaphor of life as a journey. In these texts, the journey to a physical place, South America, is indeed paralleled by a journey into the self. In addition, they show that the autobiographical act is a form of verbalized self-reflection that presupposes the writer's temporal distance from the events and from her former self, allowing a new perspective on both self and past. In Paul John Eakin's words, autobiography is a form of "self-invention" (Eakin 1985, p. 6) through narrative. Narrating the past allows the writer to discover connections between past events as well as patterns of development and behavior. Christina Rickardsson's memoir echoes this notion of the active creation of the self, when she notes: "To me, life is not about finding myself. Life is about creating myself" (home page; Rickardsson 2016, p. 154). The statement indicates Rickardsson's conception of the self as produced through a set of acts, rather than something innate waiting to be discovered. Autobiographical writing functions as one such site of self-production.

This idea is particularly pertinent for adoptee writers, whose memoirs serve to counter the often "parent-centric" narratives that have hitherto dominated the discourse about transnational

adoption. “Parent-centric discourse” is defined by Eli Park Sorensen as “a discourse that firmly articulates agency from the perspective of adoptive parents [. . .], while often ignoring or acting on behalf of the adopted person [. . .] In a wider sense, it may be seen as a rhetorical–ideological strategy whose function is to legitimize and consolidate the perspective of transnational adoption as an ethical, normative practice” (Sorensen 2014, p. 161). The recent surge of writing by transnational adoptees, exemplified in Scandinavia by such works as Brynjulf Tjønn’s *Kinamann* (“China Man” (Tjønn 2011)), Patrik Lundberg’s *Gul utanpå* (“Yellow on the Outside” (Lundberg 2013)); Eva Tind’s *Han* (“He” (Tind 2014)), Maja Lee Langvad’s *Hun er vred* (“She is Angry” (Langvad 2015)), among others, provides a form of counter-discourse by locating voice and agency with the adopted person her/himself. Often, adoptee writing assumes a critical perspective of transnational adoption but as Rickardsson’s text shows, it is possible to be critical of some aspects of adoption practice without being opposed to the phenomenon as such.

However, the (partly) autobiographical narratives of Rickardsson and Naumann not only serve to construct the self in writing, but to emphasize the relationality of that self. For example, while the voice of the autobiographical text would most obviously appear to be that of the author/protagonist, feminist critic Jo Malin suggests that the voice of many twentieth-century women autobiographers is not monologic. Instead, women’s life writing is often dialogical as the mother’s biography is intercalated with the daughter’s autobiography. Both Rickardsson’s and Naumann’s text can be usefully related to Malin’s notion of “embedded maternal narratives” in which the writer’s mother functions as an “intersubject” as the life narratives of mother and daughter intersect (Malin 2000, pp. 1–2). Representations of maternity are central to both Rickardsson’s and Naumann’s narratives, and fundamentally connected to their retrospective impetus.

Finally, the nostalgic impulse of adoptee life writing is also supported by the notion of what Adam Phillips calls the unlived life,² which is his term for “the lives we are missing out on, the lives we could be leading but for some reason are not. What we fantasize about, what we long for, are the experiences, the things and the people that are absent” (Phillips 2012, p. xi). While we are thus all to some extent haunted by the lives we could have had, the transnational adoptee provides a case in point. As Rickardsson’s and other adoptee narratives suggest, the issue of *what could have been* is highlighted by questions concerning the alternative life the writer had faced if she had stayed in her country of birth, or been adopted by another family. The shadow lives of alternative possibilities are central components of Naumann’s narrative as well, as indicated by the imagined lives of the birth mothers of adopted children and, in the fictional story of Ana, of orphans who do not get adopted.

2. Christina Rickardsson: Creating Herself

Images of maternity and duality run through Christina Rickardsson’s autobiographical narrative *Never Stop Walking*. Not only are there two mothers, a Brazilian, biological mother (Petronilia), and a Swedish, adoptive mother (Lili-ann); the narrator also describes herself a dual subject. She sees herself as embodying a Brazilian *Christiana*, whose pre-adoption memories and experiences had to be suppressed in the process of becoming the Swedish *Christina*. The structure of her memoir, in which chapters dealing with her São Paolo childhood in the 1980s and early 1990s alternate with chapters depicting her return journey in 2015, reflects the interplay between past and present, *Christiana* and *Christina*, and indicates that retrospection is as much about making meaning of the present as about constructing the past. It also underscores the theme of temporal, geographical and affiliative in-betweenness typical of *borderland nostalgia*. Throughout the story she refers her “two selves” and the text reconstructs the memories of *Christiana* that have for a long time been kept back as a part of adapting to her life as a transnational adoptee. One glaring example is the description of how she

