

*“I’m the same – but I’m not”:
Transracial Adoptees, Hermeneutic
Injustice, and Coalitional Politics*

BEAU KENT¹

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Abstract

This paper aims to achieve two goals: first, to argue that transracial adoptees lack the critical resources to adequately articulate their experiences, which constitutes a hermeneutical injustice. Second, to point towards potential strategies or ways of thinking that could assist adoptees in navigating their experiences which are yet to be widely recognised, both individually and as a community. I will argue that there is a relationality to the adoptee identity which means that there are few conceptual resources that adoptees can draw on that capture their experience at the intersection of white enculturation and a body of colour; this constitutes a hermeneutical injustice. I then provide a potential method for concept generation using Mariana Ortega's notion of 'hometactics' to argue that one way forward may be to engage in a practical 'making-do' rather than try to create more theoretically rigorous and abstract concepts. Finally, I point towards the possibility of coalitional politics through the notion of complex communication in order to create strong political intra and inter-group alliances.

¹ Beau Kent (he/they) is a recent graduate (2023) from the honours philosophy program at the University of Melbourne. He completed a thesis on the phenomenology of transracial, transnational adoptees and the critical phenomenology of the Latina feminist tradition. His philosophical work centres predominantly around critical phenomenology, adoption studies, and deconstruction, but they also have an interest in analytic philosophy of language and social epistemology. Beau currently works as a research assistant at the Alfred Deakin Institute at Deakin University.

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1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to act as a prolegomenon to future work in the philosophy of transracial adoption. Therefore, this analysis will be predominantly exegetical. I wish to achieve two goals: first, to argue that transracial adoptees lack the critical resources to adequately articulate their experiences, which constitutes a hermeneutical injustice. Second, to point towards potential strategies or ways of thinking that could assist adoptees in navigating their experiences which are yet to be widely recognised, both individually and as a community. As a general rule, an individual is a transracial adoptee if they are an adoptee who is of a different race to at least one of their parents who are most likely part of the dominant racial and cultural group. Here, I am clearly casting the net fairly wide but this is intentional. Adoptees have vastly disparate relationships to their parents, their dominant culture, their ethnic, racial and cultural heritage and so on. Therefore it is a clearly hopeless task to try and articulate experiences that *all* adoptees have; this is inconceivable and moreover, unhelpful. The goal then is to articulate adoptee *specific* experiences that arise as a unique result of their positionality. What then, if anything, is common in the experiences of transracial adoptees? Adoptees are forced to draw on conceptual frameworks that only speak to part of their identity. As a result there are few conceptual resources that adoptees can draw on that capture their experience at this intersection. I will demonstrate how this results in systematic hermeneutical injustice. I will then pose the question: what sort of frameworks or tactics should we be employing to engineer and understand concepts that will help better concretise the transracial adoptee experience? I will then discuss the strengths and drawbacks of a decentered 'hometactic' approach which draws on work by Mariana Ortega. To ground the discussion I will be using Jessica Walton's concept of (Re)embodiment from her work on the experiences of South Korean adoptees. I will conclude by talking about the possibility of coalitional politics, both intra and inter-group alliances that adoptees would benefit from, but also point out some potential concerns about assimilation and reductionism.

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2. Hermeneutical Injustice

Hermeneutic Injustice is a term coined by Miranda Fricker that aims to pick out a specific form of epistemic injustice. Fricker defines the term as “the injustice of having some significant area of one’s social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource”². This is owing to the unequal distributions of power between groups when collective social meanings are generated and disseminated, the social positions of some groups leads to unequal hermeneutical participation³. When one group is subject to unequal hermeneutical participation with respect to “some significant area(s) of social experience, members of the disadvantaged group are *hermeneutically marginalised*”⁴. Consolidating these points, we can say that an individual experiences hermeneutical injustice when they:

1. Participate in a culture with social structures that lacks the appropriate concepts or hermeneutical resources to accurately portray an aspect of their experience.
2. Are actively harmed or disadvantaged by this lack of hermeneutical resources.
3. Are affected on a structural level, that is, that this gap in relevant hermeneutical resources is due to membership in a certain social group that is hermeneutically marginalised.⁵

² Miranda Fricker (2010) *Epistemic Injustice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 155.

