KELLY M. RICH

# Sight Unseen: Proxy War, Proxy Adoption

T. R. FEHRENBACH'S CLASSIC HISTORY of the Korean War, *This Kind of War* (1962), famously calls the conflict "not a test of power—because neither antagonist used full powers—but a test of wills."[1] Originally subtitled *A Study in Unpreparedness*, it describes a US that learned the hard way what it took to fight a limited proxy war abroad. The first chapter, "Seoul, Saturday Night," recounts the eve of the Korean War in anticipatory detail, with the pathos of retrospective knowledge. Surveying the American colony and its embassy bars, the narrator observes:

> Over tax-free liquor, the colony laughed over Foster's [John Foster Dulles] visit, and over the official who had been caught keeping North Korea's Number One female spy. This man had even bought the woman a short-wave radio, and it was said the ROK's would shoot her.
>
> In spite of American influence, the ROK's were still extremely brutal to leftist elements in their midst. Of course, they could not shoot the American official.
>
> There had been a child, towheaded yet, the American wives in Seoul told each other. *Some American couple would, of course, adopt it.*[2]

The final sentence of this anecdote appears to end this story of sex, violence, and treason rather matter-of-factly. Though Fehrenbach often sums up other passages with quotable philosophical adages, this sentence is not one. As a line of free indirect discourse, it offers complexity rather than a voice of clear moral insight. Does it belong to the American wives, retaining the previous sentence's whisper of scandal? Or has the omniscient historian picked up the thread here, returning us to a world of objective fact? And what about the "would" of "would adopt it"? If part of the local gossip, the adoption could range from speculative to probable; if spoken from the narrator's present, it would be a fait accompli. Regardless, adoption is figured here as a thing taken for granted. As a geopolitical solution, its potential ramifications are dismissed in their very expression.

REPRESENTATIONS 6.  ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 51–78.  DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2023.163.4.51.

The vagueness of agency and moral reasoning in this sentence reflects the historical formalization of transnational adoption. Between the dual narrative temporalities of this sentence as character speech and historian's narration, adoption of these "towheaded," mixed-race children would transition from an informal possibility to an established practice of moving children across borders, from a collection of ad hoc processes to a matter overseen by social welfare professionals and immigration services. In the years to come, transnational adoption would prove an established option for modern family-making in the West and part of America's humanitarian repertoire in subsequent conflicts. Korea, too, would continue to be one of the top "sending countries" of children to the US, with an estimated ten percent of all Korean Americans having been adopted from abroad.[3]

Despite the professionalization and legalization of transnational adoption, this kinship practice has never quite resolved one of its most controversial problems: whether the removal of children from their birth families is in the "best interests of the child," especially when these measures sever the child from their country of origin. These geographical, social, and cultural distances make transnational adoption different in kind from domestic variants, a difference that continues to inform adoption practice, policymaking, and discourse.[4] This essay examines one of the first versions of this debate as it surfaced during the Korean War: that of "proxy adoption." In proxy adoptions, prospective adoptive parents adopted their children in foreign courts in absentia, designating a representative to stand in their stead. This allowed parents to adopt without ever having met the child in question, and without having been vetted by a social welfare agency. To return to Fehrenbach's anecdote, it's telling that the potential adopters were not the American wives in Seoul but rather "some American couple," evidently at a distance from the situation on the ground. This distance would prove one of the most controversial elements of proxy adoption, leading to the practice's prohibition under the 1961 Immigration and Nationality Act, which required that parents establish that they "personally saw and observed the child prior to or during the adoption proceedings."[5] The force of this clause, however, was soon undone by Immigration and Naturalization Service commissioner Joseph Swing, whose interpretation of the law permitted Americans to continue adopting sight unseen "as long as they proved to a licensed adoption agency that they intended to re-adopt the child in the United States."[6]

What do we see when comparing the "proxies" of proxy war and proxy adoption? My aim here is not to prove any causal link but rather to ask what insights we might glean when reading these two forms of "standing in for" together and against each other, especially as representational strategies. For at their heart is a concern over what it means to conduct the business of war at a distance: whether that is war-making or caretaking, hand-to-hand combat

or humanitarian aid. To do something by proxy means to engage a certain kind of signification in which one acts "by the agency of another; by or through a substitute; not in person."[7] This logic of substitution is especially fraught as the things we tend to do by proxy aren't just everyday actions but weight-bearing ones, such as voting, parenting, marrying, fighting, and adopting. This array suggests that to engage a proxy is to exercise a form of power or the privilege of extending yourself beyond yourself. It thus requires a certain trust in the relationships involved as well as in the system that allows for such an exchange of function. For the critical displacement of agency opens the possibility for the proxy to act infelicitously, a source of considerable anxiety for the agent engaging the proxy. Despite their potential to behave badly, however, the proxy is never their own agent: a secondariness mandated by the very structure of the proxy.

This focus on the proxy allows us to see the stakes of both proxy war and proxy adoption, which crucially extend personal and political agency while also effacing their effects on the proxy and those around them. Proxy logic ultimately decreases the risk, responsibility, and human cost of war for those employing the proxy while occluding the Korean War's status as a civil and postcolonial conflict that has yet to reach an end. Proxy adoption also allowed parents to adopt from afar with less cost and contact and fewer legal safeguards, shortcuts justified by wartime emergency and the need to save mixed-race children from a country that wouldn't accept them. Representations of Korean adoption likewise engaged their own substitutions, heightening the visibility of adoption's moral issues while also obscuring the violence inflicted through its gesture of repair. One structural difference between the proxies of proxy war and adoption, however, lies in the person of the proxy. As it turns out, the debate over proxy adoptions was not in the end about adopting in foreign courts (that is, the "standing in for") but rather about who had control over the process: professionals or nonprofessionals. The scandal of the adoptive proxy was thus itself played out by proxy, reframed in ways that overwrote its inevitable remainder.

These practices of war and kinship were intimately connected, even mutually articulated. Previous work in critical adoption studies and Asian American studies has elaborated the ways Korean adoption worked ideologically to prove that the Asian could be an ally of the US during the Cold War and, in turn, that the US was able to tolerate or even embrace racial minorities, despite its history of racial violence.[8] By this logic, kinship became a way of waging "war by other means," one that allowed ordinary Americans to participate in the Cold War by extending its combat into the family home. Adoption's humanitarian ethos also tempered the threat of the US's growing military empire, which, as Susie Woo puts it, was "cloaked by scripts of care that made US power difficult to detect."[9] Indeed, as Josephine Nock-Hee

Park argues, Korea's new kind of war "substitute[d] military victory with militarization," an additional proxy logic that reached its apotheosis through humanitarian rescue.[10]

This essay is informed by these discussions of empire, militarism, and racial ideology. Its focus, however, is a different set of proxy experiences that informs the experience of adoption: that of the adoptee, who is asked to assume the remainder of her adoption's asymmetry. If proxy adoption is meant to redeem the violence of proxy wars, what is striking about this formulation is how familial substitution is meant to repair the child's relinquishment, a wound itself created and conditioned by war. What distinguishes the migration of adoptees from that of other immigrants is precisely this enfolding into the American family: a narrative that requires the adoptee to accept their adoptive family not as proxies for their birth family but as their very own. This is the founding fiction of adoption, a mode of intimate violence that refuses to admit the traumas of adoption or its enabling structures of war, poverty, racism, and reproductive injustice. Adoption continues to rely on the proxy logic so crucial to the moment of its formation: the idea that work done by proxy can effect the work of the original, even as it displaces or stands in for it. But it also simultaneously erases the proxy relationship, which gets overwritten by the rhetoric of rescue, sentimentalism, colorblindness, or multiculturalism. The secondary becomes naturalized as the primary, its substitution forgotten.[11] The substitutive violence of proxy wars thus continues through transnational adoption, with the self-erasing proxy as its final and perhaps most violent stage.