² I am grateful to Professor Laura Marcus for bringing Phillips’ work to my attention at the conference “Nostalgia in Contemporary Culture,” University of Southern Denmark, 4–6 June 2018.

learned to speak Swedish in only two months, but that this acquisition of a second language entailed a near-complete forgetting of the first (Rickardsson 2016, p. 184). This example highlights how adoption is often connected to the suppression, or forgetting, of the past in order to assume a new adoptive identity.³ For Rickardsson, the narrative reconstruction of her former self entails opening the door to memories that have been buried deep inside her, and involves the translation of this double into a new language and new life circumstances.

The process of splitting herself in two begins when Christiana is separated from her mother to stay at the orphanage, where she learns how to keep up a tough appearance. The suppression of her “real self” gives rise to a sensation of duality. She writes: “Christiana was hidden in the fog and a new person appeared, who in time would come to be called Christina” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 138).⁴ Christiana is gradually transformed into Christina but throughout the narrative, she remains as an inner double that Christina alternately denies and yearns to embrace. In order for this regeneration to take place, Christina has to journey back to Brazil to revisit her childhood landscapes. The nostalgic urge to revisit the past becomes encoded as restorative as Rickardsson desires, and actually manages, to recover certain memories that have been thoroughly repressed, in a process that offers healing. Part of this nostalgic enterprise is the pronounced yearning for the mother, who is a forceful presence in the text.

Never Stop Walking is a multi-voiced narrative, and Rickardsson’s own pre-adoption self is not the only voice her narrative seeks to recover, as she explicitly sets out to write the joint story of mother and daughter. In the first chapter of the book she writes, “I feel I want to reinstate my mother and tell our truth, the way I remember it, the way I remember our time together and the love we shared during a time that feels as if it belongs to another world, another universe” (Rickardsson 2016, pp. 14–15).⁵ The mother’s story is embedded in the daughter’s, but here the urge to write the mother’s story is formulated along with the qualification that it will be “the way she remembers it”. Rickardsson acknowledges that memory is notoriously unreliable and that childhood memories may be distorted by the child’s inability to comprehend the larger picture, or to create connections between cause and effect. Comments like this serve to highlight that even an allegedly “true story” is to some extent fictional: the memoir constitutes a mediated version of her past in which the narrative sequencing of events imposes a pattern on her life and establish causality and meaning. The rendition of lived experience through narrative necessarily entails certain omissions and additions to hold a reader’s interest. Yet, even if an autobiography is to some extent fictional, Rickardsson rejects the combination of memory and fiction that Naumann employs, and makes a point of telling a story that is as true to her memories as possible. This is not only for the benefit of the reader, but for herself. The desire for truth is connected to the negotiation of identity that takes place in the narrative, and suggests an attempt to “patch up the memory gaps” of the past that corresponds to the characteristics of the restorative nostalgic.

Acknowledging the double, Christiana, means looking honestly at the sinister aspects of her own past. For example, there are scenes mediated by a more experienced narrator who retrospectively explains or reassesses events and actions, such as the competitive and aggressive relationship between eight-year-old Christiana and one of the other girls at the orphanage. Describing a fist fight between the two of them, Rickardsson says that at the time she felt the other girl deserved to be beaten, but then she observes: “This is an opinion that has changed over the years, and now I can only feel sorry for her and for Christiana” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 119).⁶ This reflection shows how her reconstruction

³ Signe Howell (2003) refers to this process of re-kinning of the adoptive child as involving the “transubstantiation” of the child (p. 468).

⁴ “Christiana gömdes i dimman och en ny person trädde fram, som så småningom kom att heta Christiana.”

⁵ “Jag känner att jag vill ge min mamma upprättelse och berätta vår sanning, som jag minns den, som jag minns vår tid tillsammans och kärleken som vi delade i en tid som känns som om den tillhör en helt annan värld, ett annat universum” (pp. 14–15).

