Entwined Imperial Networks:

Reading Cold War Afterlives in Contemporary Asian American and Asian Representations

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the afterlives of US Cold War military interventions in post-WWII North America and Asia by analyzing representations of war memories and transpacific and inter-Asian migrations in contemporary Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts. Through examining how the selected literary texts, films, and creative nonfictions connect US wars in Asia with US anti-black racism at home, militarization and nuclearization in the Pacific, settler colonial violence, and postwar Asian state violence as entwined networks of complicity by the US, Asian states, and less recognizable Western imperial ally Canada, I argue that by reimagining US wars in Asia in relation to postwar violence in varied sites, the cultural texts complicate a US-centric understanding of the Cold War and Asian America. Adopting inter-Asian and transpacific frames, this dissertation on the one hand reframes the Cold War in relation to post-WWII violence in Asia and the Pacific, and, on the other hand, provides an alternative way of reading Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts as mutual historical resources.

The first three chapters analyze how Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* (1998), Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* (2016) and *DMZ Colony* (2020), Lee Issac Chung's *Minari* (2020), and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) interweave Korean War memories with Korean migration to the US and less recognizable atrocity committed by US-backed South Korean regimes within South Korea as well as in Jeju island and Vietnam. By examining how the texts depict US War in Korea in relational contexts of Japanese colonialism, South Korean state violence and subimperialism, and contemporary South Korea's capitalist development, I argue that such relationalities elucidate historical atrocity doubly forgotten by both the US and South Korean nationalist narratives of the Korean War. The following three chapters

examine how lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking for* (2003), Ku Yu-ling's *Our Stories: Migration and Labour in Taiwan* (2008/2011) and *Return Home* (2014), Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2005), and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) illustrate Cold War afterlives in sites not commonly known as the frontstage of US wars in Asia. By grounding US wars in militarization and nuclearization in the Pacific and foregrounding Japan's disavowal of war crimes and Canada's complicity with US empire, obscuration of militarization and colonialism in Okinawa, and the explicit and implicit US presence in Taiwan and Vietnam, I argue that the texts help us further investigate historical atrocities that are intertwined with the more well-known US wars in Asia and yet rendered implicit. In addition to analyzing the entwined imperial networks in the texts, this dissertation also underscores how limits of the texts' representation foreground the difficulties necessarily involved in comprehending and representing the Cold War. Through highlighting how the texts refuse to render traumatic memories into comprehensive narratives and instead attending to unlikely friendship and alliances, I show that imperial networks represented in these texts are not totalizing; rather, they generate, however briefly, relationalities forged by shared yet distinct histories and positionalities.

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Introduction

Lee Issac Chung's film *Minari* (2020) depicts a Korean immigrant family's struggles with their life in 1980s Arkansas, where the family's patriarch Jacob Yi dreamed of owning a farm and selling Korean produce to the increasing Korean immigrants. The film has won several awards and received critical acclaim. The reviews of the film in the US tend to overlook the historical condition forcing the family's migration from South Korea and instead reading the film as a narrative about Asian American immigrants' struggles with life in the US. However, in the film, Jacob's reference to the difficult life in 1980s South Korea shifts the film's focus from the struggles Korean immigrants faced in Arkansas in the 1980s. The scene features Jacob and his wife Monica arguing about whether to leave Arkansas because of Jacob's failed agricultural business. Trying to persuade Monica to stay, Jacob reminds her, "Life was so difficult in Korea. Remember what we said when we got married? That we'd go to America and save each other" (*Minari).* Jacob's reference to postwar South Korea, whose people continue to suffer difficult life thirty years after the Korean War, highlights that reading the film solely as a narrative about Korean immigration to the US does not capture the aftermath of the Korean War in South Korea. The brief reference to the otherwise periphery presence of 1980s South Korea in the film pushes for further investigation of *both* how the Korean War is forgotten in the US *and* how the war perpetuates in 1980s South Korea. In other words, this scene in *Minari* calls for a method of reading the film *simultaneously* in the contexts of 1980s Arkansas and 1980s South Korea to trace the concurrent historical forces shaping Korean migration to the US as well as the Cold War afterlives in South Korea.

Jacob's reference to 1980s South Korea evokes the haunting histories of violence

committed by US-backed South Korean regimes. The bloody crackdown of Gwangju Uprising (1980), for instance, was enforced by US-South Korean complicity in prioritizing economic interests over democratic reform. The uprising was anchored in longer histories of South Korea's uneven development of capitalism. Driven by economic collapse caused by rapid industrialization and US surplus agricultural products since the 1950s, workers and farmers in Gwangju–Jeonnam area had long suffered from poverty. Moreover, the Honam area in particular was subject to intense exploitation under the feudal system and the following Japanese colonialism and US military government era.[1] The violent military suppression of the uprising by Chun Doo-hwan regime was supported by the US officials, who viewed the uprising as a threat to US investors. The US government approved suppression of Gwangju at a White House meeting on May 22, 1980. In addition to approving the suppression, official such as Secretary of State Edmund Muski also decided to sanction the president of US Export-Import Bank's visit to Seoul in June so that he could arrange ROK contracts for nuclear power plants and expansion of the Seoul subway system.[2] In linking foreign policy toward Korea to US economic interests, the US support for the suppression marked "the bloody beginning of a neoliberal accumulation regime on Korea" (Katsiaficas 202).

I begin with a discussion of this particular scene in *Minari* because it encapsulates this dissertation's focus on how contemporary Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts reframe the Cold War while pushing the boundaries of Asian American critique. This

[1] In "The Socio-Economic Background of the Gwangju Uprising" (2003), Ahn Jean notes that the Honam area in particular was subject to "intense exploitation under the feudal system, and continued to be the major area for imperialistic plundering during the Japanese colonial era and the United States military government era" (171).
[2] See Georgy Katsiaficas's investigation of US official documents in "Neoliberalism and the Gwangju Uprising" (2006).

dissertation explores the visible and invisible presence of the US in Asia by reading selected contemporary representations of Cold War in Asia, including Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* (1998), Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* (2016) and *DMZ Colony* (2020), Lee Isaac Chung's film *Minari* (2020), Bong Joon-ho's film *Parasite* (2019), and Ku Yu-ling's *Our Stories: Migration and Labour in Taiwan* (2008/2011) and *Return Home* (2014), lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking for* (2003), Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2005), and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). Produced in Asia, the US and Canada, these texts represent the ongoing Cold War in Asia and the Pacific through war memories, transpacific and inter-Asian migrations, and militarized capitalist development in Asia. Narrating from seemingly disconnected sites, these texts represent explicit US military interventions as well as how US militarism is rendered implicit in daily life and desires for modernity. Juxtaposed together, these texts foreground the otherwise obscured US post-WWII transpacific interventions while revealing the connections among seemingly distinct sites. Transpacific entanglements, Yen Le Espiritu, Lisa Lowe, and Lisa Yoneyama indicate, are US settler logic that "intersects with racialized capitalism and overseas empire [and] asserts itself—often through the collaborative networks of the U.S.-backed, patriarchally organized, subimperial Asian 'client- states'—in transpacific arrangements" (175). Building on their account, in this dissertation I ask: How does US Cold War continue to shape migrations, everyday practices, and imaginings of modernity within and across Asia? How do contemporary Asian American/Canadian and Asian writers' representations of US wars in Asia address the constellations of historical violence which both Americans and Asians are part of? What is revealed about the boundaries of Asian America and US empire by reading Asian American texts in juxtaposition with Asian texts?

