

MEETING MY MOM

I am one of Sri Lanka's lost sons. I was undesired by my mother. So she gave me away to the Christian Western organization which sold me to the foreigners for whom I was the last option to have a child. After being involuntarily migrated from Sri Lanka to Sweden when I was three months old, I was given the name Daniel. This text is about the reconciliation with my mom.

I was not looking forward to or even wanted to meet my mother when I went to Sri Lanka in 2005. During the writing of my bachelor essay which I wrote about 'international adoption', my interest in going to Sri Lanka grew intensely. I have always liked traveling. I've visited most European countries, and Ecuador, as well as Thailand and South Korea. Never have I been interested in visiting my country of origin or meeting my mom. Instead I have kept 'Sri Lanka' and 'my mom' as a fantasy which I have been visiting when reality in Sweden has been too troublesome. However, while writing my bachelor essay I had this intense emotional interest in going to my country of origin. It cannot be explained in words. Every day I started thinking about going to Sri Lanka. I wanted to see the country, learn about the culture, eat Singhalese food, and see how people in Sri Lanka lived in order to understand from where I originated.

It was this interest in going to my country of origin which arose in me. Meeting my mom was not imaginable and I hadn't thought about making such an unimaginable thought into reality before. I imagined it would be a very strange reunion. We have not met for twenty-five years. We know nothing about each other. The only thing I know about her is that she gave birth to me and gave me away. And I have always had trouble understanding how a person could give away her/his own child. Probably that is the reason I have not been interested in meeting my mom. I mean, how come adoption is an option before abortion? And what's wrong with growing up in the orphanage?

When I told people in my surrounding I would be going to Sri Lanka, one of my Swedish classmates at the university told me her sister's godfather was Sri Lankan. My classmate informed me the godfather and his family would go to Sri Lanka this summer and she introduced him to me. The godfather wanted to help me looking for my mom. He is a reputable man in Sri Lanka and connected to important people. I did not think it would be possible to find her and I had no expectations he would be able to find her. Mainly because I am a "private" adoption in the statistics (if I was registered). That is, no adoption agency was involved when I was involuntary migrated from Sri Lanka to Sweden. In fact, it was the brother of my adoptive mother who worked as a tourist guide on Sri Lanka during the 1970- and 80ies who guided the foreigners whom became my adoptive parents to the Christian Western organization which sold Singhalese children to Westerners.

Because I was sold through this private organization by the end of the 1970ies I was not certain my adoption documents were legitimate. Furthermore, these documents gave little information about anything. I have: a slovenly written document which appears to be from the Court, an application made by my adoptive parents to the Department of Probation and Child

Care, a handwritten telegram from the state attorney L.W. Fernando in Gampola, and a handwritten medical document, dated 22 January 1980 from H.A. Aponso, who was consulted by the Holy Cross Convent, St Bernard's Nursing Home in Padiwatte, Kundasale, to declare me "fit for adoption".

Through these documents it was possible to locate the presumed area where I was born, my surname Eluhagegedera, and some people involved in making possible the sale of a Sri Lankan boy to some foreigners in the beginning of the 1980ies. I gave these documents to the godfather who forwarded them to his contacts in Sri Lanka.

The summer of 2005 I visited my country of origin. I was twenty-five years old. I was to stay there for five weeks. The first two weeks I stayed alone at the godfather's hotel in the south of Sri Lanka. I spent time with a family who knew the godfather. The son of this family showed me around in the village and I hung out with him and his friends. I took part of the village life and understood how my life could have been hadn't I been sold to the foreigners and involuntarily migrated to their homeland.

After two weeks had passed the godfather and his family with two children and a friend of theirs as well as my classmate arrived to Sri Lanka. We had made plans to travel around Sri Lanka as well as trying to locate my mom. We were looking for my mom, and not my father, because my adoptive parents had told me my mother and father were very poor and had not been married when I was reproduced. Therefore, my mom had to give me away.

This is the fairy-tale produced by the Western adoption agencies in order to make the international adoption phenomenon appeal to the Western way of thinking. Because my adoptive parents could not have children of their own, I became their last option to have a child. And my adoptive parents liked the fairy-tale-like perception that they were doing something good when they bought me from the Christian Western organization which told them their favorite bed-time story that my mother and father were unmarried and so poor that I was made available for adoption in the hope that I would be saved and rescued to the Western paradise. However, this fairy-tale disguise the fact that most children available for adoption are undesired by their parents.

