

The gaze

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No one has ever looked at me like that. Not before and not after. It wasn't a gaze of love, no, but one thing at a time.

It has been some years since one of my siblings - to make it clear: "biological siblings" - invited me to his wedding. You have to know: It was still unusual for me at that time to be in the circle of my first family.

Also invited was the uncle of my late first father, who flew in from Iran. That night, I met him for the first time in my life! No, that's not quite true: I must have seen him a lot in the first five years of my life, but I can't remember that, all gone!

Back to the wedding: My uncle couldn't speak English, let alone German, and I couldn't speak Persian at the time. But there was no need for words between us. He looked at me and also in the course of the celebration he looked at me often - with a gaze... I have never experienced such a thing! Like I said, not before and not after.

I can tell you that gaze was hard to bear, I wasn't ready for the message of that gaze. If that gaze could have spoken, it would have said:

"Reza [my Persian name], how glad I am to see you again! After so long time! You look like my brother! You really look like Ahmad! Like a young edition of Ahmad. I am so happy I can still experience this!

"Reza, you are my brother's son. You belong to us. You've been gone for a long time, but you belong to us. You are Persian. You are flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood, you are one of us, we are one."

Oh! Help!!

That was too intimate for me.

That was too possessive.

I must confess, I kept my uncle — by the way, his name was also Reza — at distance. I couldn't stand his gaze.

Ten years later, I visited my first family in Persia. Now I would have been ready

for this gaze - and I would have been able to talk to my uncle by then. But unfortunately, unfortunately, he had since passed away!

In the meantime, I have read a lot about „the first gaze“ in the adoption literature. I am going to mention only two examples. Angela Long, adopted, writes about her first encounter with her first mother:

“She looked at me like you’d look at a glass of water after a long day in the desert.”

(Angela Long: A Familiar Face, in: Bruce Gillespie / Lynne van Luven (Hrsg.): Somebody’s Child. Stories about Adoption, o.O., Kanada 2011, 27-33, here: 31.)

What a touching metaphor: "like a glass of water after a long day in the desert"! The effect of this gaze was similar to mine. Long writes that this gaze frightened her so much that she turned her gaze away, towards the starry sky (so it was in the night!).

Jonathan Rendall, adopted, reports how he first met his first mother at a train station.

“The way she was looking at me – no one had ever looked at me like that. [...] Only your Mum can look at you like that.”

(Jonathan Rendall: Oedipus Descending, in: Sarah Holloway (Hrsg.): Family Wanted, London 2006, 45-48, here: 46.)

What a gaze!