³ Fricker, 152.

⁴ Fricker, 153.

⁵ Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I defend this particular definition of hermeneutic injustice. In short, I do not believe that Fricker’s account is *better* than the supplementary accounts of hermeneutic injustice given by other philosophers, such as Kristie Dotson or Ariana Falbo. This account could be strengthened by the concepts of contributory justice (Dotson, Kristie (2014) ‘Conceptualising epistemic oppression’, *Social Epistemology*, 28(2), 115–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2013.782585>) and/or Positive/Negative Hermeneutic Injustice (Falbo, Arianna (2022) ‘Hermeneutical injustice: Distortion and conceptual aptness’, *Hypatia*, 37(2), 343–363. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2022.4>). My use of Fricker here relates directly to a hermeneutical lacuna, rather than the denial of uptake (Dotson) or the construction of contradictory controlling images or oppressive distorting concepts (Falbo). Thus, it fits the purposes of my discussion. One potential avenue for thinking about this would be to analyse the distorted image of the adoptee in the public consciousness and media, such as in Hübinette, Tobias (2020) ‘When the others other: Images and representations of transnational adoptees of colour among non-adopted Swedes of colour as reflected in contemporary Swedish minority literature’, *Adoption & Culture*, 8(2), 245–264. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ado.2020.0006>

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Let us quickly demonstrate with one of Fricker's examples. Carmita Wood worked an admin desk job in Cornell University's department of nuclear physics. One professor "seemed unable to keep his hands off her" and engaged in behaviour on multiple occasions that we would now term 'sexual harassment'⁶ (Brownmiller in Fricker, 150). Wood was left stressed and traumatised and eventually resigned from her job but was denied unemployment insurance because she was unable to accurately describe her experience; "Wood was at a loss to describe the hateful episodes". Only much later, in a group with a number of other women who had all had similar experiences, did they finally give a name to this phenomena; "Somebody came up with 'harassment'. *Sexual Harassment!* Instantly we agreed. That's what it was"⁷.

Wood was unable to articulate her experience without the concept of sexual harassment, which satisfies 1. She was denied unemployment insurance on this basis and was thereby harmed, fulfilling 2. And finally 3 is satisfied because the gap in hermeneutical resources Wood experienced was due to the hermeneutical marginalisation of women as a social group (many other women experienced similar wrongs and had no way of conceptualising it).

3. Constructing the Transracial Adoptee Standpoint

This section will aim to (provisionally) provide and answer two key areas of inquiry:

1. What is significant and/or unique to the transracial adoptee's positionality?
2. How does this create hermeneutical injustice? What are some examples of adoptee specific experiences that could be understood as 'properly our own'⁸?

Our initial task will be to roughly demarcate the boundaries of the group.

⁶ Fricker, 150.

⁷ Fricker, 150.

⁸ This is outside the scope of this paper but I hold that transracial adoption problematizes the very notion of proper ownership.

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In preparation, we must begin by elucidating the adoptee positionality itself and its *relationality* to other social groups and standpoints. I am adopting the notion of relationality presented by Sarah Hoagland. For Hoagland, relationality is a key aspect of the way “our subjectivities are formed through our engagements with each other, both individually and culturally”⁹. That is, the social relations and social identities that construct knowers *qua* subjects do not exist separately and autonomously but are rather formed through their interactions with the Other. For example, races and racialised subjects do not pre-exist their relationality with other races: “Whiteness does not exist independently from engagements with people of colour”¹⁰. Crucial to Hoagland’s account is that she is making a strong claim about the ontological status of racialized subjects *as well as* an epistemological claim about the relationship between knowers and objects of knowledge; “relationalities are rendered invisible through an epistemology that presupposes autonomy and denies relationality between knower and known”¹¹. Social relations are, in fact, ontologically constitutive of social categories such as “white” and “colonised”, but this is constantly ignored through an epistemology of ignorance; “That (most) whites walk through our day ignorant of our interdependency with peoples of colour is not about the invisibility of whiteness but rather about the erasure of peoples of colour as subjects”¹². This ignorance of relationality, as we will see further on, is a serious impediment to adoptees insofar as they wish to *know themselves*.