I suggest that the afterlives of US Cold War in Asia as depicted in the texts I analyze remap the boundaries of Asian American critique. By Asian American critique, I mean the critique of US nationalism and the analysis of the interconnected histories between the US and Asia in Asian American studies. In "The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique" (1998), Lisa Lowe argues that Asian American critique "interrogate[s] the national ontology through which the United States constructs its international 'others' and through which the nation-state has either sought to transform those 'others' into subjects of the national, or conversely, to subordinate them as objects of that national ontology" (30). In highlighting the interconnection between the exclusion of Asian others and its incorporation of Asian immigrants in the US nation state, Lowe indicates that Asian American critique is a method that contests views of US nationalist history through attending to the mutually constitutive histories connecting the US and Asia. By approaching Asian American formation as an index of the US as a racist state and an empire, Lowe indicates that the critical strength of Asian American critique is not limited to the restoration of a cultural heritage to an identity formation" (30).

Furthering Lowe's view, Jodi Kim in *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (2010) focuses on the Cold War in Asia and reframes Asian American critique as an "unsettling hermeneutic" (10), which functions as an interpretive method that aims to unsettle US nationalist histories and to read Asian American literature as critique of the genealogy of US empire rather than as a form of ethnic literature. By considering the Cold War not as a historical event but as an ongoing "knowledge project" that generates an ontology through which Asian Americans are known as an identity category whose history of formation is rendered irrelevant to US imperialist projects in Asia (8), Kim's re-envisioning of Asian

American critique disrupts a US nationalist understanding of the Cold War. In addition, by linking the history of Asian American formation and US interventions in Asia, Kim's notion of Asian American critique reframes Asian American as an "analytic, which is decidedly not a reified identity category, for apprehending the specificity of American empire in Asia in the second half of the twentieth century" (10). In this sense, Kim's formulation of Asian American critique highlights the inadequacy of approaching Asian American as only an identity category situated in the context of the US civil rights movement. In apprehending Asian American as an index of the histories of US presence in Asia, Kim indicates that Asian American critique can be furthered by investigating the interconnected histories between the US and Asia.

Although both Lowe and Kim envision Asian American critique as a method uncovering the contradictions of US nationalism, their concern with the interconnections between the US and Asia suggests that the US is not the only site to generate Asian American critique. My project deploys Asian American critique to read the representations of the linkages between US Cold War in Asia, diasporic memories, transpacific and inter-Asian migrancy. In doing so, I hope to highlight the interconnected histories between Asia and the US. In "Asians on the Rim: Transnational Capital and Local Community in the Making of Contemporary Asian America" (1999), Arif Dirlik contends that "Asian America is no longer a location just in the United States but, at the same time, is a location on a metaphorical Rim constituted by diasporas and the movement of individuals" (41). He indicates that to understand Asian Americans, one must attend to "a multiplicity of historical trajectories that converge in the locations we call Asian America but that may diverge once again to disrupt the very idea of Asian Americanness" (41). Dirlik thus points out that addressing transnational historical

forces that shape Asian America helps disrupting an essentialist understanding of Asian American identity. Following Dirlik's observation, my project seeks a broader historical understanding of Asian America.

In addition to viewing Asian America primarily as critical political coalitions of US domestic ethnic minorities, my dissertation stresses the historical linkages between Asia and the US in order to further a relational investigation of Asian and Asian American subject formations and historical atrocity. To do so, I borrow David Palumbo-Liu's designation of "Asian/American" as a term that "marks both the distinction installed between 'Asian' and 'American' and a dynamic, unsettled, and inclusive movement" (1). I also follow Chih-ming Wang's formulation of "Asia/America," which signifies "not only a cultural political space of transborder movement, but also a structure of feeling shaped by colonial histories, imperialist domination, and the neoliberalist imaginations" (*Transpacific* 20). Wang's concept of Asia/America reframes Asia and America not as "independent political entities, each with its own uncontaminated history, but instead as mutually constitutive conditions" (*Transpacific* 88). I follow Wang's work to situate my reading of the texts in the intersecting histories between America and Asia.

This dissertation attempts to further Asian American critique by considering how reading representations of Cold War produced in Asia and North America enables Asian American studies to further investigate Asian American subject formation as an entwined process with US imperialism in Asia. In analyzing Asian American lawsuit against Harvard University's discrimination in 2015, Kandice Chuh asserts that Asian American model minority myth is deeply embedded in US investment in selective Asian nations such as Japan after WWII. In addition to being a product of US racism, Chuh underlines that Asian

racialization is an instrument to secure US dominance of capitalism. Significantly, Chuh points out that East Asian countries' swift postwar development was produced by US Cold War efforts to establish hegemony in Asia. Placing the contemporary myth of Asian American model minority in histories of US Cold War interventions, Chuh highlights that "Asia rises because it is made, linguistically, geopolitically, and economically, to rise, and the location of the origins of contemporary Asianness in the trajectories of modernity—which is to say, the trajectories of slavery and indenture, of colonialism and dispossession—is thrown into relief" ("Asians" 228). In this sense, Asia as well as Asian Americans are implicated in shared genealogies of historical violence. Building on Chuh's account, I argue that the selected contemporary representations of Cold War address the constellations of violence that involve Asian Americans and subjects in sites less recognizable as Asian America.

My project thereby suggests that reading the contemporary representations of Cold War in Asia enables Asian American studies to reframe both Asian America and Asia as positions structured by their shared yet distinct historical violence. In discussing the potentials of relocating Asian American studies in Asia, Rika Nakamura argues that such relocation gestures to a critical comparative minority studies and provides "a place of mutual learning: a place where we not only can explore the continuities and discontinuities between, and within, Asia and Asian America but also reflect upon and deconstruct our own discursive positions, and the violence we inflict upon others" (252-53). Nakamura thus points out that relocating Asian American studies can offer a productive space of self-critique that does not center on the US as the sole agent of atrocity. Building on Nakamura's observation, I argue that reading the selected Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural representations of Cold War, with their depictions of violence imposed by various subjects as well as resistances, can provide

such a space of encounter between Asia and Asian America.

II. Literature Review

A. Asian American Studies: Unsettling Boundaries between Asia and the US

Rooted in cross-racial social movements and Third World anti-imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s, Asian American studies has developed critiques of US racism and imperialism. Since then, transnational migrations of refugees and diasporas have pushed the field to conceive of *Asian American* beyond an identity and more as broader historical and geographical interconnections. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ, and K. Scott Wong note that on one level, the adjective use of Asian as a descriptor for American "accentuates the degree to which the field reflects multiple coordinates (in East, South, and Southeast Asia, and the United States)" (5). Additionally, they indicate that *Asian American* is also an ethnoracial category that underscores migration histories. In highlighting the field's multiple constituents, the critics underscore that Asia is not simply a place of origin for Asian Americans and that Asian American experiences in the US cannot be reduced to a coherent narrative.[3]

There have been some key theoretical turns in Asian American studies that decenter, displace, and critically challenge national frames in the field and attend to the obscured linkages among Asia, the Pacific, and America. In the 1980s and 1990s, Asian American literary critics such as Elaine H. Kim and Sau-ling Wong approached Asian American literature as a potential base for pan-Asian coalition. Nevertheless, they caution against

[3] At the starting stage of the field, scholars in Asian American studies attended more to the issues of stereotypical representations of Asian subjects in the US, while aiming to make visible Asian American lived experiences in US history. In so doing, the field prioritized establishing an Asian American identity based on common history and political unification. This call for prioritizing Asian American identity also appears in more recent Asian American scholarship. See Frank Chin, "Preface" (1975) and Timothy Yu, "Has Asian American Studies Failed?" (2018).

centering on Asian American experiences of racialization in the US, underlining that the term *Asian American* cannot adequately represent the diverse and complex Asian American communities.[4] Although Wong's work differs from Kim's approach in her attempt to establish an Asian American literary tradition rather than elucidating sociohistorical contexts, both projects are grounded in Asian American experiences in America.