I remember the strange feeling rising in my body when we got closer to the Kandy area, in central Sri Lanka, where I was born, according to the adoption documents. I felt tense and filled with adrenalin. I wanted to escape the mini-van and just run away. Whereto didn't matter. I could have run over the Pacific Ocean to Australia. But I didn't. I just sat there in the mini-van with the rest of the people staring out the window. Kandy was paralyzing me with its beauty. This was the area in which all Western colonizers had been fought and held back for more than 300 years. This is where I came from and where I would have grown up hadn't I been sent across the globe to Sweden to be civilized and educated.

We arrived at the Western four-star hotel, bargained over the price, checked in, swam in the pool, and were stunned by the up-country Kandyan landscape. The godfather was very quiet about his research and I had no expectations he had located my mom. The next day we went

to a judge who estimated the chances of meeting my mom. According to the judge the chances were very low. After seeing him we went to my presumed village of origin. The scenery was almost exactly similar to that TV-show where lost people find their beloved ones. Though, in this untelevised episode the perception of the good Westerner bridging the gap between the formerly formally colonized country and the West through the uniting of the noble savages/adoptees with their primitive kin in the underdeveloped country was not reproduced. Instead all focus was put on the adoptee, the biological family, and the country of origin.

On arrival in my presumed village of origin, we first went to a small post-office in the fringes of the village. It was me, the godfather, his wife and kids, their friend, my classmate, and the driver, making this excursion. The godfather and the driver went out to speak to the people at the post-office, showing them some papers and pointing at me. This was a picture that repeatedly manifested itself during our adventure. I sat in the mini-van together with the rest of the adventurers, looking out at the gesticulations and the big eyes watching me after being pointed at like an animal at the zoo, not understanding a word anyone was saying, and constantly being questioned whether I think it is exiting and if I think we'll find Her.

The people at the post-office directed us further into the village. We stopped at a small store. I was pointed at and watched with big eyes. I saw them shaking their heads and the raising of their shoulders. Then they just pointed in a direction further into the village while raising their shoulders, shaking their heads, and staring at me again. And I watched them stare at me until the car was out of their sight.

Our next stop was at another small store. The female store-owner stared at me for a long time. I was used to that now. It seemed she knew something. I imagined how strange it would be if she was my mother. My brain searched for similarities and found some. But she was way too young to be my mother. And, after all, my adoption documents may have been illegitimate anyways, so this might even be the wrong village we were in. This store-owner directed us to the village politician. We went to his house to inquire whether he knew something about an adoption of a small golden brown boy occurring in the late 1970ies, presumably from this village, to some foreigners.

Arriving at the village politician's house, the godfather and I got out. The godfather spoke in a language I didn't understand while pointing at me. The village politician, with his appearance of an Englishman, dressed in a shirt and cotton trousers, stared at me for some time and started to sweat. Then he avoided eye contact both with me and the godfather and began acting nervously. Even though I didn't understand what he was saying I could tell that he did not want to discuss this matter and rather would like to become a snake and wriggle off. So we drove back to the store again to make further inquiries.

The godfather went into the store asking the owner some questions. Then he left the store and went down to a house. He was there for quite a while so the rest of us went there as well. Apparently the people in this house knew something about my adoption. Though, because

adoptions are complicated matters they didn't want to let us know anything. We were offered thé and chairs. I sat down and drank the thé and the habitants of the house stared at me.

And they continued staring at me when we went towards the mini-van to go back to the hotel. Before we left the village, the godfather and his wife went into the store to say good-bye and give thanks to the store-owner. When they came out of the store the godfather seemed very upset and his wife was in tears. They told me my brother had come down to the store and that my mother's house was just above the store. I could not believe what they were telling me. Just the thought that I would have a brother seemed ridiculous. I mean, if my mother was too poor to take care of me, how would she have been able to care for my brother? Surely, if she was as poor as described in the fairy-tale she would not have had a house and certainly no other children. All she would have had was a spot on the street where she would have sat down crying with her hand stretched out begging for money to buy food. She wasn't. This was reality.

The godfather told me my brother had become furious when he found out we had come searching for my mom. My brother had told the godfather we must disappear immediately from the village. The godfather's wife did not doubt my brother would have become violent and dangerous had we not done what he told us.

When I was told what happened in the store I understood the reason my brother had been upset by our visit. All adoptions are complex. And, in most cases the children are undesired by their parents. Furthermore, it is not only a great shame for the mother who carries the child, even the relatives of the mother are stigmatized by the fact that the child is undesired. For example, if the word spreads in the village that the mother has been or is pregnant with an undesired child, the mother, the child and the whole of her family is stigmatized. The family name will be forever tainted with shame. Thus, the family has to move from the village in which they have been living for generations. I could very well understand the reason to my brother's fury. The odd thing was that I had to comfort/explain this to the godfather and his wife whom were very upset that my brother didn't want to meet me in the village. They had, however, managed to convince him to come by our hotel.