## I. By "Remote Control": The Korean War and the Adoptive Family

Though not the first proxy war of the Cold War, Korea was perhaps the first full expression of one, beginning squarely after the stated commitments of the Truman Doctrine, the NATO alliance, and the Marshall Plan.[12] With the US and its allies supporting South Korea while the Soviet Union and China supported North Korea, the Korean War was an important test case in how to wage war indirectly, allowing brutal "hot" wars in smaller countries to stand in for direct confrontation between the Cold War superpowers. To the US, the Korean War is often counted as military success, insofar as the US was able to align its objectives with the South Korean government's through "carefully calibrated rewards and punishments," preventing North Korea from imposing communist rule over the Korean peninsula.[13]

To study the Korean War as a US proxy war thus raises a key characteristic of Cold War war-making: the phenomenon of conducting war *indirectly*. Literary scholars have always been interested in the experience of war at

a distance, described by Mary Favret as "the dislocated experience that is modern wartime: the experience of war mediated, of time and times unmoored, of feeling intensified but also adrift."[14] But what happens when war is experienced not only at a distance, but also through a racial foreigner whose alliances are already suspect? After all, the proxy is never quite the same as the original. There's something impoverished, even fictional, about doing things by proxy. In deputizing someone else to act in one's place, there's always the risk of one's intention being thwarted by the stand-in. This representational unease is palpable in academic studies of proxy wars, which metaphorize the relationship between principal and local agent through the language of surrogacy, dependency, and benefaction. Proxies are taken as untrustworthy subjects who threaten to misbehave or act in their own interests, and who must therefore be controlled through a system of incentives and reprimands.[15]

This unease was evident in early Cold War cultural production, which likewise sought tropes that could make sense of America's new relationship to the Asian proxy. As Christina Klein has shown, the development of this language often involved middlebrow sentimentalism, through which Cold War alliances with Asia were translated into personal, positive relationships between Western and Asian characters. Through these relationships, American audiences were invited to re-envision the US's role in the world not as conquest but as the pursuit of connection and exchange, a tempering of US expansionism that Klein calls "Cold War Orientalism."[16] This turn to affiliation informed the discourse of the Asian "friendly," a figure Josephine Nock-Hee Park describes as "the proxy governed by metaphors of alliance, treated with open contempt, and militated into service."[17] Houseboy, mascot, orphan, bride: the friendly strategically wielded and uncovered the political logic of friendship and "extended her claim on her powerful ally to make her way to America—even though proxies were always meant to stay offshore."[18]

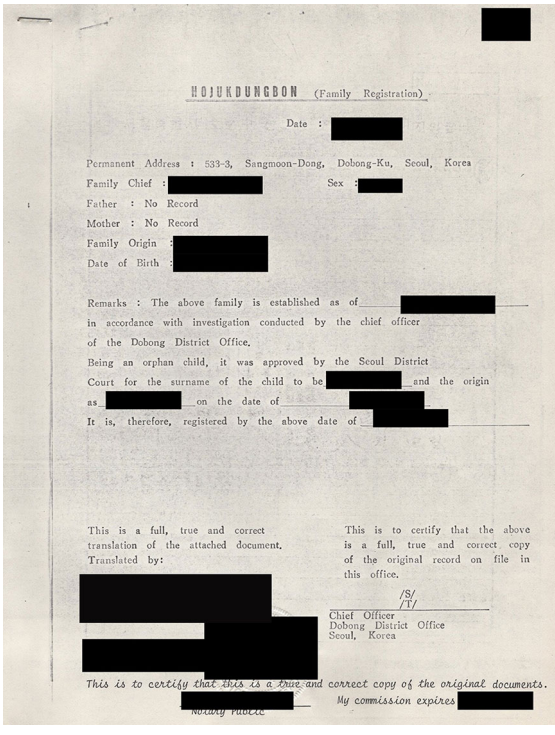
Proxy logic also informs "brainwashing," one of the most powerful negative representational devices of the Cold War, which entered American consciousness during the Korean War when American POWs began falsely confessing egregious war crimes to the public and refusing repatriation to the US. Perhaps the most familiar literary example of brainwashing appears in the urtext of Cold War literature: Richard Condon's 1959 novel *The Manchurian Candidate*, adapted for film in 1962. Condon's book recounts the capture of a US platoon during the Korean War by the Soviets and Chinese, who turn them into sleeper agents for a global communist conspiracy. This new method of mind control is the brainchild of Yen Lo, an updated Fu Manchu character:

> [Yen Lo's] meaningful goal was to implant in the subject's mind the predominant motive, which was that of submitting to the operator's commands; to construct behavior which would at all times strive to put the operator's exact intentions into execution as if the subject were playing a game or acting a part; and to cause a redirection of his movements by remote control through second parties, or third or fiftieth parties, twelve thousand miles removed from the original commands if necessary.[19]

Through this device, *The Manchurian Candidate* activates orientalist anxiety about "the mysterious power of the East," transforming earlier "yellow peril" fears into what scholars have called "techno-orientalism."[20] But if we read brainwashing in light of proxy warfare, we realize that it is just the proxy perfected: a subject whose actions are executed without flaw; whose movements can be controlled to the *n*th degree; and, most importantly, whose submission is internally planted from without. The conceit of the "remote control" brings this distance into sharp relief, recalling both the trope of "push-button warfare" that, until Hiroshima and Nagasaki, only existed in fiction and the consumer electronic device recently introduced to American homes.[21] While Condon's reference to "remote control" could be read as indexing the Cold War fear of nuclear annihilation, I read it as indexing the more precise fear of proxy warfare come home: the Cold War strategy perfected in the East and then turned back against the US.

This anxiety about the proxy returned home reveals a broader anxiety about proxy logic itself and the impossibility of ever reducing war to something that happens "over there." Indeed, there are serious limitations to reading the Korean War only as a US proxy war, and a successful one at that.[22] For while the Korean War may be considered limited from the perspective of Cold War history, it also hasn't technically ended, as both sides agreed to an armistice rather than to a peace treaty. This long temporality of war raises the question of whether there's a difference between unlimited war and a war without end: that is, whether the original reasoning for proxy wars was justified if one avoids a synchronic unlimited war but maintains a diachronic limited war. Likewise, if one goal of a Cold War proxy war was to prevent nuclear holocaust, Korea is a complicated success story, given the development of and continued threat from North Korea's nuclear infrastructure. It seems then that a proxy war is only a proxy war from the perspective of the superior power, or within a limited definition of the term.

If we take the Korean War within a more globalized framework, or what Odd Arne Westad has called "the Global Cold War," it becomes clear that the Korean War was never reducible to a proxy war. Instead, it was also (and perhaps primarily) a civil war over the fate of Korea's decolonization, which pitted two contested visions of postcolonial self and nationhood against each other.[23] In this light, the war was largely fought on the level of kinship, with



HOJUKDUNGBON (Family Registration)

Date : [redacted]

Permanent Address : 533-3, Sangmoon-Dong, Dobong-Ku, Seoul, Korea
Family Chief : [redacted] Sex : [redacted]
Father : No Record
Mother : No Record
Family Origin : [redacted]
Date of Birth : [redacted]

Remarks : The above family is established as of [redacted]
in accordance with investigation conducted by the chief officer
of the Dobong District Office.
Being an orphan child, it was approved by the Seoul District
Court for the surname of the child to be [redacted] and the origin
as [redacted] on the date of [redacted]
It is, therefore, registered by the above date of [redacted]

This is a full, true and correct translation of the attached document.
Translated by: [redacted]

This is to certify that the above is a full, true and correct copy of the original record on file in this office.

/S/
/T/
Chief Officer
Dobong District Office
Seoul, Korea

This is to certify that this is a true and correct copy of the original documents.
[redacted]
Notary Public
My commission expires [redacted]

FIGURE 1. An orphan *hojuk* for a Korea Social Service adoptee. Courtesy of Paperslip LLC, https://www.paperslip.org/orphanization-part-ii.

family separation and collective liability being its main weapons.[24] Both practices worked by breaking the chains of kinship, whether across the 38th parallel or due to suspected communist leanings. Transnational adoption provides another crucial site for investigating the intimate violence of war. To become adoptable subjects under US law, children had to be excised from their family registries: that is, from Korea's patrilineal *hoju* system, recently abolished in South Korea for its gender inequalities. As such, most were issued an "orphan *hojuk*" that recognized them as the head of their family ("Family Chief") while also erasing any evidence of their birth parents (fig. 1).[25]

The orphan *hojuk* is an exceptional document, one that exists only inside Korea's adoption system. Unlike patriarchal family registries, these papers were issued to male and female alike, in a singular recognition and erasure of girl children. What's more, this one-page document not only orphans a child but strips them of their citizenship, family, sociality, and history even as it makes them into new legal subjects.[26] If, as Heonik Kwon puts it, "the milieu of human intimacy became the primary target of the politics of the Korean War," these kinship wounds continued to be felt long after the armistice was signed precisely through the continuation of transnational adoption.[27]

Understanding the Korean War as mere proxy war occludes this fundamental dimension: that waging a war by proxy affects not only the proxies themselves but also the inheritors of the war, who have no option but to keep playing out its violent means.