The focus on the US context has been widely challenged during the field's transnational turn. While some critics called for a transnational perspective on Asian American experiences, others cautioned that the shift in focus risked deflecting attention from Asian American communities, thereby reducing the field's critical strength.[5] The transnational turn is pushed further by critics who read Asian American literature as a way to theorize US racism and imperialism. In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), Lisa Lowe investigates Asian American immigration as a site of contradictions between the imperative of the US nation-state and that of global capitalism. Lowe contends that the critical distance between Asian America culture and US nationalism allows Asian American culture to be a site where narratives and memories repressed by US nationalist history are reinvented and articulated. Attending to both US empire and racism, Lowe opens a space to examine how Asian American cultural productions represent the otherwise obscured US imperialism in Asia. In a similar vein, in *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian American Critique*

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[4] See Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (1982) and Sau-ling Wong, *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance* (1993).

[5] In "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at the Theoretical Crossroads" (1995), Sau-ling Wong argues that the field's turn to a diasporic perspective risks privileging certain transnational subjects whose class advantages enable their mobility. In contrast, Susan Koshy in "The Fiction of Asian American Literature" (1996), rejects Wong's view and argues that attending to transnational contexts enables critics to interrogate assumptions about pan-Asian coalitions. Koshy cautions that uncritically encompassing different Asian groups and their cultural productions in the name of pan-Asian coalitions risks "repressing important connections between Asian and Asian American literature" and erasing the dynamics of transnational era (318).

(2003), Kandice Chuh reconstructs *Asian American* as a critical term that "is/names racism and resistance, citizenship and its denial, subjectivity and subjection" (8). Chuh thus redefines Asian American literary texts as "theoretical texts" that contest normalized racial, gender, sexual, and national identities (16). In doing so, Chuh seeks to broaden the field's critical scope while rigorously interrogating identity politics.

Although the critics discussed above envision Asian American studies in divergent ways, their differences reiterate the difficulty of delimiting the boundaries of Asian American critique. The critics' different approaches to defining *Asian American* show the term's oscillation between an identity grounded in the sociohistorical context of the US and a critical term designating a broader critique of identity politics. Whether critics insist on pan-Asian coalitions in the US or call attention to transnational effects, they show that Asian American critique exceeds national boundaries and that its objects of study cannot easily settle in America or Asia.

More recently, critics have proposed to view the very uncertainties of the field as an alternative way to envision the field. In "Asian American Literature and the Resistances of Theory" (2010), Christopher Lee argues that the discursive indeterminacy of the term Asian American enables scholars to reconsider the limits of gaining knowledge about Asian Americans through reading Asian American literature. In *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature* (2012), Lee proposes to read Asian American literary texts as mediations that reveal the gap between critics' political desires and reading practices. Drawing upon Theodor Adorno, Lee urges critics to reconceive an "aesthetic figure" that "denotes a mode of cognition that exceeds the parameters of rational knowledge and/or political agency" (13).

The need to examine the field's conditions of knowledge production highlights the significance of reconfiguring Asian American critical work. Asia-based scholars have done so by reconsidering the role of the US in underpinning forms of knowledge produced in Asia, thereby providing different ways to redirect Asian American studies. In his introduction to a special issue of *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (2012), Chih-ming Wang argues that rethinking Asia enables Asian American studies to examine its US-centrism. Wang proposes to reframe Asia as "a critical locus of intellectual practice and commitment haunted by interconnected histories and memories of war, displacement, and movement between nations and across the ocean" (165). Wang thus places Asian American studies in a broader context that allows for reference points besides US national histories.

Inter-Asian perspective also challenges the field to critically examine its intellectual genealogies, which are implicated in US wars and colonialism in Asia.[6] In "Asian American Studies in Travel" (2012), Lisa Yoneyama argues that interrogating Cold War legacies in Asia is significant to ensuring the "most productively unsettling qualities of Asian American studies" (298). Yoneyama cautions Asian American studies against transporting North American liberal multiculturalism as it travels to Asia and the Pacific and calls for critical inter-Asian and transpacific perspectives that enable the field to be reconceived as "a discursive site that illuminates different yet intersecting trajectories of migration, colonialism, labor, capital, and militarized imperialism in and across Asia, the Pacific and North America" (295).

By reading Asian American representations alongside with Asian representations, I hope to illuminate what Yoneyama calls the "different yet intersecting trajectories" (295). In her

[6] For a discussion of the shared Cold War genealogies of Asian American studies and Asian studies, see Sucheta Mazumdar, "Asian American Studies and Asian Studies: Rethinking Roots" (1991).

reflection on the 2015 Summer Institute in Asian American Studies in Taiwan, Hsiu-chuan Lee points out that the dialogue between North America-based and Asia-based scholars shows that "the term 'Asian American,' when transplanted to Asia, might indicate not as much an identity category as a cognitive tool" (47-48). Reengaging with how Asia and US have been mutually constitutive, Lee contends, may offer new ways to read Asian American texts and reconfigure Asia. Following the aforementioned critics' call to reengage Asia, I contend that reading these representations of post-WWII historical violence can push us to ask: what does it mean to study Asian histories through reading Asian American texts?

B. Cold War: Disconnected Histories

Historians have argued that the Cold War is intertwined with protracted colonialism and conversion of US interventions into modernity. In *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (2007), Odd Arne Westad contends that the Cold War was a US and Soviet imperialist project of modeling the world into their ideal modernity. Westad points out that during the Cold War, as an economic and military superpower, the US was able to convert American values such as property-based liberty and faith in free markets into "teleological functions" and displaced energies for decolonization (9).

In *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (1999), Bruce Cumings argues that the Cold War consisted of two projects: "the containment project, providing security against both the enemy and the ally, and the hegemonic project, providing for American leverage over the necessary resources of [the US'] industrial rivals" (214). By cultivating Japan as a regional power dependent on the US, the US was able to sustain a "hegemonic web" in which East Asian nations such as Japan,

Taiwan and South Korea industrialized without undermining the US' leading position in the global economy (94), making it difficult for the semisovereign states to perceive their distinct yet subordinate positions in the US hegemonic web in East Asia.

In *The Other Cold War* (2010), Heonik Kwon argues that the dominant narrative of the Cold War as bipolar political conflicts between the US and the Soviet Union fails to account for the violent civil wars in postwar Asia. Kwon points out that critical comparisons reveal the contrast between the Cold War experienced as peacetime and a total war cannot be contained in a single framework "unless this framework is formulated in such a way that it can accommodate the experiential contraries and deal with the semantic contradiction embedded in the idea of the cold war" (18). Considering the Cold War in Asia demands accounting for how US imperialism channeled the desire for decolonization into the pursuit of modern nation-building and how the legacies of the Cold War have affected postwar Asia. That is, the Cold War in Asia must be considered in tandem with both the colonial pasts and the post-Cold War present.

Scholars have demonstrated that US Cold War is waged through both military containment and through touting liberal multiculturalism. In *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945 –1961* (2003), Christina Klein investigates how middlebrow cultural representations of Asia indoctrinate American public a form of internationalism which embeds the US and "free Asia" in a world system (13). Klein argues that US Cold War politics operates through dual global imaginaries: *global imaginary of containment* and *global imaginary of integration* (23). Klein underlines that the "sentimental discourse of integration" enables the US to obscure racism at home while rationalizing military expansion abroad (16). Building on Klein's analysis, in *Cold War Friendships:*

Korea, Vietnam, and Asian American Literature (2016), Josephine Noc-Hee Park investigates how US Cold War "strategy of alliance" perpetuates neocolonialism in postwar Asia by reading figures of Asian allies in Asian American literary representations of the Korean War and the Vietnam War and posits that tracing how Cold War friendships maintain unequal relation between the US and Asia reveals that Cold War subjects are not simply products of imperial violence but also "active participants in the logic of the Cold War" (8,16).