My brother came to our hotel some hours later. Like all other Westerners at this hotel I was sitting by the pool, smoking, drinking beer, and reading a book when he arrived. I remember taking a drag from my cigarette, looking up towards the balcony, and seeing the godfather with three Singhalese persons. I had met two of them before. They were chairpersons of a political organization and friends with the godfather. The godfather had told me that these persons could force my family to meet me had they not agreed voluntarily. The third person has a similar appearance to me in many ways. It is my brother.

The godfather waves at me to come and we go to my room. The godfather introduces me to my brother. He says that we are half-brothers; we have different fathers. There are a lot of people in this room: the godfather, his wife and children, their friend, my classmate, the driver, and my brother. The godfather's children are documenting this moment with a video camera and taking pictures. I feel out of place and don't know what to say. I just stare at him.

Trying to interpret his facial expression and verifying that this really is my brother. The similarity is there but I am very uncertain. He tells me he will bring my mom to the hotel the next morning.

This was the first time in my life I ever saw a family member who looked like me. I don't know how it felt to see my brother. It was not an emotional meeting. Neither was I happy nor was I sad. It was like seeing anyone. However, I did think it was a bit frightening to meet him because he is ten years older than me. All I could think about was whether I would look like that when I turned 35.

When he had left the hotel I continued reading, drinking and smoking by the pool. I considered the coincidence the godfather and his wife had met my brother in that small village store. He is a government security police officer and was just in the village for some days to visit mom. Hadn't he been there at that time I had probably never met him or my mother.

The next day my brother and my mom arrived at the hotel while we were eating breakfast in the hotel restaurant. I saw them coming and I understood the woman next to my brother was my mom. She wore a purple sari with white flowers. The adrenaline in my body rose. And for some reason I started thinking about how I should greet her. At first, I considered greeting her in the traditional way. That is, the greeting where you kneel down in front of the person with your hands pressed together in front of your face and then when you have reached the floor with the knees you bend forward till your head almost touch the floor while separating the hands and touching the person's feet. Because I lack that awe for my mom which this greeting symbolizes, I was not sure I should perform it. Also, I felt nervous performing this theatrical greeting because there were so many people in the restaurant simultaneously as I was afraid I would not do it the proper way.

Then I considered greeting her in the formal Western way by stretching out my hand to her. Although, then maybe all persons in the restaurant would wonder or understand I was her lost/internationally adopted son which had come to meet her. In other words, people would be given a reason to stigmatize her in the restaurant, and of course I did not want to expose her to that part of the Sri Lankan culture.

As it turned out, I didn't have to greet her in the restaurant. We got up from the table. I nodded and gave her a smile. Her facial expression was stiff and she didn't respond to my silent greeting. We went up to my room. Everybody stepped into the room feeling happy. I wanted to throw up. The godfather and my brother sat down on the bed next to the one which mom and I sat down on. I didn't know what to say, so I asked her how she was doing in Sinhala. She didn't respond. I had all the emotions at once.

I wanted to strangle her. I wanted to tell her I hated her. I wanted to hug her and never let go. I wanted to tell her I loved her and that I forgave her for giving me away. I wanted her to be so sad and happy to see me she cried. But she didn't fulfill any of my desires and I was unable to do anything. She didn't change her expression at all and I didn't know what to tell her. I felt like throwing up again. The colors and the contours of the room meshed together and I found

it troublesome with all these people taking pictures and videotaping and laughing and being so happy. I just wanted to leave. But I was paralyzed.

The godfather initiated conversation with mom. I asked him to ask her what her name was. She didn't want to tell me. He asked me some questions. I told him some things about me and that I had been sent to Sweden. Then the godfather translated. I wanted to know more about "my family". Apparently I had four half-siblings: an older sister and three older brothers. The oldest brother was 43 years old and my sister was three years older than me.

I found it strange I had so many siblings and wondered why mom had decided to send me away. I couldn't find much to say to her. My gaze painted the walls with confusion and I wished I were somewhere else and that life would not be so complicated. All I wanted to know was why she had given me away. Though, the godfather didn't want me to ask her. Instead he wanted me to offer her a picture of how well my life had developed in Sweden. Simultaneously as he told me this I felt that I, as a matter of fact, was not entitled to inquire about her past life. Certainly not among strangers. After all, I am not her beloved son. I am a stranger in her eyes, (a) "someone" she erased from her memory twenty-five years ago.