Acknowledging this relationality is of paramount importance to understanding the social position of transracial adoptees. These adoptees are positioned at the intersection of white (predominantly) enculturation and their other racial and/or ethnic identity. As a result, the social location of the adoptee cannot be collapsed or neatly encapsulated by that of their white family members or their racial heritage. One way in which this can be illustrated further is by understanding the sphere in which each identity becomes salient: more often than not, the white encultured

⁹ Hoagland, Sarah Lucia (2007) ‘Denying Relationality Epistemology and Ethics and Ignorance’, in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana, eds., *In Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*: 95–118. State University of New York Press, 97.

¹⁰ Hoagland, 97.

¹¹ Hoagland, 97.

¹² Hoagland, 97.

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identity is salient in matters of private family life while the racial identity becomes more salient in public settings (walking around as the only minority in the family, having people treat you as a racial minority at school or in the workplace, acknowledged by other members of the racial group as being ‘one of them’ etc.). This is quite clearly a *unique* set of experiences that arise as a result of the specific social relationality of transracial adoptees. However, as Hoagland alluded to before, knowledge of this relationality has been ignored and effaced historically, which has resulted in phenomena such as the transracial adoption paradox. The transracial adoption paradox is a phenomenon coined by psychologist Richard Lee and refers to a set of contradictory experiences that arise due to the fact that “adoptees are racial/ethnic minorities in society, but they are perceived and treated by others, and sometimes themselves, as if they are members of the majority culture (i.e., racially White and ethnically European) due to adoption into a White family”¹³. There is therefore a serious tension in the ways in which transracial adoptees identify; “I’m Australian but I’m not — I’m Korean but I’m not — I’m White but I’m not — I’m Asian but I’m not — I’m the same but I’m not”¹⁴. The claim that we are ‘the same but not’ points to an inherent fragmentation in the adoptee identity¹⁵. This is a problem because it then forces us to draw from conceptual resources from either racial pools, *neither of which can accurately articulate this set of experiences*.

Keeping in line with our areas of inquiry I will now quickly demonstrate how this constitutes a hermeneutical injustice (although I believe the immediate intuition is quite strong). As demonstrated above, transracial adoptees participate in a culture that lacks the appropriate hermeneutical resources to accurately portray their experiences. This is exacerbated by their unique relationality of being ignored or erased. In practice, this is a function of the adoptee’s relatively subordinate status in relation to the rest of their family; many parents adopt a ‘colour-blind’ attitude that actively aims at erasing racial difference. Transracial adoptees do not have access to

¹³ Lee, Richard M (2003) ‘The Transracial Adoption Paradox: History, Research, and Counselling Implications of Cultural Socialization’, *The Counseling Psychologist* 31, no 6: 711.

¹⁴ Heaser, E. HeeRa (2016) *Korean Australian Adoptee Diasporas: A Glimpse into Social Media*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of New South Wales], 194.

¹⁵ As constructed using dominant understandings of identity (either being white *or* otherwise, for example). I would argue that this fragmentation is due to the forgetting of relationality.