The critics thus point out that examining how US military violence in Asia entwines with the development of liberal multiculturalism is crucial to understating the Cold War. In *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific* (2020), Christine Hong argues that racial integration is central to giving the appearance of a "democratizing" of US militarism after WWII. Reading black anti-fascist writings during WWII and the Cold War, Hong indicates that the history of US military violence and the narrative of postwar democracy need to be situated in WWII, a time when the US transformed from Jim Crow era into a total war state that sought to mobilize people of color for wars abroad while perpetuating racism at home. Hong points out the convergence of targeting domestic populations as potential enemies with targeting racial enemy abroad produces structural legacies as US militarism expands during the Cold War when the US extended its sovereignty to Asia and the Pacific through "the boundary-blurring logic of national security" (19). By examining US militarism in Asia and the Pacific, racial profiling and US civil rights as "homologous responses" (8), Hong underlines that the Cold War was a time when the US empire converges military interventions abroad and coverts domestic racial wars.

These critics have thus called attention to the structural linkages between US militarism

in Asia and the Pacific, global decolonization, and civil rights movements in the US during the Cold War. Building on this expanding frame, my dissertation explores how accounting for postwar Asian state violence furthers our understanding of the structural linkages of the Cold War. Josephine Park notes that Asian subjects are active participants in waging unequal relations between the US and Asia. If so, how would an account of violence committed by Asian military regimes during the Cold War further our understanding of US imperialism? As Hong reminds us, the cultural archive of the Pax Americana in the Pacific and Asia demands "a flexible geopolitical reading practice that critically mirrors the supranational penetration of U.S. war and police power beyond and within U.S. territorial bounds as well as in sites not typically understood as arenas of war" (20). Juxtaposing cultural texts produced in North America and Asia, my project adopts such geopolitical reading practice to examine the less explicit entwined US militarism and Asian state violence and asks what it means to study US Cold War through reading Asian cultural productions.

C. Alternative Approaches

Cultural critics have attempted to devise new ways to engage with such disconnected pasts. In *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (2010), Jodi Kim reframes Asian American critique by placing the formation of Asian Americans and their cultural productions in the context of the Cold War's triangulation in Asia. Kim reframes the Cold War as a knowledge project that "continues to generate and teach 'new' knowledge by making sense of the world through the Manichaean logics and grammars of good and evil" (8). Kim thus indicates that US imperialism in Asia not only operates through military interventions but also generates a US nationalist ontology through which the US constructs

itself and its Others. Aware that the Cold War affects multiple sites and therefore compels "a *comparative and relational reckoning* with its logics" (31), Kim problematizes her focus on China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam and suggests that there are multiple sites to reckon with the Cold War in Asia. Highlighting that US empire affects multiple sites, Kim points out that the histories of US empire exceed national boundaries and thereby require a reckoning that can attend to international contexts.

In *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (2010), Kuan-Hsing Chen proposes "inter-referencing" (223), a comparative method that posits Asia as multiple sites whose histories are interconnected and mutually constitutive of the histories of the West. Chen's formulation of inter-Asian referencing regards the West not as an external Other distinct from Asia but as "bits and fragments that intervene in local social formations in a systematic, but never totalizing way" (223). Chen contends that the significance of inter-referencing lies in its attention to the entanglement of "the historical processes of imperialization, colonization, and the cold war" (212). Focusing on East Asia, Chen argues that the Cold War has left an "anticommunism- pro-Americanism structure" that impedes East Asian nations, such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea, from examining the connections between their colonial pasts and US interventions in Asia (7). In turn, this structure enables the economically powerful East Asian nations to become "subempire[s]" that impose "[n]eocolonial imperialism" on other parts of Asia (18). In subdividing Asia into strategic sites, the Cold War renders the US into an "imaginary figure of modernity" embedded in East Asia's subject constitution (177). Chen's project further examines the knowledge conditions of critiques of US imperialism by highlighting the inadequacy of positing the West as the sole object of critique of the entangled histories. Chen's concept of inter-referencing thus attempts to

decenter the US from critiques of imperialism by taking account of Asian complicity.

Chen's formulation of inter-Asian referencing can productively dialogue with Kim's project in looking beyond the US to reckon with US imperialism. Kim's and Chen's call suggests that Asian American critique can not only function as critique of US imperialism but also as Asia's self-critique. My project thus analyzes the representations of the Cold War not solely through US-Asia relations but also through less explicit postwar violence in Asia and the Pacific.

To do so, I borrow Lisa Yoneyama's formulation of transpacific critique. In *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (2016), Yoneyama argues that post-1990s movements for transitional justice of Japanese colonial violence produce a site to interrogate disavowed US-Japan interimperial violence. Central to Yoneyama's argument is her insistence on contextualizing transborder redress culture in the "transwar continuities" of historical violence of the US and Japan (19). Situating her analysis in specific interconnected colonial and imperial histories between Japan and the US, Yoneyama's formulation of transpacific critique is a "conjunctive cultural critique" that calls for "critically situated historical thinking—that is, an ability to perceive different appeals for and failures of justice as incommensurable and yet interlinked as they have unfolded on a global scale within specific historical moment" (17). For Yoneyama, transpacific is an analytical framework that connects shared yet distinct forms of historical violence that is otherwise obscured by US-Japan Cold War complicity. Yoneyama cautions that the term transpacific does not simply refer to geographical crossings between the Pacific. Rather, transpacific also refers to "the predicaments of the settler colonial present that need to be further articulated in the Pacific Islander-Asian American political and intellectual

exchanges" (x). Such an account of the Pacific gestures to a question of how to position transpacific critique in relation to Pacific studies while stressing the significance of putting WWII and the Cold War in broader geographical and temporal contexts.

Building on Yoneyama's analysis of US-Japan complicity, my reading of the contemporary Asian American and Asian representations of the Cold War examines the structural links of US empire, Asian state violence, and militarism in Asia and the Pacific. In addition to reading these texts as productive critiques of US imperialism and Asian neocolonial imperialism, I also highlight the ways the texts leave space for epistemological non-transparency. In this respect, my project resonates with Jodi Kim's caution against neatly aligning Asian American cultural productions with Asian American critique. In conceiving of Asian American texts as the site "where the officially unknowable reckons at once with the already known and the impossibility of knowing" (6), Kim underlines that the critical strength of Asian American texts is not simply "a politics of resistance or alterity" but rather their depictions of difficulties of knowing (6). My reading explores how the Cold War ruins represented in the texts may provoke further thinking about the complex entanglements among the US and seemingly scattered sites in Asia and the Pacific.

III. Chapter Outline

Organized in six chapters, my project moves from texts explicitly representing Asian Americans and US interventions in Asia to texts whose depictions of figures and sites are not immediately recognizable as Asian American. The first three chapters analyze texts engaging with the Korean War. Moving from Asian American texts illustrating Korean War memories to Asian texts representing the war and US empire in a less explicit form, I will illustrate the

limits of centering on the US as the sole agent of atrocity and the Korean War as the event marking Cold War in Korea. The following three chapters investigate texts depicting Cold War afterlives in sites less known as the frontstage of US wars in Asia. Representing the presence and absence of Asian Americans and some written in English and others in other Asian languages, these texts suggest alternative forms of Asian American critique and reading practice of historical violence in seemingly remote sites in Asia and the Pacific.

In Chapter One, I examine the interconnected histories between Asia and the US through Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* (1998). Set in 1955, Choi's novel illustrates how South Korean Chang Ahn's emigration to Tennessee as a foreign student is entwined with US racial wars at home and abroad. My reading will explore how Choi represents war memories exceeding the parameters of Asian American literary tradition. I argue that the representation of South Korean state violence, specifically the Jeju Massacre (1948) in Choi's novel pushes the boundaries of Asian American critique. By reading the interwoven memories of the massacres with the Korean War, I contend that *The Foreign Student* addresses the South Korean anticolonial movements suppressed by US-South Korean state collaboration and rendered obscured by Cold War bipolar politics.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* (2016) and *DMZ Colony* (2020) to investigate how Choi interrupts the imperial narrative of the Korean War as a forgotten war through translation. Weaving poetry, prose, photographs, and hand-written texts, the two works of poetry represent the ongoing Korean War and its entanglement with postwar violence of South Korean military regime. Choi deploys translation as a radical refusal to obscure the violence of the US and South Korean military regime. I will investigate how Choi's representation intervenes in linear temporality of the Korean War and erasure of US

historical violence through inserting images, fictional testimonies, and untranslated Korean texts. By attending to Choi's use of translation as intervention into imperialist history, I examine how Choi's texts represent a form of creative archiving that push English-speaking readers to critically engage with the Korean War through putatively local histories such as the Sancheong–Hamyang massacre (1951) and South Korean military violence in Vietnam. While *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony* cannot be easily read as translated works as they are mainly written in English, I argue that Choi's defamiliarization of English and refusal to translate can be read as a way to translate entangled histories and to alert the stakes of archiving obscured historical atrocity.