Besides the oddness of this situation in the room, there was a tension in the air between the godfather and my mom and my brother. Simply, it can be explained by the fact that the godfather is respected and considered a man of high ranking on Sri Lanka and mom in relation to the godfather becomes a woman of low ranking because she has done something unacceptable according to the Sinhalese culture. Even though she is middle class, fairly rich owns paddy fields, and has given birth to three sons, which is considered prestigious according to Sri Lankan culture. However, because she also gave birth to me all merit and status is erased when revealed in a situation like this. Consequently, my brother is also stigmatized even though he is normally a man of high ranking as a head police officer. All because my mother had an undesired child which she rejected by giving away to the Christian Western organization which sold me to the foreigners who brought me to Sweden. The relation between them was noticeable and affected the meeting in a strange way which I cannot still today explain properly.

The meeting with my mom was very short. It only lasted for about one hour. We agreed we would meet at the godfather's hotel in the south of Sri Lanka after having completed our traveling around my country of origin. When I met her again at the godfather's hotel it felt easier being around her. She and my brother stayed at the hotel for two days. I remember walking on the beach with my mother at sunset. I don't know if she speaks English or if she didn't want to speak with me, but I will always remember how we just walked on the beach in perfect silence as the sun set in the ocean.

When we got back to the hotel I begged the godfather to ask my mom why she gave me away. He didn't want to. And neither would he ask mom to confirm if the story my adoptive parents had told me was true; that mom was unmarried and poor and therefore gave me away. It only made me doubt the fairy-tale my adoptive parents have told me so many times.

I was however allowed to ask her why she chose the name Dayaratne for me. That is the Sinhala name printed in my passport. I have always assumed she gave it to me. That name, besides my body, is the only thing I have which is mine properly given from my mom. At least that's what I have always believed. Instead I found out that the name Dayaratne was not given to me by my mom. It must have been the judge at the Court or some other person involved in my adoption history who gave it to me. The meaning of my Sinhala name is, simply put: a shining treasure of gold. It seems my mom didn't consider me a Dayaratne. And maybe that is the reason she did not even want to reveal her name to me.

She did give me a name though. That name is Eluhagegedera. It is noted in my adoption documents. I have always believed it was my mom's name or surname. It wasn't. This is the name I have repeatedly told people about in Sri Lanka who have asked me about my adoption history. And each time I have told them they have given me a petty gaze saying they feel sorry for me. I have just watched them confusingly.

I came to know that Eluhagegedera is not actually a name or a surname, but a Sinhalese word. By putting that word in my adoption documents instead of a proper name, Eluhagegedera carries a metaphorical meaning stating that I was born in "the house of the sheep/goat". Because 1979, the year I was born, is the year of the goat according to eastern astrology, it is possible that this word has an astrological meaning. However, I believe the reason that name is put there is because it has an earthly meaning and symbolism, indicating that my mom didn't want any contact with me after giving me away to the Christian Western organization which sold me to the foreigners as well as not wanting me to come looking for her when I was older. In particular, because I was an undesired child.

Some of the last few words my brother told me before he and mom went back to Kandy was that I should neither show any pictures of them nor tell anyone we were related. Because adoptions are a very complex and sensitive matter, it was not good for them. My two eldest brothers whom are married to women of high ranking told the brother I met they did not want to meet me. Just because if their wives would find out their husbands had a half-brother, it would mean the end of those holy matrimonial relations and of course the shame which would always follow them till they attained nirvana. It is also because of this reason (that I was an undesired child) that I would be introduced to people in the village only as a friend of my brother and my mom if I visited their houses. They told me they would never invite or treat me as their brother and son. And I got the impression they really didn't want to meet me again.

Some months after I got back to the foreigners' homeland which I was involuntarily migrated to, I received a letter from my brother. He was interested in starting a business. I was given the opportunity to receive 10 kilos of cashew nuts which he wanted me to sell to the Swedes. He seemed glad he had met me in order to start this economical relationship. I didn't reply. And one day he called me at 4 am. asking whether I had received the letter and what I thought about his business proposal. I declined. Some weeks after his telephone call I received another letter in which he asked me how I was doing and also told me how his family and my mom

suffered from economical difficulties. I replied in a letter telling him how my life had been in this foreign country and that I had no clue as to how I was doing. After sending him this letter I have not heard from him again.

When I visited Sri Lanka recently (2007/2008) I didn't meet my mom or my brother. I don't want any contact with them. I am glad I have met them and I feel it's good I know what kind of people they are. Simultaneously I feel it might have been better not to see them but letting them remain as a fantasy. I do believe it was destiny making possible the meeting with my mom. However, I don't think I will ever be able to forgive her for giving me away for international adoption. I would have preferred being aborted or growing up at the orphanage in my country of origin.

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