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“‘the communal nature of racial melancholia’ precisely because there is no ‘intergenerational and intersubjective process’ of recognizing and affirming that experience”¹⁶. The adoptee is therefore hermeneutically marginalised by being denied access to the relevant cultural and racial communities that would be able to perhaps help in articulating these issues. Adoptees experience the existential ennui of grappling with a fragmented and ambiguous identity that does not fit because their unique *relationality* is ignored: many adoptees “fe[el] trapped by the expectation to choose to be either Korean/Asian or Australian/White...I don’t really want to associate with any of them [Korean or Australian]. I just want to be myself”¹⁷. This effacement in the family setting also leads to tangible material and psychological harms. Without the relevant support from their family in trying to understand their racial identity, many adoptees experience worse levels of well-being: In a psychological study of 34 transracially adopted Korean American youths living with White parents in the United States, Diane Lee found that “the resilience that [Korean Adoptees] display is intricately tied and perhaps dependent on the support that they receive from their White parents...it was found that two specific aspects of family warmth, cohesion and conflict, are most important in fostering the psychological resilience and flourishing of transracially adopted Korean youths”¹⁸. Therefore, this lacuna in hermeneutical resources is a form of structural hermeneutical injustice experienced by transracial adoptees.

At this point I want to clearly lay out the rationality behind my examples moving forward. This section is predominantly exegetical, Ryan Gustafsson’s importance here cannot be overstated. I will outline two concepts put forward by Gustafsson: Hyper(in)visibility and Epistemic Ambiguity. These will be discussed relatively briefly for the following reasons: first and foremost, I wish to include them because I think that they add an interesting and rich layer of understanding to the situated experiences of transracial adoptees outlined above. Additionally, I aim to open these

¹⁶ Gustafsson, Ryan (2020) ‘Theorising Korean transracial adoptee experiences: Ambiguity, substitutability, and racial embodiment’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(2), 316.

¹⁷ Heaser, ‘Korean Australian Adoptee Diasporas’, 195.

¹⁸ Lee, Diane Sookyoung (2016) ‘The Resilience of Transracial Korean American adoptees: Cultural identity crisis within the family and the mediating effects of family conflict and cohesiveness during adversity’, *Adoption Quarterly*, 19(3), 161.

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concepts up to potential future analysis; these examples will hopefully open up questions to which I do not have the answers to and/or fall outside of the scope of this paper. They represent an important contribution to this new area of work — a philosophical understanding of transracial adoptees. The next section will then begin with a discussion of another concept, (Re)embodiment, which I believe better fits within the bounds of the current paper which I will use as a case study for evaluating Mariana Ortega's notion of 'hometactics' as a way of solving the problem.

The notion of Hyper(in)visibility is put forth by Ryan Gustafsson in their work in order to "capture this sense of simultaneous exposure and hiddenness, but also to emphasise how, for transracial adoptees, visibility is achieved via invisibility"¹⁹. In tandem with the erasure of racial identity and the forgetting of relationality, adoptees are subject to a paradoxical phenomenological schema of visibility. The adoptee is both highly visible and also presented as totally invisible at the same time, across different social contexts. For example, the transracial adoptee is hyper-visible within their family, standing out as a different race, but as aforementioned, this difference is sometimes denied and unacknowledged, thereby rendering the adoptee *invisible*. From this, Gustafsson concludes that "the adoptee's visibility is achieved through, or at the price of, invisibility and vice versa...in order to be visible, the adoptee is made to disappear, or is made invisible"²⁰. This is due to the particular position of the adoptee; the dissonance between outward racial presentation and internal white enculturation or rather, the understanding that they have not been raised in a racialised environment and are therefore not privy to certain knowledge (of customs, language, food etc). As Gustafsson describes it, this means that the adoptee body in her home country is *visible* as racially different, which necessarily means that their adoptee identity and their white enculturation becomes *invisible*. An identical logic is at work in the opposite case: a Korean adoptee in South Korea might 'blend in with the crowd' and as a result their racial difference is made invisible. However, the adoptee knows that they do not fit in seamlessly and this is "often accompanied by experiences of 'standing out' via other signs, most

¹⁹ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 318.

²⁰ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences' 318.