Chapter Three builds on the analysis of the violence obscured by a sole focus on the Korean War to analyze how investigating violence taking place in postwar Asia complicates critiques of US Cold War interventions. I read Lee Isaac Chung's semi-autobiographical film *Minari* (2020) alongside with Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) to explore how their representations of Korean American migration and neoliberalism in South Korea reveal the haunting legacies of US war in Korea. *Minari* represents the South Korean immigrant Yi family's hardship when they move from California to Arkansas in the 1980s. Set in contemporary South Korea, *Parasite* features three families of distinct class positions and the story suddenly spirals down as the Kims discover the former housemaid's husband has been living for years in the bunker—a legacy of the Korean War—underneath the Parks' house. While both films are set in a time when the Korean War officially ended, the characters' references to ongoing effects of the war on their migration to the US and class hierarchy in contemporary South Korea highlight the absent presence of the US in Asia and its complicity with South Korean state violence. By examining the Yi family's memories of 1980s South

Korea, I argue that *Minari* reveals Arkansas as an imperial destination embedded in US wars abroad. My reading of *Parasite* will further decenter remembering the Cold War solely through the more well-known wars in Asia. By analyzing the film's representation of the haunting memories of the Korean War and the US as a figure of modernity, I explore the ways the Korean War continues to be forgotten in contemporary contexts. By examining how the film represents the Korean War as an unending war through revealing the history of the secret bunker and the looming North Korean nuclear threat, I contend that these Cold War ruins illuminate the protracted Korean War and US militarism in Asia and the Pacific.

In Chapter Four, I read the representation of Vietnamese displacement along with traces of US militarization in the Pacific in lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking for* (2003) to investigate the entanglements between US violence in Asia and the Pacific. lê's novel interweaves a Vietnamese refugee girl's resettlement in San Diego with her memories of displacement from Vietnam and loss of family members. I argue that lê's representation grounds Vietnamese refugee narratives in US wars in Asia and longer histories of settler colonialism and militarism in the Pacific. By examining lê's representation of refugee bodies, I show that the novel offers a feminist critique of US humanitarian narrative. I analyze how the images of water and lê's blurred boundaries between fiction and memoir open Vietnamese refugee narratives to shared yet distinct narratives of displacement.

In Chapter Five, I turn to Ku Yu-ling's *Our Stories* (2008/2011) and *Return Home* (2014) to explore how the representations of Filipino and Vietnamese migrant workers' inter-Asian migrations reveal the implicit US presence in Asia. Published in 2008 in Mandarin and later translated into English in 2011 by Agnes Khoo, *Our Stories* weaves together Filipino migrant workers' life stories, stories of Taiwanese blue-collar workers' urban migration, Ku's

memories of her parents' migration, and her experience of becoming a social activist in post-martial law Taiwan. *Return Home* represents Vietnamese migrant workers' life stories as they return to Vietnam. My reading of *Our Stories* explores how Ku's text situates Filipino migrant workers' life stories in Cold War formations Asia. By analyzing how Ku depicts the Cold War as a crucial factor connecting the stories of inter-Asian migrations and labor movements in Taiwan, I argue that *Our Stories* elucidates how the US-centric understanding of the Cold War obscures shared historical experiences with US hegemony between Taiwan and the Philippines. Unlike *Our Stories,* which foregrounds US presence in Taiwan, *Return Home* depicts a postwar Vietnam where anti-American sentiments no longer easily interpellate the young generation and entering the global market becomes a nation's primary concern. By analyzing how Ku represents the US as distant memories and Vietnamese migrant workers' view on Taiwan as aspirations to modernity, I contend that such an inter-Asian framing illuminates the similar patterns economic development of postwar Taiwan and Vietnam and the entanglements of Asian sovereignty with US hegemony. By representing postwar Vietnam in an inter-Asian frame rather than highlighting US interventions, *Return Home* challenges us to envision a form of Asian American critique that could attend to changing forms of US imperialism and intersecting Asian subimperialisms in contemporary Asia as former Cold War rivals forge new economic relationships.

In Chapter Six, I turn to Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011) to analyze how the Asian Canadian/American texts interconnect narratives of subjects implicated in postwar violence. *A Tale for the Time Being* illustrates an attempt to read stories of the other through a character named Ruth—a writer living on an island in British Columbia, where she finds a freezer bag washed ashore

containing Japanese returnee Nao's diary along with other materials presumed to be debris from the tsunami on March 11, 2011. Set in British Columbia, Thien's novel interweaves the lives of Janie, an orphaned Cambodian refugee, and Hiroji, who migrated with his family from US-bombed Tokyo during WWII. By reading how the novels represent alternative ways of engaging with postwar violence, I argue that the two texts provide a way to bear witness to atrocity imposed on subjects in seemingly remote sites without reproducing the violence of representing Othered subjects. My reading of *A Tale* focuses on how Ruth's act of reading the figure of a Japanese WWII soldier's diaries interrupts the depiction of Canada as a safe refuge with memories of Japanese internment and marginalized Indigenous presence on Cortes Island. I further investigate how Ruth's act of reading narratives of historical atrocity both reveals authorial intervention and offers a critical way for Asian Canadian/American subjects to interrupt Japan's national narrative of WWII as a war for self-defense by examining how the Battle of Okinawa and militarization of Pacific islands in the text disrupt the nationalist narratives of WWII of both the US and Japan. My reading of *Dogs at the Perimeter* investigates how the text interweaves Hiroji and Janie's memories of Tokyo bombing and Khmer Rouge genocide, thereby gesturing to war crimes otherwise obscured by a sole focus on US empire. By attending to how Thien juxtaposes fragmented narratives of different space and time, I argue that Thien's representation maintains critical gaps of knowledge to grapple with difficult histories. In reading this representation of Cambodian genocide by an Asian Canadian author, I explore how such engagement with historical violence in Asia complicates critiques of forms of imperialism in Asia by accounting for Canada's Cold War foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

Chapter One

"Leave No Absence Behind": The Korean War and Indescribable Stories in *The Foreign Student*

The Korean War, as Jodi Kim indicates, represents "a curious lacuna" compared with the more well-known Vietnam War in US public's memory (*Ends* 144). By casting North Korea as the initiator of the war and celebrating the racial integration of US military, the US nationalist memory displaces US military interventions and racism at home.[7] Reading the links between US imperial presence in Korea and the racial gendered Korean migration to the US represented in Asian American cultural productions, Kim points out that the Korean War itself is an "epistemological *project*" that generates Cold War knowledge foreclosing inquiries about US imperialism (*Ends* 145). Extending Kim's concern, this chapter examines how Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student* (1998) not only makes explicit the forgetting of the war in the US but further illustrates how such forgetting also involves foreclosing knowledge about US complicity with South Korean state violence. Mainly set in Sewanee, Tennessee, Choi's novel depicts Korean diasporic character Chang Ahn's life as a student at the University of the South from 1955-1956. In interconnecting Chang's memories of the US and South Korean state violence before and during the Korean War with US racial politics in the South, Choi illuminates stories exceeding US and South Korean nationalist narratives of the Korean War. In addition to foregrounding the link between Chang's migration and the Korean War, Choi's novel further elucidates the violence inflicted on Korean subjects, such as Jeju Islanders, that are not accounted for in narratives solely focused on Korean immigration to

[7] See Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (2010), Daniel Y. Kim, *The Intimacies of Conflict: Cultural Memory and The Korean War* (2020), and Christine Hong, *A Violent Peace: Race, U.S. Militarism, and Cultures of Democratization in Cold War Asia and the Pacific* (2020).

the US. The novel addresses not only the US military interventions but also Korean complicity in creating such violence. By attending to the production of Cold War knowledge in the US *and* in Korea prior to the civil rights movements era, the novel shifts focus on Korean immigration to the US as the primary entry point to analyze US imperialism in Korea. By investigating how Choi foregrounds historical atrocities exceeding Asian American racial formation in the US and Korean mainland-centered view on the Korean War, I contend that the novel forces what Lisa Yoneyama calls "*un-Americanization* of Asian American studies" that refuses to reproduce US nationalist geopolitical knowledge ("Un-American" 359).