⁶ “Detta är en åsikt som med åren har ändrats och nu kan jag inte annat än tycka synd om henne, och om Christiana.”

of the past leads to a reconciliation with her inner double. Writing here proves to be a therapeutic act through which *Christiana* is acknowledged, and the brutal parts of her past, including the act of accidentally killing another child in a desperate struggle over food, are worked through. Thinking about the boy whose life she took, Rickardsson writes: “How does one move on? How does one forgive oneself? I really don’t know!” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 98). At the end of her story, she has arrived at the beginning of an answer: “To become reconciled with oneself is a long journey and I feel I am on my way” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 231). Passages like these indicate that by writing the story of her past, Rickardsson is allowed to mourn her losses and transgressions. Retrospection thus leads to the “path of knowledge” through which the influence of the past on the present can be explored.

Rickardsson’s memories of the violence and brutality of her early childhood are traumatic, but despite all the hardships, there are also parts of her childhood that she longs for. This longing is mainly centered on the mother. Her story begins with a moving portrait of her mother, who took care of her daughter in a loving way despite indigence, mental illness, and harassment by the police. The search for the mother is also what drives the plot of her memoir, as the journey into her past is paralleled by an actual journey back to Brazil. As she is getting ready to meet her mother again after 24 years, Rickardsson notes that her happiness at the reunion is mixed with the fear that this present meeting will affect her view of the past. More precisely, she is afraid of what will happen to her story about her childhood should the mother prove not to be the loving, heroic person of her memories (Rickardsson 2016, p. 205). These fears indicate her need to keep the past intact: her memories have served as a source of sustenance, and she hopes she has not built her identity on false premises.⁷ In other words, she fears that retrospection may not lead to restoration. When she first learns that her mother and aunts have been located by the local “researcher”, Brian, he recapitulates some stories from her childhood that they have told him. As she recognizes these incidents from her past, Rickardsson reflects that she is happy to find people “with whom she shares more than just blood; there are also shared memories” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 175).⁸ To begin with, her memories are validated: they were not fantasies about her partly repressed pre-adoption childhood, but truths, which serve to restore the lost home of the past. In addition, her observation echoes the view that affiliative bonds are created by interaction and joint experiences, rather than by biological ties, or “just blood.”

To Rickardsson, these pre-adoption memories are not only a source of strength but also a burden. This is not primarily because they remind her of the harsh existence of her early childhood, but because she feels she has an obligation to remember the people she has been bereft of—or they will be twice lost (Rickardsson 2016, pp. 89, 182). The book is dedicated to these loved and lost people: her two mothers, Petronilia Maria Coelho and Lili-ann Rickardsson; and Camile, her best friend in São Paulo’s *favela*. Camile, who was shot to death by the military police at the age of seven, is significantly described as a miniature version of Rickardsson’s mother (Rickardsson 2016, p. 88). Unwillingly, Rickardsson was separated from all three women. Two of them, Lili-ann and Camile, are dead, while Petronilia and her daughter were parted for 24 years. Together, they reinforce the idea that representations of maternity are central to the text. Thus, while Rickardsson’s narrative centers on the reunion with the birth mother, it significantly includes other maternal images that call the primacy of bloodlines into question. Hence, Rickardsson’s memoir recognizes that, for the adoptee writer, the disengagement from the discourse of blood and genes may offer new opportunities for self-definition.

While for example David L. Eng observes that some transnational adoptees experience a “psychic predicament” (Eng 2003, p. 1) as a result of an inability to contain the notion of two mothers, Rickardsson’s memoir challenges such an assumption. When she has left Brazil for Sweden, Lili-ann Rickardsson will play an important role as Christina’s adoptive mother. Tragically, Christina will lose

⁷ “Eftersom jag varit så rädd om mina minnen och verkligen förlitat mig på dem, blir det så viktigt för mig nu, när jag är tillbaka, att de stämmer” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 128).

⁸ “Det känns skönt att få bekräftelse på att jag hade vetat och gissat rätt, att jag och dessa människor delar mer än bara blod, att det finns gemensamma minnen”.

her as well. When Lili-ann is dying from cancer, Christina realizes that there is space in her psyche for two mothers and the strong bond that has been forged between Lili-ann and Christina leads her to refute the saying that “blood is thicker than water” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 199). In this way, she echoes Astrid Trotzig’s memoir, and reasserts the potential of adoptive familial relationships.