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commonly, by one's inability to speak Korean fluently"²¹. The becoming-visible of one aspect of the adoptee identity is made possible only by the making invisible of the other aspect: at home, the body is marked for difference while in their country of origin, blending in "render[s] visible one's difference (to oneself), reinforcing and amplifying it"²². In both cases, visibility and invisibility function to make hyper-visible one's difference (to oneself) *as an adoptee*."²³

Epistemological Ambiguity characterises how transracial adoptees in the actual world are denied stable epistemological footing when interrogating matters of their origins. Adoptees are a *product* of social institutions, rituals and legal codes which by its very form, entails a disconnect of the adoptee from their racial, ethnic, and genealogical origins; "In order to facilitate the potential adoption of a child, adoption agencies had to in effect create orphanhood administratively...This becoming-bare of the child, which is also the becoming-adoptable of the child, hence entails a legal and social severance or detachment from natal parents, siblings, and relatives"²⁴. The actual institutionalisation of adoption and the intervention of adoption agencies means that in search of answers, the adoptee constantly has the epistemic floor dragged out from under their feet; "it is important to note that the institutional processes mentioned form part of the historical and social context within which adoptees attempt to forge 'knowable' or legible individual life-histories"²⁵. Without

²¹ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 319.

²² Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 319.

²³ A question one may have at this point is how the experience of transracial adoptees differs from an experience of white passing. While they both operate within a logic and discourse of racial visibility, I believe there are very clear differences. The main difference is the relationship between racial appearance on the surface of the body and that body's 'truth' in a sense. That is, when a light-skinned black person who passes as white is called out to: "'Hey, white girl! Give me a quarter!'" (Piper, Adrian (1992) 'Passing for white, passing for black', *Transition*, (58), 4–32.

<https://doi.org/10.2307/2934966>), there is a sense in which the caller is getting something *wrong*. Adrian Piper is *not* white, this person has made a mistake. On the other hand, when the auntie at my local Korean restaurant speaks to me in Korean, expecting me to understand, she is *not* getting something wrong in the same way. My racial presentation is simultaneous with the 'truth', I am Korean. There is no sense of passing here in the traditional sense. If there is a feeling of 'passing as Asian' for example for transracial adoptees then it will arise from a lack of cultural knowledge, not necessarily from being mis-recognised as being a race which they are not. There may be space to further interrogate the relationship between the two phenomena but that would fall outside the scope of this paper. At this point they are two very distinct phenomena that both operate within a similar discourse of race, visibility etc.

²⁴ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 312.

²⁵ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 312.

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reliable ways of cross-checking and verifying information given by the agency, adoptees seeking information are stranded and forced to operate within a terrain of uncertainty; "Epistemological ambiguity stems from not just the absence of knowledge but also the impossibility of knowing and, relatedly, the ambiguous value or status of any knowledge gained"²⁶. In a more general sense, this epistemological ambiguity is prominent in the seemingly innocuous questions that adoptees get asked everyday but *do not have immediate answers*: "who are your *real* parents?", for example. This poses similar questions about genealogical origins, who are my ancestors? Where or what is *my* history? Answers to these questions are not obvious and fall outside of the aims of this paper but I believe it to be a really insightful aspect of adoptee identities.

4. Models Going Forward

In this section I will be looking at Mariana Ortega's notion of 'hometactics' as a model for overcoming this hermeneutical injustice. To ground the discussion I will be drawing on the concept of (Re)embodiment.

(Re)embodiment is a term put forward by Jessica Walton in her anthropological study of Korean adoptees who have chosen to return back to Korea. Walton argues that many Korean adoptees move back to Korea as a way of better understanding their Korean identity; "Korean adoptees attempt to (re)embody their physical bodies by trying to identify with their appearance as well as their past. These acts toward (re)embodiment demonstrate agency as Korean adoptees try to make a Korean identity something that they can feel, move around in, experiment with and understand"²⁷. By actually living and being in Korea, eating the food and participating in the culture, adoptees are able to better understand the facts of their Korean origins through lived experience²⁸. Borrowing from Thomas Csordas, Walton

²⁶ Gustafsson, 'Theorising adoptee experiences', 312-313.