The Foreign Student interweaves Chang's life in Tennessee and his traumatic memories of Korea. In exchange for his scholarship from the Episcopal Church Council, Chang is asked to give regular talks at the church about Korea and the Korean War. Chang soon falls in love with Katherine Monroe, a local white woman who has been having an affair with Charles Addison, an English professor much older than her, since she was fourteen. Chang's presence in Tennessee sparks anxieties about miscegenation and ongoing anti-Black violence in the American South where the locals "[don't] know what to make of" Chang's Asianness (Choi 38). While Chang does not share detail about his life in Korea with other characters, readers learn from Chang's memories recounted by a third-person narrator that Chang and his family were forced to leave their home amidst the turmoil of the transition from Japanese colonialism to US occupation and the subsequent Korean War. Interwoven with the storyline in Tennessee, Chang's memories reveal his work as a translator at the USIS in Korea (where the American officials renamed Chang as "Chuck") and his imprisonment and torture as a communist suspect during the Jeju Uprising (1947-1954). After a series of events, Katherine

breaks off her engagement with Charles Addison and follows her feelings for Chang. The novel ends with Chang losing his scholarship and forging friendship with the Black domestic staff at the university by working as a fellow staff member.

Choi's novel represents the difficult histories of the Korean War and South Korean state violence by highlighting the significance of fictionality. By examining how Choi interweaves the third-person narrator's depiction of Korean histories and Chang's memories of the Korean War and Jeju Uprising with anti-Black violence in American South, I argue that *The Foreign Student* calls attention to different forms of forgetting of historical atrocities in the US and South Korea. In placing Chang's migration through US racial politics and US-backed South Korean regimes' violence before and during the Korean War, Choi challenges both the US and South Korea's nationalist narratives of the war. By attending to the novel's dual framings of the Korean War in the US and South Korea, I show how the novel highlights the Jeju Uprising and massacre as atrocity doubly obscured by the US and South Korea. Moreover, in investigating how Choi depicts anticommunist atrocity in Jeju through non-Jeju islander Chang's struggles with trauma, I contend that the novel points to alternative ways to remember difficult histories and reconceive the victim deserving transitional justice by leaving space for unknowable stories.

I draw attention to the use of fictionality in Choi's work for two goals. First, I highlight how the Korean War is rendered fictional, that is, cannot be understood by the American public without turning into a story about the US liberating Korea. Deprived of the historical facts of US military violence, the story turns the Korean War into a backdrop of US heroism. Fictionality, in this sense, describes the violence of taking the liberty to invent a plot of the Korean War to justify US interventions regardless of the actual casualties, forced

displacement, and trauma the war caused in Korea. My second goal is to analyze how Chang's memories do not simply serve as historical facts to counter US forgetting. The fictional aspect of Chang's memories is worth taking seriously because it offers a crucial space for Chang to survive his trauma through storytelling as well as a space remained closed to the desire to better understand the war. By attending to the fictional narratives of Chang's memories, Choi points to the need for survivors to tell stories that exceed historical facts. Furthermore, by interweaving stories not based on his direct experiences and witnessing, Chang refuses what Rosemary Jolly terms "spectacular violence" that feeds viewers' desire to "want to be constantly surprised by the actual occurrence of violence . . . [the] desire to be offended by it" (11). Spectacular violence in turn allows viewers to distance ourselves from the perpetrator "without seeking to understand anything further about the specific context in which that act of violence took place" (Jolly 12). In underlining fictionality, I show how fictional narratives allow Chang to not tell the whole truth about his war experiences and leave room for critical not-knowing that interrupt readers' desire to comprehend the war through delving into Chang's trauma.

The Korean War as Epistemological Project

The Foreign Student represents the Korean War as an epistemological problem: it foregrounds the ways through which the war is rendered illegible for the American public. The storyline of Chang's life as a foreign student in Tennessee illustrates how the Korean War becomes not only forgotten but incomprehensible for the American public. In the novel, while Chang's presence in Tennessee is living reminder of US military interventions in Korean, he is not able to make the locals understand how the war has caused his migration to

the US. In exchange for his scholarship, Chang is arranged to give talks on Korea to members of churches. Chang struggles with explaining the war both in personal conversations as well as in his prepared talks. On one of his trips to the talk accompanied by Katherine, Chang recalls his life in Korea: "Where I am living, before this, it is no safe to walk" (Choi 34). Katherine admits her ignorance about the war and tries to ask Chang to talk more about the war: "I don't know anything about the war . . . I've always wondered what a war really looks like. There's no way to tell, reading the papers" (Choi 34). While Chang tries to share his memories of the war with Katherine, the narrative turns to Chang's thoughts about the dreams he has been having since he left Korea. Rather than revealing Chang's memories, the narrator narrates that the dreams "flickered past his sights and was gone" (Choi 34). Chang ends up responding that "There is not much to know" (Choi 34). The conversation shows that the American public's lack of knowledge about the war limits Chang's language to describe what the war was like. Moreover, the opacity of Chang's dream points out that even though he lived through the war, his experiences cannot be rendered into comprehensive narratives by the third-person narrator. In highlighting the limits of the narrator's knowledge about Chang's dreams, Choi indicates that apprehending the war through excavating Chang's trauma is as problematic as erasing the war from US history.

As the novel progresses, we learn that the American public's ignorance about the Korean War is not simply due to a lack of information but also because of US nationalist narrative of the Cold War and Orientalist knowledge about Asia. Even when Chang attempts a slide presentation, he finds that the war "defied explanation" (Choi 51). Chang's lecture presents the war through a reductive narrative deprived of particularities and causes. We learn that Chang's pedagogy is restricted by US racialized understanding of Korea, which becomes the

sole context through which his audience expect his lecture on Korea to be. Prior to Chang's presentation, we encounter the scene where Katherine attempts to learn about Korea at the library but the only book she can find is "a copy of Terry on the Japanese Empire, thirty years out of date" (Choi 43). The short section on Korea presents a racist description of Koreans:

> Korean ideas of hygiene are as negligible as those of a Hottentot . . . The average Korean man is 5 ft. 4 in. tall, of good physique, well formed, with not unhandsome Mongoloid features, oblique dark brown eyes, high cheek-bones, and noncurling hair that shakes from a russet to a sloe black. The olive bronze complexions in certain instances show a tint as light as that of a quadroon. . . . (Choi 44)

That Katherine can learn about Korea only through a book about Japanese empire reveals the US and Japan's shared interest in Korea as a colony. Moreover, in comparing Koreans with varied racist description of Indigenous people, Blacks, and Asians, the section shows that US knowledge production about Korea is embedded in its foundational histories in anti-Black racism, settler colonialism and Orientalism long preceding the Korean War. As Joo Ok Kim indicates, the illegibility of Korea in the US derives from an exceptionalist epistemology dating to "the late nineteenth-century genealogy of Western attempts to simultaneously disavow and underwrite the humanity of racialized nonsubjects" (104). Constructed as an unknowable "hermit nation" by nineteenth-century Orientalists such as William Elliott Griffis (Kim 104), Korea was known as the uncivilized parts of Asia when US empire-building expanded to Asia and the Pacific. The ideology of US exceptionalism, the premise that the US is endowed with the manifest destiny to freely develop and extend its territory, drove US expansion throughout the nineteenth-century and continued to justify US war in Korea. As

Kim points out, “The calibrations of American exceptionalism do more than just persist—they couple with the U.S. state and military to combat ideologies hostile to capitalism and constitute the conditions of possibility for the ongoing becoming of the nation” (106). By anchoring knowledge about Korea in genealogy of US exceptionalism, Choi elucidates that Cold War knowledge production about the Korean War is already restricted by an epistemological context confined by white supremacy and US imperialism.