The postwar movement of children across borders had its origins in and around the Second World War, when countries in war-torn Europe sent children to First World countries, including the United States, Canada, and New Zealand.[28] President Truman's directive of December 22, 1945, admitted over 1,300 European children to the US under refugee legislation.[29] This emergency measure was followed by the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 (DPA), which provided three thousand special nonquota immigration visas to "eligible displaced orphans."[30] It wasn't until the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 (RRA) that the word "adoption" was used at all. Like the earlier DPA, the RRA allowed for the admittance of four thousand "foreign refugee orphans" between 1953 and 1956 through nonquota visas. Instead of only asking for general assurances that the orphan "will be cared for properly," however, the RRA stipulated the adoption of these orphans "by a United States citizen and spouse," either completed abroad or to be completed upon admittance into the United States.[31] The RRA also critically expanded who could count as an "orphan." Instead of the DPA's straightforward definition of a child turned orphan "because of the death or disappearance of both parents," now an orphan could still have one living parent as long as "the remaining parent is incapable of providing care for such orphan and has in writing irrevocably released him for emigration and adoption."[32] To become an adoptable subject, then, one need not be an orphan at all. One need only be made an orphan "in writing"—a condition that raises significant questions about consent, coercion, and falsification.

What most differentiated these adoptions from earlier ones was their burgeoning Cold War rhetoric. Through adoption, Korea continued to be a proxy war of the Cold War, with the successful assimilation of each Korean orphan proof of democracy's success. Arissa H. Oh calls this ideology "Christian Americanism," which "took on the adoption of Korean GI babies as a kind of missionary work, a way for Americans to participate in their country's Cold War project of proving its racial liberalism and winning the allegiance of newly independent countries around the world."[33] This justification recalls Gayatri Spivak's characterization of British colonialism, specifically its abolition of widow immolation, as a process in which "white men are saving brown women from brown men."[34] Here, the sentence would be something like "white families are saving yellow children from yellow families," which likewise turns the protection of the subaltern, or Asian child, from her own kind into a signifier of an enlightened society.

This mode of adoption found a particularly vocal advocate in the figure of Harry Holt, a farmer and Christian missionary from Creswell, Oregon, who became the figurehead for US adoptions in Korea and for the movement of transnational adoption writ large. Moved by a documentary on "G. I. Babies" of the Korean War shown in church, Holt and his wife, Bertha, formed the Holt Adoption Program to facilitate transnational adoptions and encouraged their supporters to pressure Congress to allow more adoptions. The Holts themselves depended on such ad hoc legislation, with the Private Law 475 of August 11, 1955 ("An Act for the Relief of Certain Korean War Orphans" or the "Holt Bill") allowing them to adopt a total of eight Korean children, six more than the two allowed by the RRA.

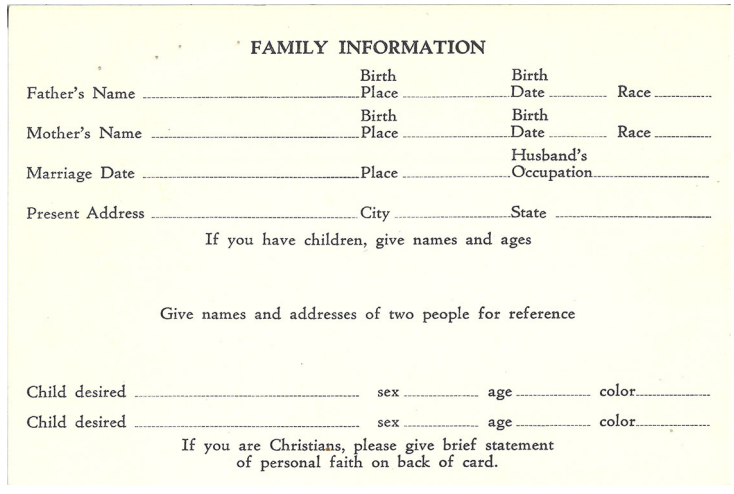
Scholarship has rightfully questioned the explanatory power of Holt as originator of transnational adoption, painting a more complex picture of the other forces and agents that helped to catalyze the practice. Nevertheless, the Holts modeled key forms of adoption rhetoric that persist to this day. In particular, they were passionate spokespeople for proxy adoptions, becoming synonymous with the practice in the eyes of the media and social welfare establishments. The Holts did not invent proxy adoptions, but in the case of Korean war orphans they perfected it, along with the use of charter flights to transport groups of children to the US. These infrastructures of adoption proved instrumental in getting the practice off the ground quickly and at a larger scale than ever before.[35] The Holts' defense of the practice was grounded in wartime expediency and economic enablement: they wanted to "save" as many children as they could while allowing the "right" kind of people to afford the costs of adoption. As Harry explained in one of his "Dear Friends" newsletters sent to his followers, "People who are financially able and can spend two or three months in a foreign country can adopt war orphans; however, most people who have big hearts are not able to do this."[36] This judgment and its assumptions soon came under fire, revealing what exactly was at stake in these proxy adoptions in the Cold War's first proxy war.

## II. "Sight Unseen": The Noncritique of Proxy Adoptions

Proxy adoptions sat uneasily with the development of adoption standards in the United States. From about 1900 to 1945, adoption became highly regulated, with measures including child testing, probation periods, record keeping, case studies, and postplacement supervision done by professional social workers contributing to its ethos of standardization.[37] Historian Ellen Herman calls this "kinship by design," a "campaign to rationalize kinship" whose "unprecedented and ambitious goal was to conquer chance and vanquish uncertainty" for adoptive families.[38] This coincided with the advent

of "stranger adoption," or adoption by nonrelatives, as well as an increased drive by middle-class couples, medical professionals, and religious and civic leaders to place children in permanent rather than foster homes.[39] This push toward permanent placement was recognized by the Child Welfare League of America's "Minimum Safeguards in Adoption," published in their November 1938 bulletin, which offered suggestions for protecting the adopted child, the adoptive family, and the state.

When it came to proxy adoptions, however, these principles flew out the window. Proxy adoptions could be completed in as little as three months, rather than the one to two years of mainstream social work. In the Holts' case, the process was expedited using two measures of parental fitness: a screening by the American Service Bureau, which did credit checks for life insurance companies, and the "Family Information" card enclosed with Holt's newsletter (fig. 2). This card reveals the parameters structuring the adoptive family: a heterosexual married couple of a certain age and origin, headed and supported by the husband, who could request up to two children based on the Refugee Relief Act. But it also points to some of the tensions, unspoken expectations, and exceptions involved in the practice. Race was taken into consideration insofar as Holt would only place Korean Black children with Black families, with the majority of Korean Black adoptees between 1955 and 1961 processed through Holt's adoption agency.[40] Yet the card notably strips



FAMILY INFORMATION

Father's Name ..... Birth Place ..... Birth Date ..... Race .....

Mother's Name ..... Birth Place ..... Birth Date ..... Race .....

Marriage Date ..... Place ..... Husband's Occupation .....

Present Address ..... City ..... State .....

If you have children, give names and ages

Give names and addresses of two people for reference

Child desired ..... sex ..... age ..... color .....

Child desired ..... sex ..... age ..... color .....

If you are Christians, please give brief statement of personal faith on back of card.

FIGURE 2. Harry Holt's Family Information Card. Series 2, box 10, folder 30 ("Holt, Harry I, 1955–1957"). International Social Service United States of America Branch Records. Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota.

these adoptees of their racial identity, designating them only by "color." Most importantly, the card asked for a "brief statement of personal faith" to be expressed on its back, the only instance of nonstructured information solicited from prospective adoptive parents. Though registered as a conditional ("If you are Christians"), the invitation was in practice a requirement: as Holt clarified in one of his "Dear Friends" letters, "We would rather that you did not fill out this card until you are assured that you are a saved person," language indicating a further preference for evangelical applicants.[41]

Given the abbreviations employed by these measures, it makes sense that proxy adoption's fiercest critics were the social service agencies whose very expertise was being flouted.[42] Within these circles, the topic became a cause célèbre, with celebrity adoption advocates such as author Pearl Buck and actress Jane Russell weighing in on either side of the issue.[43] This debate is most granularly and, in some ways, most movingly registered in the archives of the American Branch of the International Social Service (ISS), an international NGO founded in 1924 to help children and families with complex migration cases. As one of the two major national agencies authorized to handle intercountry adoptions under the RRA, ISS emerged as a major player in transnational adoption.[44] Its files index a growing concern over the practice of proxy adoption, as found in correspondence between ISS officials and various state child welfare agencies who sent ISS examples of questionable or failed placements done by proxy adoption; in articles on the subject reprinted in professional publications such as *Child Welfare* and the *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*; and, most baldly, in their tracking of Harry Holt's activities and publications.