²⁷ Walton, Jessica Rose SeeYoung (2009) *(RE)EMBODYPING IDENTITY: Understanding Belonging, 'Difference' and Transnational Adoption through the Lived Experiences of Korean Adoptees*. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Newcastle], 250.

²⁸ Walton, '(RE)EMBODYPING', 255.

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understands embodiment as “an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world”²⁹. Walton claims that adoptees are able to *re-embodiment* their Korean ‘mirror image’ by actually travelling to, and living in Korea, which makes this identity more real and tangible. By dressing a certain way, eating certain foods and adopting certain mannerisms, adoptees are employing tactics that “make a Korean identity a part of their sense of self. Eating Korean food is a way to embody a Korean Identity”³⁰. Moreover, it is necessary to recognise that not having knowledge of these things (how to dress, what to eat, etc), produces a profound feeling of *not* being Korean, of being a fake. Consequently, acquiring this knowledge and applying it in practice allows a Korean identity to emerge in praxis, that is, “Korean identity is not given, but something that has to be worked through...By being in Korea and literally embodying a Korean identity through food, they are trying to feel a meaningful Korean identity through their body”³¹.

5. Hometactics

Mariana Ortega’s work is based in a politics of location and a phenomenology of the home. For Ortega, the question of what it means to *belong*, to dwell in the world and to have a home which is connected to an ‘authentic belonging’ is problematised by what she calls the multiplicitous self³². The multiplicitous self is the self that occupies multiple positionalities in terms of gender, race, class and so on simultaneously and is therefore capable of “occupying a liminal space of space of in-betweenness”³³. The question of home for the multiplicitous self then becomes a question of *homes*. The notion of ‘hometactics’ is aimed at shedding light on the actual praxis of everyday life, the ‘making-do’ that multiplicitous selves undergo all the time in order to “negotiat[e] their multiple identities in light of both ambiguities and

²⁹ Csordas in Walton, ‘(RE)EMBODYING’, 255.

³⁰ Walton, ‘(RE)EMBODYING’, 269.

³¹ Walton, ‘(RE)EMBODYING’, 279-280.

³² Ortega, Mariana (2014) ‘Hometactics’, in Emily Lee, ed, *Living Alterities*: 173–88.

³³ Ortega, ‘Hometactics’, 176.

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contradictions"³⁴. Hometactics emphasise the practical aspect of making the world 'homely' for those without a stable home, it draws attention to ways of being in the world, modes of living with the ambiguities and the contradictions. Although this may entail that multiplicitous selves do not form stable and robust senses of belonging to a single 'home', this should not undermine the ability to create meaningful social and political bonds and coalitions of resistance; "The sense of individual or group 'belonging' that they may provide is a great source of comfort in the midst of the complex, sometimes ambiguous, sometimes contradictory lives of multiplicitous selves"³⁵.

For me, it is clear that practices of (Re)embodiment are an archetypal hometactic. (Re)embodiment details quite literally the experiences of adoptees 'making-do' with what they have and their legitimate attempts to make sense of their identity. Ortega's 'multiplicitous self' is also useful here in helping us navigate these complex and ambiguous situations that we have to confront all the time. With reference to our discussion of Epistemic Ambiguity above, the epistemically shaky grounds upon which questions of origin can be understood clearly problematises the question of home: where is home for the transracial adoptee? Common questions such as 'who are your *real* parents?' only exacerbate this confusion. Framing how adoptees navigate their racial identity through the notion of 'hometactics' accentuates its significance; the desire to engage in the culture and embody a racial identity is not simply a curiosity nor is it a simple way of understanding oneself better. Rather, it is a crucial aspect of one's ability to dwell within the world, to survive, to flourish, to create and to resist.