Within this context of exceptionalist knowledge, Chang realizes that the only way to make Korea comprehensible is conforming to the church members’ racialized expectations. Rather than showing war photographs, Chang arranges his slides with a set of National Archive photographs of Korea, “in which it looked dim, impoverished, and unredeemable” and explains that the Koreans “were farmers . . . that they were fond of flowers and children—that they were unremarkable, hardly worth the trouble of a lecture” (Choi 39). Furthermore, Chang’s pedagogy is limited by US nationalist narrative of the war as liberating Korea from communism and Japanese colonialism. Chang begins his presentation by tracing his migration to US military presence in Korea as he reminds his audience that “I’m not here, if this [MacArthur’s Inchon landing] doesn’t happen” (Choi 50). While the introduction opens a space to elaborate on how US military interventions condition his presence in the US, Chang feels “hopeless” to fulfill the expectation to “deliver a clear explanation of the war” (Choi 51). He starts by introducing Korea after 1945 and explains, “The Japanese colonize, at the beginning of this twentieth century, so when the Second World War is beginning, they are already there” (Choi 50). Whereas Chang explains Japan’s presence in Korea as colonialism, he omits reference to the US presence in Korea. To make the war legible to the audience, Chang “skipped over causes” and “groundlessly” compares the 38th parallel to the Mason-

Dixon line (Choi 51). Adopting the Cold War binary frame, he explains the war started with the communist invasion: “Korea is a shape just like Florida. Yes? The top half is a Communist state, and the bottom half are fighting for democracy!” (Choi 51). Skipping US military violence, Chang narrates MacArthur’s landing as liberation of Seoul from the communist attack. Yet, the narrator problematizes Chang’s reductive narrative of the war by revealing his thoughts:

> He genuinely liked talking about the landing, and MacArthur. It all made for such an exciting, simple minded, morally unambiguous story. Each time he told it, the plot was reduced and the number of details increased, and the whole claimed more of his memory for itself and left less room for everything else. (Choi 52)

Chang’s strategies of simplifying Incheon Landing to make a “morally unambiguous story” highlights the gap between Chang’s memories of the war and the story he chooses to tell the audience (Choi 52). To make the war comprehensible for the American audience, Chang has to translate the war into a story of US liberation by omitting his memory. The war does not make sense in the US unless Chang changes facts and invents a plot to make it into a story of US heroism.

By interweaving the narrator’s remark on Korean history with Chang’s lecture, Choi highlights Chang’s imperfect English when he explains the war. Compared with the narrator, who supplements information about the war in past tense, Chang delivers the lecture in present tense. In rendering the war in present tense and scant description, Chang’s lecture suggests that the war cannot be easily chronologized as historical periods. For example, Chang introduces the shift from Japanese colonial era to the Soviet occupation in present

tense, making the shift from Japanese colonialism to the Korean War simultaneous rather than distinct periods: "The Japanese are in Korea, this is a terrible time . . . The Soviets, in the Second Would War, fight against the Japanese, and they fight in Korea" (Choi 50). By rendering the development of the war in present tense, Chang illustrates that for those who have experienced the war, Japanese colonialism is not finished and that the subsequent occupiers are not different from the Japanese colonizers. The narrator further supplements the histories of US occupation that Chang omits: "A line was drawn at the thirty-eighth parallel, which split the country roughly in half. The Soviet military would administer the northern half, the Americans the southern. This was, in theory, a temporary arrangement" (Choi 51). Rendered in past tense, the narrator's comment offers historical contexts that Chang cannot provide. However, the contrast between the narrator's grammatically correct explanation and Chang's imperfect English also shows that being able to narrate the war with temporal distance and render the events into contexts is a privilege those who lived through the war cannot easily enjoy.

Making the Korean War fictional requires Chang to not only revise his memory but also create a revisionist history for the American audience. Instead of presenting photos of the Korean war, Chang uses a photo of 1945 Korea to represent the war:

> Korea after 1945 was replaced by The U.S. Infantry Coming out of the Seoul Railway Station, a soap-scrubbed and smiling platoon marching into the clean, level street. This image made a much better illustration of *the idea of MacArthur* than any actual picture of the Korean war [sic] could have . . . The file of troops looked confident and happy, because the picture had not been taken during the Korean conflict at all, but in September 1945, after the

> Japanese defeat. The photo's original caption had read, "Liberation feels fine! U.S. and their Soviet allies arrive to clean house in Korea." No one was dreaming there would be a civil war. (Choi 52, emphasis added)

In replacing actual pictures of the Korean War with the photo of Korea's liberation from Japanese colonialism, Chang's presentation obscures the US' role in creating the civil war in Korea. The passage also shows that "the idea of MacArthur" is created by erasing Korea's anticolonial effort and rewriting Korean anticolonial history as a story of US rescue (Choi 52). By highlighting Chang's revisionist switch of the photos, the passage indicates that US liberation is an *idea* that disavows US perpetuation of Japanese colonialism and intercepts Korea's postcolonial independence. Facing a crowd that expresses disappointment at the modern look of Seoul, Chang turns to slides titled "Water Buffalo in a Rice Paddy" and "Village Farmers Squatting Down to Smoke." (Choi 52). Chang's audience "murmured with pleasure at the image of the farmers, in their year-round pajamas and inscrutable Eskimos' faces" (Choi 52). In highlighting how Chang creates the *idea* of MacArthur and Koreans, the passage shows that the *idea* of the Korean War is constructed by erasing contradictions that challenge the myth of modern US saving premodern Orientals. Chang's lecture thus illuminates that rendering the Korean War unknowable affirms the American public's Orientalist imagining of Koreans and positions the US as an anticolonial liberator. As Jodi Kim points out, Chang presents the Korean War as "a problem of knowledge production and comprehension overdetermined by and saturated with the imperial and gendered racial logics of the Cold War military intervention and its aftermaths" ("I'm Not" 284).

Intertwined US Racial Wars at Home and Abroad

Although Chang's lecture perpetuates US Orientalist conception of Korea, Chang's ambiguous racial position in Tennessee reveals that the Korean War is a racial war intertwined with US anti-Black racism. For instance, on their way to the lecture, Chang and Katherine stop at a filling station where Katherine notices that "the people, all ten or twelve of them, gathered to watch, also—to watch her and Chuck, standing there, watching her car" (Choi 37). Their gaze forces Katherine to feel alienated:

> She was afraid for a moment, and sensed that he was also . . . They might have been watching a ship come in, Katherine thought. For a moment she could feel it. The arrival in a strange land, and stepping onto the gangplank as the whole harbor paused in its work and turned a single gaze toward you. (Choi 37)

In adopting Chang's position and sharing the tense surveillance and fear, Katherine's imagining points to potential interracial alliance. By noting the violence of the gaze through Chang, Katherine realizes that her whiteness is not inherent essence but may become insecure possession if her relationship with men is deemed racially transgressive. Noticing the "half circle of constant, unshy observation," Chang tells Katherine that "They don't know what to make me" (Choi 37). The locals' scrutiny of the couple shows that while Chang's partly colored position makes the locals unsure whether to enforce anti-Black violence, the possibility of the violence is constantly threatening to surface. Furthermore, anti-Black racism intersects with scrutiny of sexual normativity as the locals suspect Chang and Katherine's possible interracial sexual relation. As Leslie Bow underlines, by situating Chang in the American South, Choi does not simply add an Asian character to black-white racial politics but deploys Chang's partly colored position as "the vehicle of the novel's embedded

commentary on the artificiality of the color line and the sexual taboos that surround it, but more expansively, its inquiry into the making of social divisions" (167). Choi shows "the racialization of a Korean man in Jim Crow culture engages both a racial continuum and other processes of assigning social status as well, both gendered and sexual" (Bow 178).