In March 1958, ISS and the Child Welfare League of America sent a questionnaire to the League's membership regarding the phenomenon of proxy adoption, asking members to describe the adoption's arrangement, family information (especially if they'd had previous experience with other adoption agencies), the child's experience, and their evaluation of the placement. The resulting "Study of Proxy Adoptions," or the "Hyde Report," after its authors, found that of seventy-seven families who had adopted by proxy in twenty-nine cases "the adoption had not succeeded or the stability of the placement was in question" due to physical and mental abuse; the failure of adoptive homes; or illness, instability, or other inadequacies of adoptive parents.[45] Taking aim at Holt in particular, the Hyde Report decried the lack of legal protections for those adopted (some of whom "seem to be truly lost children") and the absence of prospective parents during the adoption process, especially the fact that they were able to adopt children "without having seen them first."[46]

"Sight unseen" became a common phrase deployed by proxy adoption's detractors, one that circulated in media representations of the practice,

along with mention of the "tragic consequences" that inevitably followed.[47] As shorthand for the ills of proxy adoption, "sight unseen" speaks to the representational anxiety around employing a proxy, insofar as the action involved takes place without one's presence. The oxymoronic phrase is an Americanism, originally and typically used in reference to commercial exchanges in which one party buys an object without first inspecting it. This taint of the economic was duly critiqued by the Hyde Report, which concluded that "proxy adoptions look back to an earlier time, when children could be deeded by one person to another, like parcels of real estate."[48]

What kind of "seeing" would remedy adopting "sight unseen," however, was another question. The welfare establishment often sidestepped this issue, preferring to emphasize the benefits of legal protection and the importance of vetting all parties involved. But the meaning of such sight can be glimpsed in an early document in the ISS archives: the 1953 report "Experience in Inter-Country Adoptions," circulated and read widely by state public welfare officials and the UN Department of Social Affairs. Written by two ISS consultants, Eugenie Hochfeld and Margaret Valk, the report reviews the ISS's role in facilitating adoptions from Great Britain, Ireland, and Germany, and offers recommendations for future work. One such recommendation was that prospective adoptive parents and children be in relation before the adoption itself. As the authors note, "it is not sound social planning to carry through an adoption of a child whom the family has never seen and with whom no relationship exists at the time of adoption," citing domestic adoption standards of waiting periods and postplacement supervision.[49] Transnational adoption did not allow for such standards to be met and was therefore of increased risk:

> While careful "matching" of a child and the adopters is especially desirable when a child has passed the stage of infancy, and is developing a personality of his own, such "matching" seems more difficult to arrange in inter-country situations unless the prospective American adopters are able to go abroad and to test out through visiting the child or caring for him temporarily how they react to one another.
>
> Otherwise the "matching" must be worked out through consultations between agencies in two countries and with the prospective adopters—so that the selection of a child must be affected by what can only be called remote control.[50]

The report reveals again the specific logic of the proxy, or the difficulty of conducting business at a distance. Here, too, is the fear of "remote control" but, in this instance, limned differently than in *The Manchurian Candidate*. Instead of automation produced by foreign interference (that is, brainwashing), this fear is of automation without foreign influence (either that of the child to be adopted or of their country of origin). What's more, the foreign encounter is prized as a valuable test case or trial of the caretaking to be

done. "Reacting to one another" is valued as much for its possible failure as its success, for its allowance of bad feelings as well as good ones, even if temporarily.

The anxiety over "seeing the child" remains a palpable undercurrent in both national and international law. In the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (1993), the primary document of international adoption law, in-person meetings are not mandated but suggested. Article 19(2) states that the transfer of the child should happen "in secure and appropriate circumstances and, if possible, in the company of the adoptive or prospective adoptive parents."[51] That small phrase "if possible" indexes the fraught debate around proxy adoption, noting its importance while also undoing its gravity. While the law acknowledges that the most "secure and appropriate" way to send the child out of the country is in the physical company of their new adoptive family, it simultaneously gives parents the option to use a third party, allowing a proxy to stand in their stead. Seeing the child is also a determining factor in which immigrant visa they may receive under US immigration law. If the adoptive parents "personally saw and observed the orphan before or during the adoption proceedings abroad" and obtained a final adoption abroad, the child enters on either an IR-3 or IH-3 visa, which grants automatic citizenship upon entrance to the US.[52] If not, the child is issued an IR-4 or IH-4 visa and enters as a Permanent Resident, and is granted citizenship only when parents complete the adoption in the US.[53] Like the Hague Convention, this difference emphasizes but does not fully articulate the meaning that inheres in seeing and observing the adoptee-to-be.

In a way, then, Harry Holt got it right in his newsletter summary of proxy adoption: "Of course, this (proxy adoption) is not like doing it yourself, because someone else has to select the children for you. This, however, holds true when the welfare handles the adoption also."[54] This observation is more than self-defense. Indeed, it points to the inexorable fact that no matter what other safeguards they might offer, intercountry adoptions depended on a third party to choose the child, rather than the adoptive parents doing it themselves.

### III. Seeing, Not Seeing: *Slattery's People* and Humanitarian Reading

Proxy adoption was the social issue of the week for the episode of *Slattery's People* airing on CBS on November 2, 1964. Starring Richard Crenna as the titular state legislator, the civic drama dealt with current affairs such as sex education, abortion, and freedom of speech; while critically praised, it had relatively low ratings and was canceled mid-second season. The episode

"Where Vanished the Tragic Piper?" or "Children of Calamity" features a thinly veiled Harry Holt character, Angus Rosebury, whose adoption agency is in danger of losing its license due to its reliance on proxy adoptions. Slattery, Rosebury's representative, finds himself having to decide between Rosebury's humanitarianism and the expertise of Ms. Donlen, a femme fatale social worker who serves as both love interest and the voice of professional standards. ("She's lobbied the best of us," says a fellow legislator to Slattery. "It's hard to stand up to such objectivism!"[55]) The episode adds a human-interest story through the plight of Jimmy and Annette Rowan, white adoptive parents of five-year-old Korean orphan Judy, who are fighting a court order to relinquish Judy due to Rosebury's legal troubles.

In the episode, the question of meeting the child in their country of origin is moot. Instead, adopting "sight unseen" plays out through a different battle of visibility: that of a welfare professional being able to properly vet adoptive families, whose insufficiencies may not be visible to the humanitarian eye. Holt's stand-in Rosebury prides himself on being able to see the merits of prospective adoptive parents, saying, "I know good people when I see them." Rosebury believes in the evidentiary power of seeing the families so much that he brings several to his hearing. Calling them "a testimonial to the kinds of homes we can find for these children in America," he points to the families mid-trial, asserting, "These are my qualifications. Look at their faces!" Slattery then echoes this logic in his opening presentation to the welfare board: "I don't think you can quarrel with the results. These are happy, well-adjusted children." As he speaks, the camera's eye pans over the families, presenting the visual argument to the viewers at home.

Yet some truths are not so self-evident. As we learn, the Rowans have been hiding their own maladjustments, specifically an "accident" Jimmy had with his rifle that was ruled a suicide attempt by the police. This Chekhovian gun made its first appearance when Slattery meets the Rowans, sticking out their front window in a symbol of Jimmy's "old frontier spirit." News of his attempted suicide, however, shifts the rifle from a symbol of self-defense to one of self-harm, significantly weakening Jimmy's bid for parenthood as well as the militarized American empire he represents. Eventually, Jimmy reveals that his motivation to adopt was not for Judy's sake but for his own: an attempt to shore up his postwar masculinity and infertility ("A man was better off dead if he couldn't have a family, be a father"). This self-interest resulted in the welfare bureau's rejection of the Rowans' application to adopt, leading them to Rosebury's unofficial agency. This history proves the tipping point for Slattery, whose final remarks warn about such selfish rationales:

Most of these proxy, sight-unseen placements have happily worked out well. But what about the other side—the other cases—the scores of cases of heartbreak and suffering that have resulted from this system? The inhuman black market in babies—the cruelty of irresponsible or unstable persons who only want children out of some need within themselves?

