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Sandra So Hee Chi Kim

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## Suji Kwock Kim's "Generation" and the Ethics of Diasporic Postmemory

Sandra So Hee Chi Kim

### Commentary

Regarding her highly acclaimed first book of poetry, *Notes from the Divided Country*,<sup>1</sup> second-generation Korean American poet Suji Kwock Kim has stated that she considers the representation of the traumatic experiences of the Korean War as “the responsibility that one has, in terms of using the imagination as a means of compassion, and understanding things one couldn’t have experienced.”<sup>2</sup> If *Notes from the Divided Country* (hereafter *Notes*) is a work created from a sense of ethical responsibility, we could perhaps also see it more specifically as a project of *ethical memory* and ask, along with ethnic studies scholar Jodi Kim, “What does it mean to want to represent or ‘remember’ a war that has been ‘forgotten’ and erased in the US popular imaginary, but has been transgenerationally seared into the memories of Koreans and Korean Americans, and experienced anew every day in a still-divided Korea?”<sup>3</sup> *Notes* in many ways grapples with this very ques-

tion and can be seen as an effort to remember the “Forgotten War” through vivid, moving, sometimes chilling poems that depict the enduring trauma of war through the lens of a diasporic subjectivity that connects people, places, and events in unexpected ways.

The poems in *Notes* represent an array of voices, vast geographies<sup>4</sup> and multiple historical conjunctures, addressing topics as complex and varied as colonialism, war, rape, love, family, migration, and race. Despite such diverse content, the poems are unified in a noteworthy way: all the poems use either the first person (“I,” “my,” “we,” “our”) or the second person (“you,” “your”) perspective.<sup>5</sup> The effect of this poetic choice is that, taken together and in light of one another, the poems create the impression of a patchwork oral history passed down through generations. Poems dedicated to the author’s mother (“Translations from the Mother Tongue”), father (“Fragments of the Forgotten War”), grandmother (“Borderlands”), and her great-grandparents (“Resistance”), or with the indication of specific dates, like “(August, 1950)” in “Chasm,” give the impression that the poems represent actual events that have been passed down to the author through family narratives. The “I” in the poems switches from one persona to another, including a diasporic contemporary “I” who is the receiver of these passed-down memories.

The notion that memories can be passed down or transmitted to subsequent generations has been termed *postmemory* by cultural critic Marianne Hirsch. In her writings on the photography and visual art of the Holocaust, Hirsch uses *postmemory* to describe “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”<sup>6</sup> The second generation cannot literally, of course, remember the experiences of those who came before, but postmemory describes the way in which a different kind of memory is constructed by means of the stories, images, objects, and practices among which the second generation grew up. Postmemory is not identical to memory: it is “post”—after, secondhand—but at the same time, it approximates memory in having a kind of affective force.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly enough, even as Kim’s *Notes* links postmemory and diaspora thematically, Hirsch’s work seems to link the two terms conceptually. Hirsch observes that although the children of exiled survivors have

not themselves lived through the trauma of separation from home and the destruction of that home, they nevertheless remain marked by their parents' experiences: "always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora."<sup>8</sup> Both postmemory and diaspora infer the experience (whether real or imagined) of spatial and temporal exile. What Hirsch is describing is not only the creation, dynamics, and effects of postmemory, but also a diasporic experience.

What link is there, if any, between postmemory and diaspora? The concept of postmemory can perhaps help us reformulate what we mean when we speak of diaspora. Some have used the concept of diaspora to refer to those who sustain a sense of connection to both where one is from and where one is, both one's "homeland" and one's "nation of residence."<sup>9</sup> This notion of diaspora is problematic, however, for a couple of reasons. First of all, it poses as a universalizing category founded on the assumption of unified, "authentic" ethnicity as well as on myths of origin. Secondly, the postgenerations of immigrant families cannot unproblematically be considered diasporic in the sense of where one "is from" and where one is, since what constitutes their "homeland" is disputable. There is no doubt, however, that many second-generation children of parents who have migrated from a different place feel a sense of affinity and affective attachment to their parents' cultures and places of origin. In my view, what makes for this affinity, however, is not so much race or ethnicity as it is the effects of postmemory, which I discuss in depth elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

I find in *Notes* a compelling relationship between the dynamics of postmemory and the ethics of memory. This essay will focus on the poem "Generation," which significantly was written for the volume *last* even though it is the first poem in the book.<sup>11</sup> "Generation" could be read, then, as setting the stage for the dominant themes and tropes of the book.