6. Coalitional Politics

Here is a potential problem for Ortega: it seems to be a short term solution. That is, while it has useful explanatory power regarding the home-making practices of

³⁴ Ortega, 'Hometactics', 181.

³⁵ Ortega, 'Hometactics', 185.

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'making-do', it seemingly has little normative force which directs us towards what we *ought* to do, especially in the context of a long-term political project. While it is all good and well to describe these practices, the model itself does not seem to be able to critique these practices or revise concepts if needed. Although they *can* be done collectively, hometactics are a largely individual task, it is about making do with what *I* have and creating a sense of belonging for myself. If this is threatened or criticised in any way, this could be seen as a direct attack on one's sense of place and belonging in the world; in this scenario, hometactics would be a hindrance to new thought. As Ortega herself recognises, hometactics "do not form a robust sense of belonging or familiarity, whether it is associated with a location or a group, and thus they might not be capable of forging strong political coalitions that can establish practices of resistance"³⁶.

In terms of relieving hermeneutical injustice, hometactics can help with clarifying our current practices and ways of engaging with the world which allows us to bridge the hermeneutical gap. It is clear that hometactics are a good way of framing (re)embodiment practices such that we are better at articulating our estranged sense of self. Our identities are heterogenous and ambiguous hence we struggle to find a place where we belong, a *home*. Nonetheless, I would maintain that this is predominantly due to the insufficient conceptualising of the adoptee experience and the forgetting of relationality. This is an integral line of thought in this paper for me: although the vast majority of the experiences I have outlined have been ones of negativity, tension and being out-of-place, I am not a pessimist about the future. Rather, I believe that with further thinking, the goal will be to eventually dispense with these concepts as expressions of the transracial adoptee phenomenology because we have formulated a more robust sense of identity and solidarity such that issues of being 'not Korean' or 'not Australian' enough, for example, are less significant. At this juncture then, I wish to speak of coalitional politics.

Here I will look at Ortega's understanding of coalitional politics and an ally in Maria Lugones and her notion of deep coalition. But first one may think that I need to

³⁶ Ortega, Mariana (2016) *In-Between*, SUNY Press, 205-206.

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justify the need for broader group politics instead of the cultivation of our own small community. My answer would be that we do not live in an adoptee-only bubble nor should we aspire to; to take that as an ideal would be to reaffirm a politics of liminality, of a self-contained space. But this is not the world we live in — we must learn to live together with others. Not only that, but many of our struggles are predicated on our marginalisation from groups that we actually *do* belong to, most prominently that of our racial/ethnic identity. Thus I wish to briefly outline some considerations regarding coalition between, say, between Asian-Australian adoptees and non-adopted Asian-Australians and what sorts of understandings and channels of communication should be open for our marginalisation to be recognised and addressed.

Ortega identifies some key elements of coalitional politics: an understanding that coalitional politics is about both being/belonging and becoming “which includes location, being-with, and becoming-with”, as well as a recognition of both shared oppression and resistant agency, which is dependent on what Lugones theorises as “complex communication” that can lead to “deep coalition”³⁷. As Ortega makes clear, we must be mindful “of the manner in which groups are already heterogenous” so that we do not fall into the plight of simple identity politics which assigns group identity based on homogeneity; rather, we should take heed of the call for “basing identity on politics rather than politics on identity”. For Lugones, complex communication begins with a mutual recognition of liminality but the simultaneous recognition of difference — we do not understand each other transparently *in virtue* of both occupying liminal subjectivities. Thus, complex communication with the other requires the mutual recognition of a marginalised position but also requires that we be “disposed to understand the different ways in which others communicate and resist without trying to assimilate or reduce them to our language and to ourselves”³⁸. Jose Medina aims to combat this problem with what he calls the ‘kaleidoscopic consciousness’. Rather than a double-consciousness or an infinitely pluralised consciousness, Medina advocates for a consciousness “that has built into it a flexible and dynamic structure so that it can always adapt to the

³⁷ Ortega, *In-Between*, 163.