With these words, the show lifts the curtain on the selfish motivations that may underlie humanitarian efforts: a surprising critique of a seemingly unassailable moral logic. Yet it also preserves these humanitarian logics even in the act of exposure, asserting the success of most proxy arrangements. Indeed, Slattery goes on to suggest that Rosebury continue his work in tandem with the Department of Social Welfare, proposing that "[the department] can benefit from his great humanity, his dedication—but surely the greatest benefit would be to the children themselves."

The episode's conclusion adds moral complexity to this decision by turning to the adoptee herself. As Judy is about to be taken away by social services, Jimmy's rifle appears once more, turned this time toward Slattery. But the scene takes a decisive turn when Judy appears, frightened, at her bedroom door. This image echoes our first glimpse of Judy, who, at the episode's start, peeked shyly from her doorway, smiling and offering confirmation that she's "happy here" (fig. 3). By the end, however, such happiness has been shattered (fig. 4). Poised at the threshold of private and public, family and the law, these images in the doorway bookend the episode with two fraught tests of seeing the adoptee. In the first, Judy appears proof positive of a well-

FIGURES 3 and 4. "Are you happy here?"; an unhappy Judy. Stills from "Children of Calamity" or "Question: Where Vanished the Tragic Piper?," *Slattery's People*, season 1, episode 7, 2:45 and 46:26. Directed by Lamont Johnson. Aired November 2, 1964, CBS. Online version available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0I1aOO4JaU.

adjusted child, answering the lawyer's often leading questions in the affirmative ("You want to stay here, don't ya?" "Yes"). In the second, Judy suggests a different conclusion, her tears indicting her father's violence. With this, Judy has once again become a child to be saved, this time from her white adoptive family rather than her Korean one. Thus even though the episode critiques the assertion that one could know good (white) adopters when one sees them, it still believes that it can read the pain of the racial other, or humanitarian object, as unimpeachable evidence of their needing to be saved. This logic foregrounds the importance of the law and social services, whose agency and judgment are best able to assess Judy's situation. To recall Spivak's characterization of colonial logic, in this case, "white professionals are saving yellow children from (bad) white families." With this, *Slattery's People* rewrites without replacing the racial script of military humanitarianism and its defense of human rights, a discourse that, as Makau Mutua and others have shown, depends upon a "modern" sensibility defined in opposition to the "barbarian" who is incapable of lawfulness.[56] Instead, it engages a mode of humanitarian reading that, as Joseph Slaughter describes, "invites us to project ourselves not into the position of the sufferer but into the position of the humanitarian, the subject position of one who already recognizes the human dignity of the wounded and attempts to relieve their suffering."[57]

Both proxy adopter Rosebury and social worker Donlen emblematize this humanitarian logic. Though Rosebury describes his time in Korea through orientalist tropes ("You haven't been there. You haven't seen it. Hordes of tiny children"), it is precisely his ability to "see it" that distinguishes him from the callous, self-interested Jimmy. And lest the new American lawfulness of welfare professionalism be charged as unfeeling, Donlen likewise reveals her work to be founded on an act of seeing: as she confesses to Slattery, "I was in Korea during the war. I was a nurse in a children's home when our own American planes dropped napalm bombs on it by mistake. Eighty-six children were burned to death on the spot. I was one of the few survivors. Don't tell me about misery."[58] In reaffirming the sentimental histories and witnessing of both Rosebury and Donlen, the episode admits Rosebury's humanitarianism even as it denounces it: a double bind that makes him both antagonist and hero. Such a reading is supported by the episode's title, "Where Vanished the Tragic Piper?," which suggests a tragic end for Harry Holt (called the "Pied Piper" by the press) and his seemingly outdated methods, transforming him into the ultimate object of sympathy.[59] (This was evidently the conclusion of adoption advocates, who, identifying with the "tragic piper," denounced the show for its portrayal of the Holt Adoption Program, hoping it would never air again.[60])

These displacements of abstraction for sympathy, or the humanitarian for the adoptee, speak to the proxy logics of Cold War transnational


FIGURE 5 and 6. Shot: Jimmy's monologue; reverse shot: Judy's tears, close-up. Stills from "Children of Calamity," *Slattery's People,* 47:38 and 47:55.

adoption. The question, then, becomes whether these substitutions can ever be stopped or interrupted, and where, exactly, they might end. The episode's final close-up on Judy, now in Slattery's arms, with the rifle sighted-in on her and Slattery alike, raises the question of whether or how its audience can perceive the wounds of the adoptee herself. After Slattery attempts a final appeal to Jimmy's parental instincts, Jimmy begins a wild monologue: "What about me? Oh I'm here, you know. I see and I feel, you know. I look around, I have wants. Yeah, go on. Take the kid. I never wanted her in my house to begin with, you know that." The effect of these words is registered by a shot/reverse shot, the camera switching from Jimmy to a close-up on Judy and back again (figs. 5 and 6). This reverse shot is the show's coup de grâce against the risks of proxy adoption. Though this alternating camera pattern is typically used to establish subjects in conversation with each other, Jimmy is not looking at Judy as he speaks but rather at Slattery, underscoring a fundamental lack of communication between parent and child. This imbalance proves Jimmy once and for all the bad father he's always been. This camerawork establishes the violence inflicted on Judy by her adoption, formally enacting its asymmetries.

Even so, the camera's employment of the close-up also promises a sort of revelation. Inviting us to face Judy head-on, the camera brings the viewer physically lower than any of the adults towering above her, establishing for us a unique line of sight that calls attention to itself as a potential moment of exposure. Though Judy's expression might be read as aligning with Slattery's judgment—further verifying it by proxy—there is also an ethical opening here, one that admits the possibility of reading otherwise. For Jimmy's failure as an adoptive father is not the only trauma available here. Through Judy, we might apprehend other, less readily managed wounds,

whether her unease around the social service workers; her attachment to Jimmy and Annette, soon to be severed; or, more simply, her being relinquished once again.

### IV. Reading by Proxy: Adoption's Double Vision

*Slattery's People* offered a rare contemporary account of adoption gone wrong, even though, as I've shown, it manages to defend both practitioners and detractors of proxy adoption. In most cases, however, adoption was described as a startling success, surpassing even the professional expectations of the welfare establishment. This success was communicated through the press's "meticulously conceived" accounts of assimilation in newspapers and popular magazines, including depictions of the "all-American" adoptive family, whose expectant wait for the child finally ends as they meet at the airport, and the pliable adoptee, usually a "full-blooded" Korean, who has escaped poverty-stricken Korea and welcomes being surrounded by American commodities.[61] Like other immigrants and refugees, adoptees were expected to be grateful for the chance to make a life in America, an affective burden Mimi T. Nguyen calls the "gift of freedom."[62] This gratefulness marked adoptees as "good" Koreans and the most model of model minorities, yielding to their seemingly privileged subject position of being "chosen" and "rescued" by American families. These formal, affective, and ideological conventions kept the adoptee "sight unseen" to a degree, unable to be seen in ways that might counter or otherwise trouble their eminently legible script.

That these subjects can only be accessed in highly mediated form is an epistemological conundrum often faced by those seeking to recover minoritized subjects.[63] One way to look for these overwritten or occluded subjects is thus through the language of trauma, transgenerational haunting, and ghosts, which allows a thinking through of the distance, repression, and secondariness involved. In adoption-specific discourses and spaces, for instance, concepts such as the "primal wound," "ghost kingdom," and "being in the fog" have been used to describe the experience of being adopted.[64] Literature also provides a privileged place for "seeing" the adoptee outside the sentimental scripts of adoption, particularly in novelistic representations of the Korean War, including Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1996), Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002), and Chang-rae Lee's *The Surrendered* (2008). These works resituate adoption within the violent contexts of war, entangling the adoptee in complex, intimate relation to her history, kin, and community. Still, the adoptee often occupies a spectral role in these accounts, coming in

and out of focus through various characters such as the child waiting to be adopted, or the child aborted or killed before being adopted.