While many contemporary adoption narratives, such as those of Jane Jeong Trenka and Maja Lee Langvad, are critical of the practice of transnational adoption, Christina Rickardsson’s narrative approaches adoption in more positive terms. Adoption has for Rickardsson meant losing part of herself, but she ultimately finds it a price worth paying to get out of the dire poverty she experienced as a street child (Rickardsson 2016, p. 147). Above all, it guaranteed her survival (Rickardsson 2016, p. 153). However, she is critical of the circumstances of her adoption: her mother’s illness was not made known to her daughter, nor was there any attempt to place Christiana and her younger brother with other relatives. She is also critical of the way Brazil fails to support mothers who are financially unable to take care of their children (Rickardsson 2016, p. 15). When her aunts found out that the children were in an orphanage, they went to get them only to find the children were no longer there (Rickardsson 2016, p. 209). Their mother kept looking for Christiana and her brother all these years as nobody told her relatives that they had been put up for adoption. It is not until their reunion 24 years later that they find out about the circumstances of the children’s disappearance.

Finally, as Rickardsson’s memoir draws to a close, she has been reconciled with her past: through the act of writing her own narrative she has been able to bring together her two selves and two cultures, and the journey into the past has led to restoration. She stresses, however, that visiting Brazil does not equal going *home*. Instead, she envisions herself as having two homes (Rickardsson 2016, pp. 40–41, 195). Her mother’s words have stayed with her and helped her through hard times, and these words also form the ending of her narrative: “never stop walking” (Rickardsson 2016, p. 238). This exhortation to move on suggests adaptability, the mobility of the self, and the need to look forward rather than back. However, Rickardsson’s memoir shows that the route to the future goes via the past.

3. Cilla Naumann: Mothers, Mirrors and Memories

Carrying the Child Home is a multi-layered text about motherhood in which the coexistence of the past and the present is represented by images of mirrors, shadows and doubles.⁹ Several images of maternity are played off against one another in Naumann’s, as in Rickardsson’s, text. There is of course the narrator herself, the adoptive mother, who travels with her son to meet his birth mother.¹⁰ Their story is interspersed with images from the narrator’s own childhood and reflections on her aging mother, who suffers from increasing senility. Gradually, the mother’s illness leads to a role reversal through which the daughter becomes the caretaker of the mother. Finally, there is the parallel story of the fictional Ana, an orphan who was abandoned at birth and grew up at an orphanage where she stayed until she was 18 years old. Ana works as a housekeeper for a wealthy family and has only accepted her present position because working there includes taking care of small children, for whom she serves as a maternal figure in the absence of their working mother. The relationship between Ana and her employer, an emotionally distant career woman, evokes the question of whether biogenetic affiliation is the most important credential for motherhood. It is Ana who gets to voice the most poignant claim about maternal feelings: “Is it possible to love somebody else’s child as if it were your own?/Yes, yes, yes, it is, Ana muses, I know it is! If you were only allowed to, if the child was allowed to, if the whole world could just stop trying to control what mothers and children and love should

⁹ This is classic melancholic imagery defined by, for example, Jean Starobinski in “*La mélancolie au miroir: trois lectures de Baudelaire*” (Starobinski 1989).

¹⁰ Naumann’s actual birth date is given as the date of birth of the narrator (Naumann 2015, p. 198) which validates the connection between author and narrator.

be like” (Naumann 2015, p. 192).¹¹ Ana’s words suggest that repeated acts of care and tenderness may well constitute the ground of motherhood, thus reflecting on the relationship between adoptive mothers and children. In this way, her musings also amount to an endorsement of the practice of transnational adoption, which is typical of the parent-centric text. Yet, Naumann’s text is more complex than that as it is vitally concerned with what is left behind in this process.

The family for whom Ana works live opposite an orphanage in central Bogotá and every Wednesday afternoon, Ana is hypnotized by the blue door of the orphanage. When it opens, a child will appear and go down the steps to meet her adoptive parents waiting in a car. This scene is described as “the moment that would stand still forever—the minute the girl became someone else” (Naumann 2015, p. 102). The blue door is connected with a moment of complete transformation, from which there is no going back. The closing of the blue door in Naumann’s novel amounts to a simultaneous beginning and erasure: a new life begins while the child’s pre-adoption identity is expunged. Behind the door remain the un-lived life, and the alternative person the adopted child could have become.¹² This event echoes Rickardsson’s depiction of the total repression of her pre-adoption past, suggesting that both adoptive parent and adoptee recognize an absolute boundary between life *before* and *after* adoption—a boundary that their narratives seek to negotiate.