The "divided country" referred to in the title of the volume most immediately and strongly suggests Korea, which was permanently divided at the 38th parallel in 1953, when the armistice was signed that called a truce to the Korean War.<sup>12</sup> The 38th parallel remains the official territorial borderline between the two Koreas to this day. The indiscriminate military strikes of the Korean War set into motion a massive migration in which millions of people lost their land and their homes and fled in search of safety.<sup>13</sup> The official partition of the Korean peninsula subsequently displaced and

separated families permanently, generating also large-scale diasporic movements to places like the United States.<sup>14</sup> Upon reading through Kim's book, however, "the divided country" takes on more of a metaphorical sense that invokes *any* community divided against itself due to various kinds of injustices and power struggles, as well as the "divided country" of the mind—a divided and fragmented subjectivity. The first poem, "Generation," engages on some level with all these senses of the "divided country," but most deeply with the latter sense of a subjectivity that is always already fragmented, divided, and dividing. This, I argue, is an approach to identity that lays the groundwork for an ethics of diasporic postmemory that Kim builds on in the rest of the volume.

The title of the first poem has at least two meanings: (1) "generation" as in the sense of procreation, the process of bringing into being, and (2) "generation" in the genealogical sense of a set of members of a family regarded as a single stage in descent, usually marked by and counted from a historical event, such as immigration (as in "second-generation Korean American") or war (as in "third-generation Holocaust survivor"). The poem is quite evidently about generation in the sense of procreation, as the overarching conceit is the journey of the preborn lyric speaker toward her own birth against her will. This essay will also show how the poem is about generation in the other sense. Based on the Latin *generatio* meaning "creation" and "origin," this sense of the word *generation* represents a structural transition between the idea of origin and its *continuation*. It further implies an intrinsic, unbridgeable separation and distance *from* the origin, since the question of beginning arises only after a history of some sort has been established. As such, history can be said to interpellate "generations" into being. Kim's poem "Generation" dwells on the painful transmission of historical trauma to a subject of the diasporic postgeneration,<sup>15</sup> for whom the origin of that trauma is distant and inaccessible and yet so formative to her subjectivity.

The poem is numbered into sections 0 to 5, with each successive section getting increasingly longer. The only line under "0" is "Once I was nothing: once we were one." While the poem starts with a lyric "I" as the speaker, it immediately switches to "we." The "I" does not return until midway through section 4, after which it continues through all of section 5. Who is the "we" that the "I" sees herself as once having been a part of?

0

Once I was nothing: once we were one

1

In the unborn world we heard the years hurtling past,  
whirring like gears in a giant factory—*time, time, time*—

2

We heard human breathing,  
thoughts coming and going like bamboo leaves hissing in wind,  
doubts swarming like reconnaissance planes over forests of sleep,  
we heard words murmured in love.

3

We felt naked bodies climb each other,  
cleaving, cleaving,  
as if they could ride each other to a country that can't be named.

We felt bedsprings creak, felt the rough sailcloth of sheet dampen,  
felt wet skin hold them together and apart.

What borders did they cross? What more did they want? [Ed. note]

Bittersweet the sweat we tasted, the swollen lips we touched, the  
chafe of separate loins:  
bittersweet the wine of *one flesh* they drank and drank.

The parallel grammatical structure of the line, "Once I was nothing: once we were one" reflects a mirror-like structure, with the colon in the middle visually standing in for a mirror. At the same time, the colon invokes an analogy between a subjectivity constituted by "nothing" and one constituted by a "we" that is founded on oneness. This first line most immediately suggests a psychoanalytic reading in which the nascent ego emerges through a misidentification of the infant subject with her own mirror image. In what Jacques Lacan calls "the mirror stage," the infant sees in her mirrored reflection an image of wholeness that does not correspond with the bodily fragmentation she experiences. This dynamic of misidentification extends to a kind of fusional identification of the self with the mother as well; in both cases, an external image of the body produces a psychic response that gives rise to the mental representation of an ideal "I" toward which the subject will perpetually strive throughout her life. According to Lacan, the process

by which the ego is conceived and born in the Imaginary remains the part of the subject that is always pursuing wholeness and unity, trying to overcome the division which created it in the first place.<sup>16</sup>

In Kim's poem, the simultaneous psychic attachment and alienation of the child in relation to her mother is taken further back, before infancy, to even before birth. Despite this difference, the dimension of an interminable questing for wholeness or *oneness* with the Other remains resonant with a Lacanian kind of subject—lines like “We felt naked bodies climb each other,/ cleaving, cleaving,/ as if they could ride each other to a country that can't be named” rhythmically express something like desperation between two bodies that want to penetrate each other. Likewise the lines “wet skin hold[ing] them together and apart/bittersweet . . . the chafe of separate loins:/ bittersweet the wine of *one flesh* they drank and drank” illustrate vividly the dynamic of a deep attachment always attended by alienation and separation.