These psychic and literary languages offer two strong accounts of how we might see the adoptee, retrospectively countering the scripts of assimilation with those of loss and haunting. And yet I find myself coming back to these scripts in the moment of their formation, seeking touchpoints, however small, that might reveal something of the adoptee beyond their routinization through discourses of imperialism and humanitarianism. As Catherine Ceniza Choy notes, adoptees were never silent. Yet Choy's pathbreaking account of transnational adoption also leaves their words "glossed over," a decision she attributes to the fact that adoptees' words were always "paraphrased and documented secondhand by a social worker, an adoptive parent, or a translator."[65] I'm interested in how adoptees surface in the archive through these proxies. Their representation expresses what Ann Laura Stoler calls "epistemic anxieties," the tremors of uncertainty or illegibility that unsettle the administrative order of things.[66] In what follows, I heed Stoler's call to approach archives as "condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety rather than as skewed and biased sources," which requires reading along rather than against the archival grain.[67] In doing so, we find other narratives of the adoption experience, ones that materialize even at a distance. Though this way of looking may not end the replications of proxy logic, its temporary openings or suspensions admit other kinds of affect, desire, and intention into the proxy relationship.

Such irruptions appear both mundane and unexpected. When eight-year-old Soong Kil Hong arrived in America on April 27, 1955, a reporter noted that Soong "can't erase the terror the war etched on his young face even if he's getting his first taste of an ice cream cone" (fig. 7).[68] Like Judy's tears, Soong's posture and affect are supposed to be eminently legible, standing in marked contrast to the enthusiasm of his "flight pal" offering him ice cream. The caption, "War—and a Child's Wound," places his refusal to play the grateful subject squarely under the sign of war, dispelling concern that his fear might stem from his impending adoption. This wartime trauma is reiterated in the description of Soong—"orphaned at 3 and underwent amputation of his leg when Reds machine-gunned his home"—which positions him as a victim of communism in need of saving.[69] Though war relief images also relied on this political logic, arrival images such as Soong's raise the question of whether American homes would be enough to heal the wounds of war, or, more troublingly, whether the wounds of war could also be those of adoption itself.[70] Rather than a symbol of humanitarian relief, we might read these images as a reminder that there was always a time before, whose heterogeneity cannot be ameliorated or even absorbed by the promise of a better life.


FIGURE 7. Soong Kil Hong. In "War—And a Child's Wound," *Mirror and Daily News* (Los Angeles), April 27, 1955, 13.

Adoptees' ugly feelings are ineradicable from the archive and appear even in moments of triumphant celebration. Take, for instance, the *Washington Post*'s coverage of Harry Holt's inaugural baby lift, which conveys the children's anxiety and pain:

> Some were carried by newsmen, customs officials and passengers. Others toddled along uncertainly, threatening every minute to get lost. Their faces were streaked with tears and their noses were running, defying the best efforts of Holt, a nurse and co-operating passengers to mop them fast enough.[71]

Tears, snot, and toddling: bodily functions break through the most fervent of humanitarian plans. Entitled "'Pied Piper' Corrals 12 Korean Babies," the article captures both the new frontier that was transnational adoption and its haphazard feel: the babies are both cattle to be corralled and unruly subjects. That those walking were "threatening every minute to get lost" is an evocative phrase, signifying both immediate and perpetual danger. Again, these children's trauma is not absent from these accounts. Its translation or secondhand nature is not even obscured; instead, it surfaces. These accounts thus suggest a double vision, one that acknowledges pain despite the expectation to be grateful for the very thing causing it.

The most surprising irruptions by adoptees, however, are found in the very bureaucratic archives that sought to manage them. In a 1956 conference paper, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," Margaret Valk, co-author of the earlier ISS report "Experience in Inter-Country Adoptions" (1953), sought to justify the practice of transnational adoption. Her paper catalogues the "remarkable" response of adoptive parents, welfare agencies, and adoptees themselves to the situation of mixed-race Korean American orphans, a common refrain in these follow-up studies.[72] Though the paper describes its method as "observation," "description," and "report," there are certain sentences that escape their generic containment. Take, for instance, the child who appears at the end of a series of examples of adoptees' rapidity in learning English:

> [redacted], aged four, has a fine extensive vocabulary. The parents attribute this to neighbor children who delighted in sitting with [redacted] by the hour teaching him simple words. He has one of the best vocabularies that I have noticed among the overseas children and seems perfectly at ease when talking with an individual. He has an inquiring mind and needs to have things explained when he does not understand them. His father mentioned the word "parking." [redacted] immediately asked, "What does parking mean, Daddy?" His father proceeded to explain, giving all the details of what is involved in parking a car. When he did not understand a word, [redacted] would stop the parent to ask what it meant. His parents feel that he will want to go to college and have purchased insurance for him to this end.
>
> (Incidentally, during his first week of placement this child had chanted over and over again in Korean, "I want to go home.")

How are we to read this parenthetical remark, which closes the list but also dangles from it? What happens to this perfectly American narrative—a boy, his father, a car, and college insurance—when its troubled origins are revealed? What does it mean when the child's perfectly controlled speech acts of explanation, definition, and pausing for clarification are anteceded by his chanting, over and over, in a mother tongue that isn't even transliterated here, "I want to go home"? Perhaps the Valk of 1956 knew a bit more than the Valk of 1953. Perhaps she allows this slippage, heavily qualified, to enter her prose, even as she is defending the practice of adoption.

But let us put aside the desire to read like a humanitarian or even a social worker. Instead, let us speculate on what might have been said, while acknowledging the impossibility of ever accessing the child's direct speech through these various proxy representations.[73] That occasion, inflection, and direction are absent here multiplies its possibilities. Was it 집에 갈래, a simple version of want that could either be spoken to oneself or to an adult? Was it 집에 가고 싶어, "I *would* like to go home"? Or was it a more formal expression, 집에 갈래요, a more mature construction used with an adult, indicating the

need to tell someone that he wanted to go home? Or did the child simply say 엄마 보고싶다, "I miss Mom"?[74]

Any reading of the "proxy" of "proxy wars" and "proxy adoptions" has to take into account the incongruencies of these seemingly banal turns of phrase: the terror of war "even" when getting the first taste of ice cream; a child threatening every minute to get lost; the chanting of "I want to go home" labeled as mere incident; or, to return to this article's opening, the "child, towheaded yet," that "some American couple would, of course, adopt." What the "proxies" of proxy warfare and proxy adoption share, then, is the way "proxy" works as a strange kind of signifier: a modifier whose implications, though indicated, remain unknown. In these terms, "standing in for" is never quite the same as being on the ground or doing it yourself. Though the proxy allows for a certain work to be done on one's behalf, it forgets that the injury done is precisely through its mode of representation, which allows for the erasure of some through the presence of another, whether those some are the millions of Koreans killed and kinship chains broken due to the war and its aftermath, or the children that continue to be sent away through practices of transnational adoption—people for whom this was no proxy.

## Notes

The author would like to thank her research assistant, Zhe Geng, for helping to get this project off the ground; archivist Linnea M. Anderson and student helpers for facilitating my trip to the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota; participants in the symposium "By Other Means: The Cold War and U.S. Empire in Asia" at Wellesley College's Suzy Newhouse Center for the Humanities, as well as in the seminar "Transnational Adoption, Cold War Militarism, and Literary Creation" at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, where versions of this paper were delivered; Theo Davis, Josh Kotin, Gage McWeeny, Alan Niles, and John Plotz for their engaging responses; and Yoon Sun Lee and Kent Puckett for occasioning this special issue and their valuable feedback and insights.

1. T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War: The Classic Military History of the Korean War* (New York, 2014), 5.
2. Ibid., 18, emphasis mine.
3. Eleana J. Kim, *Adopted Territory: Transnational Korean Adoptees and the Politics of Belonging* (Durham, NC, 2010), 21.
4. These debates over the social and cultural differences of transnational adoption find domestic counterparts, however, in histories of US transracial adoption: see, for instance, the 1972 statement issued by the National Association of Black Social Workers, which "affirm[ed] the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound

projection of their future"; "Position Statement on Trans-racial Adoptions," September 1972, 1. See also the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act, which gave tribes exclusive jurisdiction over custody proceedings involving an Indian child, and whose constitutionality is currently under review at the Supreme Court.