Naumann’s nostalgic enterprise incorporates the mirrors, doubles and ghosts of reflective nostalgia. In a key scene in the beginning of the narrative, the narrator opens a cabinet where she has stored the family albums, full of pictures of the Swedish, post-adoption lives of her three adopted children. On the shelf below the photo albums is a box with all the adoption documents, which she refers to as “the other world” (Naumann 2015, p. 11). In this box, labelled *Bogotá*, “time is nothing [. . .] It is the shadows of all kinds of mothers who move in the dreamed life of the sunken mirror city of *Bogotá*, the city underneath the city that made even me into a mother” (Naumann 2015, p. 12).¹³ This description reads like an embodiment of the Freudian unconscious: the knowledge that there are other mothers whose children are now part of her own family is repressed, but continues to exist in a dream-like world beneath her own, everyday experience. The un-lived lives that are the residue of adoption dwell in *Bogotá* (in italics); an alternative reality where the lives that could have been are frozen. The anonymous mothers of children given up for adoption are shadows in this parallel world; shadows that have resonated with the narrator’s own experiences of motherhood in a faraway northern country. Naumann goes on to observe that the birth mothers of her adopted children once appeared in medical records as their names, ages, and blood groups were registered, but as soon as the child was born they disappeared. This observation illustrates the process of “de-kinning” of birth mothers that is part of the adoption process, involving “the undoing of the relationship between the child and its previous parent(s)” (Högbacka 2016, p. 5). Keenly aware of this process, the narrator is haunted by these lives that were left behind, and so her narrative is marked by doubles, shadows, and mirror images. In this way, Naumann’s text suggests that the tropes common to melancholia and nostalgia are also relevant to adoption.

Toby Alice Volkman’s question, “Is adoption inescapably bound to the effort to replicate, echo or mirror the family formed by biological ties?” brings out the central imagery of doubles and parallel lives in adoption (Volkman 2005, p. 102). Inherent in this question is the notion that the adoptive family is somehow inferior, second-best or inauthentic. This is an idea that both Naumann’s and Rickardsson’s text challenge. Naumann offers several versions of biological motherhood restricted by either illness, poverty, or attachment to a career. As an alternative, Ana and the narrator herself

¹¹ “Kan man älska någon annans barn så som sitt eget? //Ja, ja, det kan man, tänker Ana, det vet jag att man kan!/Om man bara får, om barnet bara får, om hela världen bara kunde sluta lägga ordningen för hur mor och barn och kärleken ska vara.”

¹² For more about the metaphorical role of the door in transnational adoption narratives, see Ahlin (2018, p. 32).

¹³ “är tiden ingenting . . . Det är skuggorna av alla sorters mammor som rör sig i den sjunkna spegelstaden Bogotá’s drömda liv, i den stad under staden som gjorde även mig till mor.”

are representations of maternity based on the repeated acts of nurturing and caring for a child. Ana's story resonates with the point Marianne Novy makes about kinship in *Imagining Adoption*:

Relations of adoption are constructed relationships—at least in that sense, they are fictions. But there is a sense in which the relationship between a parent and child who have always been together, as well as of a reunited birth parent and child, is also a constructed relationship—one built up out of many small interactions. (Novy 2001, p. 11)

Here, Novy equalizes the biological and non-biological parent-child relationship by suggesting that an enduring bond is based on sustained contact and interaction. Still, her observation that relations of adoption are “fictions” deserves further elaboration. Naumann's narrative, which is a combination of autobiographical material and fiction, validates the imaginary as a vital mode of making sense of the experience of adoption. As we have seen, it is mainly through the use of fiction—in Ana's story—that Naumann emphasizes her alignment with Novy's view of adoptive parent-child relationships. Another important aspect of the fictional as a way to fathom the practice of adoption relates to language and the limited vocabulary available to represent adoption. In the autobiographical section of the text, the narrator reflects on her habit of keeping a diary to record the process of adoption. However, she soon finds that the diary mode is inadequate for the type of story she is about to write (Naumann 2015, p. 57).¹⁴ Later on, when she is going to meet Magda, the woman who gave birth to the child who would later become her own son, the narrator observes, “It is a meeting without regulations, there are no rules to observe, not even a vocabulary. I am going to meet my son's mother. Even this simple statement is an anomaly. Not even language can encompass what is about to happen” (Naumann 2015, p. 88).¹⁵ The experience of adoption thus tests the boundaries of language and at times appears unspeakable: remaining as a shadow just beyond the writer's reach. Instead, it is through images of doubles and mirrors that the story is conveyed, through passages in which the tropes of adoption and nostalgia converge.