Besides the psychic implications of the poem, there is also a deeply biological sense of “generation” that influences our reading of the first person plural subject. The “we” seems also to refer to prezygotic sex cells,<sup>17</sup> which the speaker describes as being outside of time (“we heard the years hurtling past”) and prehuman. In section 4, the we-cells run and hide as entities referred to as “they” attempt to catch them.

4

They called us over oceans of dream-salt,  
their voices *moving over the face of the waters* like searchlights from a  
guardtower.

We hid, and refused to come out.

Their cries followed like police dogs snarling from a leash.

We ran through benzene rain, flew through clouds of jet-fuel.

We swam through hydrogen spume, scudded among stars number-  
less as sands.

We didn't want to be born we didn't want.

Blindly their hands groped for us like dragnets trawling for  
corpses,

blindly their hands hauled me like grappling hooks from the  
waves,

the foaming scalps of ghost-children laughing, seaweed-hair dripping,  
the driftwood of other children who might have been.

Out of chromosomes and dust,  
cells of hope, cells of history,  
out of refugees running from mortar shells, immigrants driving to power  
plants in Jersey,  
out of meadowsweet and oil, the chaff of unlived lives blowing endlessly,  
out of wishes known and unknown they reeled me in.

The "they" seems to refer to a God-like figure "calling" them into being, as the phrase "*moving over the face of the waters*" is nearly a direct quote of Genesis 1:2: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."<sup>18</sup> The traumas of war seem to structure the consciousness of the speaker before she is born. The references to swarming "reconnaissance planes," "searchlights from a guardtower," "police dogs snarling from a leash," "benzene rain," and "hydrogen spume" (alluding to the use of the chemical warfare agents) vividly reproduce the scenes of war from the perspective of refugees or dissidents in hiding. In a sense, the structure of the traumatic memory of the speaker's parents is symmetrical to, though distinct from, the speaker's own postmemory. The fact that the speaker and "other children who might have been" didn't want to be born suggests the horror of the world they would be born into, where such images of war are not *analogies*—"like searchlights from a guardtower," "like police dogs," "like reconnaissance planes," and so on—but a reality that people like the speaker's parents endured.

Section 5 depicts not only the generation of the speaker as a fetus, but also the contours of intergenerational, intersubjective alienations as well as entanglements. The first line marks the moment of conception: "I entered the labyrinth of my mother's body." From there the speaker explores the internal landscape of her mother's body:

I wandered through nerve-forests branching in every direction,  
towering trees fired by feeling, crackling and smoldering.  
I rowed through vein-rivers.  
I splashed in lymph-creeks between islands of glands.



I leaped rib to rib, rung to rung on the spine,  
 I swung from the ropes of entrails.  
 I played on organs, leaped through a fog of sweet oxygen in the lungs.

All these actions begin with the word “I,” stressing the speaker’s now individual consciousness and almost-human composition. She is inside of her mother’s body, and yet separate, so that her mother’s body becomes a vast internal world that the zygotic “I” explores and wonders at. The speaker is simultaneously at one with and irreducibly distinct from her mother’s body. This is especially evident when she describes her mother’s brain and heart:

I clambered over tectonic plates of the skull, scrambling not to fall  
 down the chasms between, the mind-mountains where I could see no  
 bottom.

I peered through sockets at the brain brewing in cliffs of bone  
 like a gigantic volcano, with its magma of memories, magma of  
 tomorrows,

I could have played there forever, watching, wondering at the vast  
 expanses inside,  
 wondering at the great chambers in the heart.