5. An act to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, and for other purposes; Pub. L. No. 87–301, 75 Stat. (1961).
6. Arissa H. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea: The Cold War Origins of International Adoption* (Stanford, 2015), 150. That same year, South Korea established its own "Act on Special Cases Concerning Orphan Adoption" in light of US practices, seeking further safeguards for Korean children. Yet this act did not require prospective adoptive parents to meet or observe the child, and so proxy adoptions continued apace.
7. *OED Online*, s.v. "proxy, n."
8. For adoption's place in Cold War history, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2003); Catherine Ceniza Choy, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (New York, 2013); SooJin Pate, *From Orphan to Adoptee: U.S. Empire and Genealogies of Korean Adoption* (Minneapolis, 2014); Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*; Susie Woo, *Framed by War: Korean Children and Women at the Crossroads of US Empire* (New York, 2019); and Kori A. Graves, *A War Born Family: African American Adoption in the Wake of the Korean War* (New York, 2020). These military origins continue to shape the practice of transnational adoption and the lives of Korean adoptees: for instance, see Kim, *Adopted Territory*; David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC, 2010); Crystal Mun-hye Baik, *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (Philadelphia, 2019); and Kimberly D. McKee, *Disrupting Kinship: Transnational Politics of Korean Adoption in the United States* (Champaign, 2019).
9. Woo, *Framed by War*, 21.
10. See Josephine Nock-Hee Park, *Cold War Friendships: Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature* (Oxford, 2016), 27, 35.
11. The idea that the substitutions of adoption were positive, even reparative, found powerful expression in John Bowlby's 1952 report, "Maternal Care and Mental Health," which studied the deleterious effects of maternal deprivation and various substitutions for maternal care. Bowlby favors adoption above all options, as "no other arrangement permits continuity of mothering"; John Bowlby, "Maternal Care and Mental Health," 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1952), 101.
12. Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* takes Korea as a tipping point: as the war in which Eisenhower learned "there were limits to the sacrifices most Americans were willing to make in order to extend Americanism abroad"; and as the war that proved "Stalin had left behind any hope that social processes in the Third World by themselves would lead toward socialism." See Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 26, 66. See also Masuda Hajimu, *Cold War Crucible: The Korean Conflict and the Postwar World* (Cambridge, MA, 2015).
13. Julia M. Macdonald, "South Korea, 1950–53: Exogenous Realignment of Preferences," in *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence Through Local Agents*, ed. Eli Berman and David A. Lake (Ithaca, NY, 2019), 28.
14. Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton and Oxford, 2010), 9.
15. Michael Innes emphasizes the self-interest of proxies in his preface to *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates and the Use of Force*, ed. Michael A. Innes

(Washington, DC, 2012), xiii–xvi. Eli Berman, David A. Lake, Gerard Padró i Miquel, and Pierre Yared offer a theoretical framework for understanding proxy wars based on a rewards and punishments system in their introduction to *Proxy Wars: Suppressing Violence through Local Agents*, ed. Eli Berman and David A. Lake (Ithaca, NY, 2019), 1–27.

16. For a discussion of how this Cold War sentimentalism updates and complicates Edward Said's model of orientalism, see Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 15–17.
17. See Park, *Cold War Friendships*, 9.
18. Ibid., 10.
19. Richard Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate* (New York, 2013), 32.
20. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu define "techno-orientalism" as "the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse." See their "Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction," in *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2015), 2.
21. See the conclusion to Rachel Plotnick's *Power Button: A History of Pleasure, Panic, and the Politics of Pushing* (Cambridge, MA, 2018): "Critiques of push buttons in the mid-twentieth century took many forms, and observers continued to fear, as in the past, that the act of pushing buttons would erode human beings' morals and work ethic and, in the worst-case scenario, destroy the planet in a single instant" (237).
22. One might even question the Korean War's status as a war itself. In a news conference four days after the official outbreak of the war on June 25, 1950, President Truman famously denied that the US was at war, later agreeing to a reporter's characterization of the conflict as "a police action under the United Nations"; Harry S. Truman, "The President's News Conference of June 29, 1950," Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, National Archives, https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/179/presidents-news-conference-0.
23. For the Korean War as a civil war over decolonization, see historian Bruce Cumings's *The Origins of the Korean War*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1981, 1990); anthropologist Heonik Kwon's *The Other Cold War* (New York, 2010) and *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (Cambridge, 2020); Daniel Y. Kim's *The Intimacies of Conflict: Cultural Memory and the Korean War* (New York, 2020); and Monica Kim's *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton, 2019).
24. See especially Kwon, *The Other Cold War*, and Kim, *The Intimacies of Conflict*, which meditate on the "intimacy" of targeting kinship; and Clara Han's *Seeing Like a Child: Inheriting the Korean War* (New York, 2020), which uses childhood memories to explore how the war "is dispersed into a domestic life marked by small corrosions and devastating loss" (3).
25. For more on the systemic creation of "orphans," see Lee Kyung-eun's *The Global Orphan Adoption System: South Korea's Impact on Its Origin and Development* (Seoul, 2021) and Paperslip, LLC's "Orphanization Part II," https://www.paperslip.org/orphanization-part-ii. The use of orphan *hojuks* was recently cited as a major problem in the Danish Human Rights Group's application to South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. See "Addition to Danish Korean Rights Group's main document of August 23rd, 2022," Danish Korean Rights Group, delivered November 15, 2022, https://danishkorean.dk/press.
26. For a discussion of the Korean adoptee as a peculiar legal subject in light of Korean laws, kinship norms, and nationalist state policies, see Eleana J. Kim, "Our Adoptee, Our Alien: Transnational Adoptees as Specters of Foreignness

and Family in South Korea," in "Kinship and Globalization," ed. Stephen C. Lubkemann, special issue, *Anthropological Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 497–531. As Kim observes, "In the context of Korean law, (the adoptee) becomes a person with the barest of social identities, and in the context of Korean cultural norms, she lacks the basic requirements of social personhood—namely, family lineage and genealogical history" (521).

27. Kwon, *After the Korean War*, 10.
28. Richard R. Carlson notes that "until 1948 there were no special adoption provisions in federal immigration statutes and no statistical category for prospective adoptive children" in INS records. The only related category recorded was of immigrants "under 16 years of age, unaccompanied by parent": of these, very few entered the United States, averaging only fourteen per year from 1935 to 1945. See Carlson, "Transnational Adoption of Children," *Tulsa Law Journal* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 321.
29. Kristen 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 (Fall 2000): 911. While some of these children were adopted by American families, others were the responsibility of the federal government and private agencies.
30. An act to authorize for a limited time the admission into the United States of certain European displaced persons for permanent residence, and for other purposes; Pub. L. No. 774, 62 Stat. (1948). See Rachel Rains Winslow, *The Best Possible Immigrants: International Adoption and the American Family* (Philadelphia, 2017), which identifies European adoption after WWII as the first international adoptions.
31. An act for the relief of certain refugees, and orphans, and for other purposes; Pub. L. 203, 67 Stat. (1953).
32. Ibid.
33. Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 8. An alternative ideological account can be found in the practice of North Korean adoption, in which North Korean war orphans were touted as "children of national heroes" and either adopted domestically or by families in communist countries. See Tobias Hübinette, "North Korea and Adoption," *Korean Quarterly* 5, no. 4 (Winter 2002/03): 24.
34. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago, 1988), 296.
35. See Oh, *To Save the Children of Korea*, 95–104.
36. Harry Holt, "Dear Friends" letter, undated [est. 1955–57], box 10, folder 30 ("Holt, Harry I, 1955–1957"), International Social Service United States of America Branch records, Social Welfare History Archives, University of Minnesota. The historical records of the International Social Service, United States of America Branch, Inc. (ISS-USA, in Baltimore) on which this study is based are held by the Social Welfare History Archives at the University of Minnesota (SWHA, in Minneapolis). Permission for their use in this research project was granted by ISS-USA. For more information, see http://www.iss-usa.org and http://special.lib.umn.edu/swha. Points of view in this presentation and/or document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or polices of ISS-USA.
37. Ellen Herman, *Kinship by Design: A History of Adoption in the Modern United States* (Chicago, 2013), 1.