The actual meeting with Magda is briefly depicted and substantiates the interpretation that Naumann's text is not so much concerned with a recovery of memories that offer restoration, as with a fictional exploration of the alternative pasts associated with transnational adoption. The return to Colombia cannot be a return “home” for the adoptive mother, and instead *Carrying the Child Home* pivots on the inevitable separations that all mothers—biological as well as adoptive—and children have to face. When the meeting with the birth mother has taken place and Magda has left them again, the narrator will also leave her now grown-up adoptive son and return to Sweden alone while he continues to travel in Colombia without her (Naumann 2015, p. 208). There is thus no endorsement of his belonging in the adoptive country, and neither does Naumann's narrator ever attempt to speak on behalf of her child.¹⁶ In these ways, Naumann's text does not reflect the typical parent-centric pattern, and through the fictional episodes she is able to explore the losses involved in transnational adoption without appropriating the son's story.

The motif of separation is also found in the stories of Ana and the narrator's own aging mother. As the novel ends, the narrator is back home reflecting on her mother: “I long for my mother as she used to be” (Naumann 2015, p. 223).¹⁷ The mother's memories and personality dissolve as her senility progresses and the novel ends with a passage in which imagination and reality merge in such a way that it is impossible to tell the one from the other. As the door to the “mirror city” associated with

¹⁴ “Just då kan jag inte säga exakt hur det havererar men jag vet helt säkert att jag håller på med en berättelse som inte rymms i dagbokens form.”

¹⁵ “Det är ett möte utan regler, inget finns att rätta sig efter, inte ens en vokabulär. Jag ska träffa min sons mor. Till och med den enkla utsagan är en anomali. Inte ens språket rymmer det som nu ska ske.”

¹⁶ This is in marked contrast to another recent autobiography by an adoptive parent, Michael Segerström's *Till Arre från pappa: Vårt gemensamma liv som jag minns det* (Segerström 2017); “*To Arre from Daddy: Our life Together as I Remember It.*” As the title suggests, Segerström speaks for the two of them throughout the narrative.

¹⁷ “Jag längtar efter min mamma som hon var.”

the birth of the narrator's children has been closed, another otherworldly landscape takes its place. Past, present, and future are mixed in this final image, which appears to describe the mother's passing. The beach and the sea of the narrator's own childhood form a dreamscape which beckons her mother, fusing childhood happiness with loss, and reinforcing the circular pattern of life. In this way, maternity becomes an emblem of loss and nostalgia.

In conclusion, focusing on nostalgia leads to an enhanced understanding of the role of memory and the motifs of duality and longing in transnational adoption narratives. Both the narrative of the adoptive mother and that of the adopted child center on maternal images, and their representations of maternity open up for alternative understandings of kinship and authenticity, affirming the positive potential of adoptive relationships rather than rehearsing a nostalgia for bloodlines.

Furthermore, the two narratives analyzed in this paper highlight the significance of facing the shadows of un-lived lives, but they conceptualize the double in different ways. Rickardsson's double is locked within her own body and through the act of writing she reconstructs the voice and experiences of this inner shadow. Origins are established and memories recuperated in this process, which indicates that there is a restorative aspect to the nostalgic longing articulated in her memoir. However, as in other memoirs of transnational/transracial adoption, it is complemented by a reflective attitude to the past. As a result of the position from which they are speaking, nostalgia ultimately serves different purposes in the texts of Rickardsson and Naumann. For Rickardsson, maternal nostalgia is coupled to a desire for knowledge about the past, which will eventually function as a stepping stone into the future.

Naumann's narrative also dwells on the borderlands of time, space and family, but offers no final resolution. The doubles encountered here are imaginary shadows leading parallel lives in the mirror city of *Bogotá* in representations that serve as a means to reflect on, but not to restore, the past. *Carrying the Child Home* shows that the nostalgic tropes of mirrors and shadows are a fruitful means to represent the "other" family, and the alternative lives that were left behind in the process of adoption. The nostalgia articulated in the adoptive mother's narrative is connected to the theme of loss and separation embodied by recurrent images of mothers parting from their children, such as an unknown woman giving up her biological child; an adoptive mother whose son is grown up and leaves her to see the country of his birth on his own; and an aging mother who is lost in senility and finally passes away. In the end, these representations suggest the limitations of the autobiographical mode and illustrate the capacity of fiction to provide a symbolic register in which to articulate the unspeakable aspects of adoption.

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