What machine made me move into the womb-cave, made me  
 a grave of flesh, now the engine of beginning driving forwards,  
 cells dividing, cells dividing:

The “chasms” are so great and so deep that they fill the speaker with both fear and awe, suggesting the kind of unrepresentable trauma that the second-generation subject of postmemory inherits from the first generation. The brain that the speaker sees is overflowing with and nearly exploding from “its magma of memories, magma of tomorrows.” The implication is that the speaker will never fully know these memories and tomorrows, the “vast expanses inside”; she can only “watch” and “wonder.”

After she finally drops into the “womb-cave” and undergoes the process of “cells dividing, cells dividing” and all her body parts coming together, her birth into the world is marked by violence, division, and confusion:

then cold metal tongs clamped my forehead and temples,  
 then forceps plucked me from my mother’s body like fruit torn from a tree

then I heard a cry of pain—mine? not mine?—  
 then a scalpel's *snip snip* against the umbilical cord, like razors scraping a  
 leather strop:  
 soon I felt sticky with blood and matted fur, surgical lights blinding,  
 soon I felt tears burning my skin—*Why are you crying? Why am I?*—  
 I didn't know who or what I was, only that I was,  
 each question answered by the echo of my voice alone: I, I, I.

This passage depicts the speaker being unwillingly and forcibly removed from her mother's body, with cold metal forceps and the surgical scalpel being the first objects touching her newly birthed body. The rhythms of biopower affecting the formation of the speaker's body, its forcible removal, and its displacement are metaphorically congruous with those surrounding her parents' experience of war—the homelessness, wandering, hiding, and psychical violence of refugee life (“benzene rain,” “hydrogen spume,” “running from mortar shells,” and so on) and its aftereffects (“immigrants driving to power plants in Jersey”). Since the speaker clearly can have no memory of her birth, the memory depicted here is a willful act of narrative, of reconstruction presumably based on sources that the speaker encountered over the course of her life. This aspect of the reconstruction of war memory by way of a postmemorial, intersubjective creative act is seen throughout Kim's book, in poems like “Resistance,” “Fragments of the Forgotten War,” “Flight,” and “Transit Car,” among others. The reconstructive aspect of such poems is analogous to postmemory—the *creation* of a memory one does not have, rather than the *recollection* of the memory of an experience one had at one time. These poems of oral witness imply a structural element of *dual* creation, which involves both the person who creates a story as he/she speaks about his/her past experience, as well as the poet-listener who creates the form of the poem, which exhibits overlapping affective listening qualities. At once both listener and speaker, the subject of postmemory in “Generation” acts out the remoteness of the “original” memories at the same time that she feels them deeply woven into her own existence.

The passage further foreshadows the speaker's now human-to-human relationship with her mother as one vexed by the crisis of identity and traumatized subjectivity. The “cry of pain” is her mother's, but the speaker is

confused and wonders whether the cry is “mine? not mine?” While the “cry of pain” is almost certainly referring to the pain a woman endures in giving birth, it also has the connotation of the pain of the traumatic effects of war that the mother has experienced and will deal with for the rest of her life. In this sense, the “mine? not mine?” question of the speaker will be one that she too must deal with under the psychic weight of postmemory. The question, too, of knowing “who or what [she is]” foreshadows the fragmented and incoherent sense of identity that the speaker will struggle with as not only the inheritor of a secondhand memory of trauma, but also as a diasporic subject who is exiled from the time and place of that trauma.

The cry of pain could also invoke the idea of the poet and the figure of the mother as common figures for national voice in times of social and political upheaval. The separation of mother and child in such a reading would take on an allegorical dimension that calls to mind the simultaneous death and birth pains involved in the process and effects of national division. However, Kim plays with these familiar tropes in a way that ultimately destabilizes them. The child is forever separated from the maternal landscape she has just described once she enters the external world. She can never go back to “the labyrinth of mother’s body,” forced instead to be born through a violence reminiscent of war:

now neurons sizzling, dendrites buzzing,  
 now arteries tunneling tissue like tubes hooked to an IV;  
 now organs pumping, hammers of hunger and thirst pounding,  
 now sinews cleaving, tendons lashing meat to bone:  
 meanwhile my skeleton welding, scalp cementing like mortar,  
 meanwhile my face soldered on, hardening like a mask of molten steel,  
 meanwhile my blood churning like a furnace of wanting,  
 meanwhile my heart ticking like a bomb—*is-was, is-was*:

Significantly, the images in these lines will find echoes in other poems in *Notes from the Divided Country*, like “The Chasm” and “Fragments of the Forgotten War”—poems that depict the violence and trauma of the Korean War. The insides of bodies in these poems are described not in the process of generation, but *degeneration*—after they have been blown apart by bombs or guns, or eaten by vultures. The echoes between “Generation” and these

other poems suggest that Kim is connecting the psychic not only to the individual and the familial, but also to the *inheritance* of the idea of the "national." This is not an inheritance that is nostalgic for a once-unified Korea, however. While Kim's poems uncover the trauma that the Korean War and national division have caused, she does so without invoking or glorifying a national identity. Furthermore the juxtaposition of the Korean War poems with other poems set in the United States serve to metaphorize what one could mean by a "divided country." The poem "Transit Car," for example, is a reimagining of the experience of a Japanese American woman photographed in a transit car, face pressed against the window, traveling from relocation center to relocation center, one after another, during the Japanese internment in the United States. When one reads this poem alongside poems depicting the suffering of Koreans during the Japanese occupation, or during the Korean War, in Kim's book the "divided country" becomes any country divided against itself, degenerating from power struggles, injustice, and dehumanization. Thus, while "Generation" plays with the typically nationalistic figures of the child and its motherland, they are ultimately refigured in Kim's work as unbound by national identity under a broader vision of justice and solidarity.

In the end, the speaker states that "each question [is] answered by the echo of my voice alone: I, I, I." Kim is perhaps highlighting the fact that those who experienced the trauma of the Korean War have a different memory from those who couldn't have experienced it. Returning to the quote from an interview with Kim that opened this article, she sees her writing as "the responsibility that one has, in terms of using the imagination as a means of compassion, and understanding things one couldn't have experienced." Kim is seeking to empathize with the suffering of those who have survived the Korean War, while acknowledging at the same time that she herself, or any other postgeneration children, couldn't have experienced it. Trauma travels across generations, languages, cultures, and geographies through affective, postmemorial (af)filiaions that link them. Kim's book exhibits this dynamic, while still resisting full identification with victimhood and trauma. This, I would argue, is the groundwork for the ethics of memory that structures her book as a whole.

Dominick LaCapra, in his essay "Trauma, Absence, and Loss" argues

that the distinction between loss and absence is crucial when representing trauma. Losses are specific and involve particular events while with absence “one cannot lose what one never had.”<sup>19</sup> He further suggests that absence applies to ultimate foundations in general, and that when absence becomes conflated with loss, the absence becomes fetishized and absorbs or obscures the significance of particular historical losses (as with certain renditions of both Christian and oedipal stories). The affirmation of absence as absence rather than loss or lack, according to LaCapra, “opens up different possibilities and requires different modes of coming to terms with problems” (706).

Regarding “secondary witnesses” (who in the context of this essay would be the diasporic Korean postgeneration), LaCapra observes that a difficulty arises when the virtual experience involved in empathy “gives way to vicarious victimhood, and empathy with the victim seems to become an identity” (699). He proposes instead that the secondary witness who resists full identification and the dubious appropriation of the status of victim may nonetheless undergo “empathic unsettlement or even muted trauma” (717). Since it acknowledges that it is dubious to make oneself a surrogate victim, the role of empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness does not entail identity; it involves “a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place” (722). The paradigm of empathic unsettlement sets in relief the problem of how to address traumatic events involving victimization, including the problem of composing narratives that neither confuse one’s position with the victim’s nor “seek facile uplift, harmonization, or closure but allow the unsettlement that they address to affect the narrative’s own movement” (723). Empathy that resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of another would depend on one’s recognition that another’s loss is not identical to one’s own loss or experiences of absence.

In light of LaCapra’s analysis, the diasporic postgeneration(s) of collective trauma must grapple with the ghostly, unsettling *absence* of their parents’ traumatic losses—material, familial, psychical—from a war they only know about secondhand. The speaker in “Generation,” while affectively engaged with the burden of historical trauma, resists not only surrogate identifica-

tion with her parents' experiences, but also troubles the question of a stable "I" altogether. The poem ends with the repetition of the word "I" three times—"I, I, I."—which visually resonates with and "echoes" the line "cells dividing, cells dividing" that came before it. The effect of this association is the suggestion of a never whole or stable consciousness, repeatedly dividing and fragmenting itself even as it "driv[es] forwards." The specific loss that the poem deals with is the experience of a baby losing its "home" in its mother's body, but the absences that haunt the poem are the unfathomable traumatic experiences of the child's parents before the child was born, as well an "affirmation of absence as absence" at the end of the poem—what one could argue is a critique of foundational, unified identity. These distinctive registers of loss and absence contribute to how the poem both performs empathic unsettlement and produces it in the reader.