³⁸ Ortega, *In-Between*, 166.

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possibility of excess, that is, of there being more ways of experiencing the world than those considered"³⁹. The kaleidoscopic consciousness believes that "ready-made meanings and fixed frameworks of intelligibility fail us"⁴⁰ which, for our purposes, will be helpful in trying to show to non-adopted members of the racial group that adoptee experiences are *racialized experiences in a legitimate way* i.e, Asian adoptee experiences are still Asian experiences!

Here it is important to emphasise a meta-point about the thesis as a project: I have tried to distinguish certain aspects of the adoptee experience as *irreducibly our own*, that is it can be very tempting for second-generation immigrants or mixed-race people to claim or identify with adoptee experiences. I think that this is both insightful and helpful, however I would like to maintain that there are aspects of our experience that are unable to be assimilated into the experiences of others in a one-to-one way. This is what Medina calls 'blindness to differences'⁴¹. In short, there is the worry that members of the relevant racial groups will not realise that there are important intra-group differences that can be covered with the blanket term 'Asian' for example. But on the other hand, there is also the worry that adoptee experiences will be entirely overlooked as 'inauthentic' experiences due to white enculturation. It is here then, that I am speaking not to adoptees but instead to non-adopted people of the relevant racial/ethnic groups. Asian adoptees are Asian! Accordingly, I would call for the necessary re-examination of 'standpoints' to accommodate adoptees, deep coalition through complex communication seems to me to be an important development for racial groups which will encompass a wider range of experiences and allow for new ways of becoming-with; " There is no complex communication if the communicators come out of the encounter untouched, with their subjectivity unaltered"⁴². These groups have a lot to teach each other⁴³.

³⁹ Medina, José (2020) 'Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles: The Forging of Deep Coalitions through Emotional Echoing and Resistant Imaginations', *Critical Philosophy of Race* 8, no. 1–2: 200-201.

⁴⁰ Medina, 'Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles', 200.

⁴¹ Medina, 'Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles', 208.

⁴² Medina, 'Complex Communication and Decolonial Struggles' 212–36.

⁴³ Going any deeper into what this might look like or issues of epistemic appropriation fall outside of this thesis.

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One criticism that could be made is that this picture paints the adoptee subject as being too passive, as too dependent on the recognition and action of others. In brief, I can almost bite the bullet on this criticism. I believe that a key proactive move on the part of the adoptee is embodied in the notion of 'hometactics' so this criticism mainly applies to our place in coalitional politics. I believe that it is reasonable to assume that adoptees cannot do all of the work themselves, especially when we recall the importance of relationality — we are constructed in conjunction with others. We might then be able to call for a model of shared responsibility (also following Medina) but this again, would fall outside the scope of the thesis.

7. Conclusion

The core aim of this paper was to justify the classification of the conceptual lacuna regarding transracial adoptees as a hermeneutic injustice. I outlined what I thought were the main issues, namely what made the transracial adoptee standpoint distinctive and what sort of experiences we could draw as a result. I argued that the adoptee standpoint is distinguished by its unique social positionality and its relational nature, situated at the crossroads of white enculturation and racial minority identity. I looked at a 'hometactic' model which may help to guide future inquiry. I then raised the concern that hometactics may struggle as a long-term communal political project and I therefore introduced Maria Lugones' notions of coalitional politics and complex communication. The experiences of transracial adoptees may be brushed aside in multiple ways; non-adopted members of the relevant racial/ethnic group may reject the perceived 'authenticity' of the experience or, on the other hand, there may be a temptation to assimilate or reduce the adoptee experience to that of their own. This is terrain that is vastly unmapped and very new. My intention was to begin to sketch its silhouette, erase and redraw some misguided lines and paint just a small section of the landscape.

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