38. Ibid.
39. See Arissa H. Oh, "Into the Arms of America: The Korean Roots of International Adoption," PhD diss. (University of Chicago, 2008), 216–17.
40. See Graves, *A War Born Family*, 143–46. These numbers were in part due to the racial inequalities of US adoption policies and practices: as Graves notes, Black families "remained loyal to programs like Holt's once licensed agencies became the gatekeepers of transnational adoption because of the minimal standards Holt used to evaluate families" (146–47).
41. Holt, "Dear Friends" letter, December 27, 1956, box 10, folder 30 ("Holt, Harry I, 1955–1957"), ISS-USA, SWHA. For a nuanced and detailed discussion of Holt's evangelicalism and emphasis on family heroism, see Soojin Chung, *Adopting for God: The Mission to Change America through Transnational Adoption* (New York, 2021), 64–69.
42. Another critique came from the Catholic Church, which aligned itself with social welfare professionals: see Cathi Choi, "Protection Against Good Intentions: The Catholic Role in the Campaign to Ban Proxy Adoption, 1956–1961," *Journal of Policy History* 31, no. 2 (2019): 242–72.
43. Pearl Buck, literary author and founder of Welcome House, registered her opposition to the practice in principle but acknowledged its necessity, noting that "fewer children die if we use proxy adoption." See Homer Bigart, "Pearl Buck Upholds Adoptions by Proxy for Waifs in Korea," *New York Times*, January 7, 1959, 14. Jane Russell, actress and then-president of WAIF-ISS, the intercountry adoption division of ISS, also spoke against the phenomenon, asserting: "We don't like proxy adoption. I wish every attorney in the country would find out for himself the evils to the child of such procedure." See Jane Russell and Susan T. Pettiss, "International Adoptions: Possibilities and Problems," *Summary of Proceedings: Officers, Committees (American Bar Association, Section of Family Law)* (1961): 18.
44. The other agency named was the Catholic Committee for Refugees of the National Catholic Welfare Conference.
45. Laurin and Virginia P. Hyde, "A Study of Proxy Adoptions," sponsored by Child Welfare League of America and International Social Service American Branch (June 1958), 6, box 59, "Study on Proxy Adoptions 1957–1958" folder, Child Welfare League of America records, SWHA.
46. Ibid., 9, 4.
47. An early reference to "sight unseen" is the ISS American Branch's Assistant Director Susan Pettiss's article "A Board Member Speaks," in which she defines the "new term" of proxy adoption as "the adoption of a child in one country by parents residing in another country who were represented in court by proxy. In reality it means finalizing a legal parent-child relationship sight-unseen"; Susan Pettiss, "A Board Member Speaks," *Child Welfare* 34, no. 8 (October 1955): 20. See also the joint statement issued by the Child Welfare League of America and the ISS: "Adopting a child sight-unseen, without legal protection either for children or parents, has already produced many tragic consequences, including the death, beating and abandonment of children"; "Adoptions By Proxy Denounced," *Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, August 1, 1958, A3.
48. Hyde, "A Study of Proxy Adoptions," 20.
49. Eugenie Hochfeld and Margaret A. Valk, *Experience in Inter-Country Adoptions* (New York, 1953), 10. Pettiss underscores the need to test out adoptive relationships in transnational adoption: "The risks involved in an intercountry adoption can be greater than those where a child is placed with a family of his own cultural background, language and mores. It is more than ever important, therefore, that

there be a 'living together period' before the legal adoption decree is finalized. Pictures and correspondence, or even a short acquaintance, are not enough"; Pettiss, "A Board Member Speaks," 21. For a discussion of the development of postplacement measures in domestic US adoption, see Herman, *Kinship by Design*, 72–77.

50. Hochfeld and Valk, *Experience in Inter-Country Adoptions*, 20.
51. "Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption," adopted and opened for signature at the conclusion of the seventeenth session of the Hague Conference on Private International Law, May 29, 1993. The convention was signed by the US in 1994 and by South Korea in 2013.
52. "Your New Child's Immigrant Visa," *US Citizenship and Immigration Services*, https://www.uscis.gov/adoption/bringing-your-internationally-adopted-child-to-the-united-states/your-new-childs-immigrant-visa/your-new-childs-immigrant-visa.
53. While the Child Citizenship Act of 2000 advanced adoptees' rights by not making them dependent on adoptive parents for naturalization, the act did not apply retroactively to those above the age of eighteen before the act's effective date (February 27, 2001). Adoption activists have been lobbying to correct this gap ever since, most recently through the Adoptee Citizenship Act of 2021. For more information, see https://www.adopteesforjustice.org/adoptee-citizenship-act and https://adopteerightslaw.com/adoptee-citizenship-act-status/.
54. Holt, "Dear Friends" letter, undated.
55. James E. Moser and Anthony Lawrence, writers, *Slattery's People*, season 1, episode 7, "Children of Calamity" or "Question: Where Vanished the Tragic Piper?," directed by Lamont Johnson, featuring Richard Crenna. Aired November 2, 1964, on CBS; my transcription.
56. See Makau Mutua's reading of the narrative of human rights as "an epochal contest pitting savages, on the one hand, against victims and saviors, on the other"; Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphors of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 201; and Talal Asad, "Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism," *Critical Inquiry* 41 (Winter 2015): 411–14.
57. Joseph R. Slaughter, "Humanitarian Reading," in *Humanitarianism and Suffering*, ed. Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown (Cambridge, 2009), 94.
58. This narrative recalls that of the 1957 film *Battle Hymn*, in which minister and lieutenant Dean Hess seeks penance for bombing a German orphanage during World War II by caring for Korean War orphans.
59. Though the character of the Pied Piper has a long cultural history, the term found renewed purchase during the Second World War in association with the mass movements of children.
60. Winslow, *The Best Possible Immigrants*, 120.
61. For discussion of representations of Korean adoption in the popular press, see the introduction to Kim Park Nelson's *Invisible Asians: Korean American Adoptees, Asian American Experiences, and Racial Exceptionalism* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2016); Choy, *Global Families*, 105–7; and Woo, *Framed by War*, chap. 4.
62. Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC, 2012). Catherine H. Nguyen's current project, *Children Born of War, Adoptees Made by War*, discusses the meaning of this "gift" in the practice of adoption.
63. Stephen Best has used the language of the "proxy" to describe scholars' relation to the visual record of slavery, insofar as any approach "must always be arrived at

by proxy, and at a deferred relation to the actual event of slavery." See Stephen Best, "Neither Lost Nor Found: Slavery and the Visual Archive," *Representations* 113 (Winter 2011): 152.

64. See Nancy Newton Verrier's influential *The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child* (Baltimore, 1993) and Betty Jean Lifton's "Ghosts in the Adopted Family," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 30, no. 1 (2009): 71–79. The phrase "coming out of the fog" is used widely in the adoptee community to describe coming to terms with the fact and experience of being adopted.
65. Catherine Ceniza Choy, "On Histories and Futures of International Adoption," *Adoption & Culture* 6, no. 2 (2018): 296. I am moved by Choy's return to her original work here, testifying to what she calls the "emotional and intellectual residue" of her research that did not make it into her monograph (295).
66. Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, 2009), 19.
67. Ibid., 20.
68. "War—And a Child's Wound," *Mirror and Daily News* (Los Angeles), April 27, 1955, 13.
69. Ibid.
70. Woo recounts another case of an unsmiling child: Kang Koo Rhee, a Korean orphan described in *Life* as "The Little Boy Who Wouldn't Smile." After he was adopted to the US, *Life* returned to his story, recounting his successful transformation into an American subject. See Woo, *Framed by War*, 131–33.
71. Gene Kramer, "'Pied Piper' Corrals 12 Korean Babies, Flies Them to America for Adoption," *Washington Post* and *Times Herald*, October 14, 1955, 71.
72. Margaret A. Valk, "Adjustment of Korean-American Children in Their American Adoptive Homes," paper presented at 1957 National Conference on Social Welfare, box 10, folder 2, ISS-USA, SWHA. This "adjustment" defied even the clinical experts: "We are somewhat challenged to explain the successful adjustment of almost two-thirds of these transplanted children, some of them severely upset in the early months of their adoptive placements"; Constance Rathbun et al., "Later Adjustment of Children Following Radical Separation from Family and Culture," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 35, no. 3 (April 1965): 609. Recent engagements with adult adoptees by Eleana J. Kim, Kimberly D. McKee, Kit Myers, and Kim Park Nelson offer an important corrective to this conclusion.
73. Hollee McGinnis, Korean adoptee and founder of Also-Known-As, Inc., has reflected on her own use of these words upon arrival to the US when she was three and a half years old: "I would run up to the front door, throw my body up against it and cry and cry and say in Korean, 'Jip e ka le!' . . . Years later my parents learned what my Korean words meant: 'I want to go home'"; Hollee McGinnis, "Who Are You Also Known As," *New York Times*, November 13, 2007.
74. These Korean phrases come from a friend of mine, Angela Choe. As a Korean adoptee myself, I did not have the words.