The paradigm that Kim sets up in "Generation" of a fragmented, unstable identity that resists surrogate victimization paves the way for an approach to ethical memory founded on a comparative, transnational notion of justice. The varied internal and external focalizers featured in *Notes from the Divided Country* bind together different temporal, spatial, and cultural sites, connecting diverse private and collective traumas while still retaining their specificities. This is a move away from identity politics to a vision of justice that cuts across nation, ethnicity, received identities, and official histories; it is an act of solidarity that aims to create new communal and political identities.

The ethical dimension of Kim's book, which shapes "Generation," is perhaps best encapsulated in a line of one of the later poems. In the poem "Montage with Neon, Bok Choi, Gasoline, Lovers & Strangers," the lyric speaker observes old men on the streets of Seoul "with hair the color of scallion root . . . old enough to have stolen overcoats & shoes from corpses" who seem to say:

after things turned to their worst, we began again,  
 but may you never see what we saw,  
 may you never do what we've done,  
 may you never remember & may you never forget.

*May you never remember and may you never forget.* This enigmatic, subjunctive statement resonates with a lesson that LaCapra has stressed: that simultaneously remembering and actively taking leave or “forgetting” is what distinguishes healthy mourning from debilitating, endless melancholy.<sup>20</sup> In other words, forgetting and remembering must happen together. *Notes from the Divided Country* puts a twist on this counsel to “remember *and* forget” by couching it in the negative: “*never* remember and *never* forget.” One must remember that one can never *remember* another’s memory. And yet, sometimes, one must not allow for the forgetting of that other’s memory. Postmemory entails a different kind of remembering that is, in the first instance, relational, nonidentitarian, and ethical.

## Notes

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1. Suji Kwock Kim, *Notes from the Divided Country* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).
2. Robert Siegel, interview with Suji Kwock Kim, National Public Radio, October 13, 2003.
3. Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 34.
4. New Jersey, Seoul, Queens, Pyongyang, Skye (in Scotland), Vladivostok, and Harbin are cities mentioned, among others.
5. One might point to the poem “Occupation” as an exception since it seems to be mostly written in the third person; however the “You” that abruptly interjects (starting in the twenty-fifth line, near the end of the brief poem) confuses this perspective, making the whole poem suddenly sound like free indirect speech, which combines characteristics of third-person along with the essence of first-person direct speech.
6. Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103.
7. This affective force is by no means necessarily as strong as the original memory or trauma, but what makes it *postmemory* is the retaining of some residue of the affect associated with the original memory, even as it evolves or transforms in the postgeneration.
8. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 243.
9. Lok C. D. Siu, *Memories of a Future Home: Diasporic Citizenship of Chinese in Panama* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4.

10. See Sandra So Hee Chi Kim, "Redefining Diaspora through a Phenomenology of Postmemory," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 16, no. 3 (2013): 337–52. In that essay I argue that, while diasporic groups do not exist as entities that have some common essence or nature, they do exist phenomenologically. I redefine "diaspora" to refer to the phenomenon that emerges when displaced subjects who experience the loss of an "origin" (whether literal or symbolic) perpetuate identifications associated with those places of origin in subsequent generations through the mechanisms of postmemory.
11. Suji Kwock Kim stated this before reading "Generation" at one of the "Lunch Poems" series at the University of California at Berkeley. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHON6gFvLKs> (accessed January 17, 2013).
12. Korea was divided at the 38th parallel in 1945 after World War II, but the signing of the armistice after the Korean War made that division permanent.
13. Grace M. Cho, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 68–69.
14. *Ibid.*, 9.
15. *Postgeneration* is a term frequently used by Hirsch to indicate the "generation after" the first generation of Holocaust survivors, but in my view should not be limited to the second generation. It can be used in the broader sense of any generation that follows the first-generation survivors of collective trauma.
16. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror-Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," trans. Bruce Fink in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006).
17. I owe this insight to Seo-Young Chu. See Seo-Young Chu, "Science Fiction and Postmemory Han in Contemporary Korean American Literature." *MELUS* 33, no. 4 (2008): 106.
18. Gen. 1:2 (AV).
19. Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss." *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 701.
20. *Ibid.*, 716.