While Katherine's imagining of a shared foreign position with Chang gestures to alternative alliance, Chang's comment on the people not knowing "what to make me" alerts the different levels of violence he bears compared with Katherine (Choi 37). For Chang, the surveillance may escalate into lethal violence. For instance, while Chang's ambiguous racial position allows him "a subtle, unremitting scrutiny, disguised as politeness" by the locals most of the time (Choi 54), his white roommate Crane causally speculates how his parents would respond to inviting Chang to his hometown Atlanta: "They don't hang Orientals . . . They might mistake him for a nigger and hang him, or have the sense to see he's not a nigger and *not* hang him just because of that" (Choi 56-57). Crane's casual reference to lynching reveals that the paternal welcome and politeness Chang experiences are a precarious privilege dependent on whether Chang follows the rule of white supremacy. For example, when having dinner at Crane's place, Crane's father, who is also a member of the Klan, offers Chang "first lessons in things American" by instructing that "I am giving you white meat and dark. You will develop a preference in time. You may develop a preference right away. If you do, exercise it" (Choi 60). Chang's inclusion is thus contingent on learning and practicing anti-Black violence, which perpetuates the very white supremacy threatening to punish Chang's transgression.

Choi further illuminates that white supremacy is not exclusive to the American South by depicting Chang's trip to Chicago for a part-time work during the summer break. On the

Northern-bound bus, Chang encounters a blond-haired boy who recognizes Seoul because his brother has been in the Korean War. As the boy offers Chang some gum, he comments, "My brother says gooks are nuts about gum" (Choi 229). Despite the boy knows where Seoul is, his knowledge about Korean and the war is translated into racist conceptions via his brother's war experiences. By categorizing Chang as a gook, the boy reduces Chang to a racialized subject. The racist categorization further erases Chang's Korean specificity by conflating Chang with Asian immigrants in the US. Hearing that Chang is heading to Chicago, the boy tells Chang about his dream to go to the "big old Chinaman town in Chi where they've got a place where they've got sharks and giant snakes and monkeys hung in the windows to eat . . . they've also got kung fu stuff and airplanes" (Choi 229). Although Chang reminds the boy that he is not a Chinese, the boy "kindly" replies, "That's okay" (Choi 230). The boy's "kind" inclusion of Chang into his imagining of the Chinese and Chinatown illustrates how Orientalism racializes Chang by erasing the specific US military interventions in Korea that differentiate Chang from Chinese immigrant histories. When the boy does attempt to differentiate Chang from the Chinese, he simply reduces their differences to physical features: "My brother says you can't tell the difference between gooks and chinks so I'm getting a good look at you and when he takes me to Chinatown with him I'll bet I can tell" (Choi 232). On the one hand, the boy's reference to his brother's remark on gooks and chinks based on his Korean War experiences reveals that the war is rooted in US racial wars in Asia where Americans conceive all Asians as an enemy race. On the other hand, the boy's attempt to differentiate gooks from chinks shows that both Chinese and other Asians are subjected to racism in the US regardless of their differences. Whether through conflation or differentiation, the intertwined US anti-Asian racism and US imperial expansion in Asia is

obscured.

Chang's identity as colonized subject by Japan and the US complicates his relation with the local Asian American community. Choi points to the limits of forging pan-Asian alliance by depicting how a sole focus on Asian racial identity risks erasing Chang's Korean diasporic identity and Korean War histories. For instance, tired of the abusive working environment at the rebindery in Chicago, Chang moves into the Lakeview Hotel, a boardinghouse occupied entirely by Japanese men located in Little Tokyo. Chang finds himself "adopted" by the men in the local Asian American community who address him as "Sensei Einstein" (Choi 243). However, this inclusion in Asian American community also generates a sense of alienation as Chang finds his "reservoir of schoolboy Japanese" soaked into him (Choi 243). While speaking Japanese enables Chang to find a sense of belonging in Little Tokyo, Chang's complex relationship with Japanese as a colonial language makes him reflect: "It was strange that his homesickness was banished by a place that reminded him of the only other time he had been homesick" (Choi 243). Chang's paradoxical feeling about curing his homesickness in the US through speaking Japanese points to the Japanese colonial histories in Korea obscured by his inclusion in the local Asian American community. As a language he learned in Korea, Japanese relieves Chang's homesickness in a place where nobody speaks Korean. However, as a colonial language, Japanese also becomes a language that severs Chang from his mother tongue. Although Japanese language reconnects Chang to his memories of Korea, his sense of homesickness in the colonial language needs to be left unaddressed in order to feel at home as a racialized subject in Little Tokyo. As Christine Kim points out, "While race and language provide Chang entry into this community, they do not lead to an investigation of shared histories or the formation of deeper social bonds capable of easing the foreignness

that Chang lives" (116). This unaccounted aspect of Chang's homesickness as a colonial subject also forces Chang to keep to himself his memories of learning Japanese for anticolonial purposes. Chang recalls his father lecturing him about the purpose of sending him to boarding school in Osaka:

> His father had always known the period of Japanese rule would end, and then the country would have to remake itself . . . If it didn't happen in his own generation, his father reasoned, it would happen in the generation after. Chang was sent to boarding school bearing the frightening weight of that national duty, and the idea that this was an exalting flame that should make fuel of misery. (Choi 243-44)

In highlighting the anticolonial contexts of Chang's education in Japanese, the passage indicates that simply including Chang in the Asian American community risks forgetting that Chang is a colonialized subject by both Japan and the US in addition to being a racialized alien in the US. As Daniel Y. Kim indicates, Chang's assimilation to the Asian interethnic community "recapitulates the re-education that Koreans underwent when their country was forcibly integrated into the Japanese empire—an empire that was as racist and as destructive as any devised by the West" ("Bled" 569).

By attending to Chang's ambiguous sense of belonging in the local Asian American community, Choi underlines that forging Asian American solidarity without addressing colonial and imperial histories in Asia risks reinforcing US forgetting of the Korean War. Following Chang's memories of learning Japanese for anticolonial national duty, we learn that the Asian immigrants in Little Tokyo are not interested in his Korean identity. The narrator describes how Chang's Korean identity is erased and incorporated in Asian American immigrant narrative:

> If these people knew he was Korean, they didn't seem to care . . . Old prejudices were irrelevant and unprofitable. Many of the families in the neighborhood who weren't new immigrants had lived in California before being interned during World War II, and their only loyalty now was to the generous Midwest, where it seemed that anyone could do anything. (Choi 244-45)

The novel seems to turn into an Asian American fiction as the Asian American immigrants' loyalty not to the US nation but to the American dream inspires Chang to think that he "could stay here and get another job" (Choi 245). However, Chang's familiarity with Japanese language cautions readers against overlooking Chang's specific Korean histories. In addition, the reference to Japanese American internment is a reminder that US racism operates precisely through erasing the differences between Japanese Americans and Japanese and casting both as the enemy race. Overlooking Chang's Korean identity thus risks turning US racism and settler colonial conception of the Midwest into the basis of pan-Asian alliance. In forging Asian alliance without accounting for Chang's Korean identity and Korea's colonial histories, the Asian American community forecloses the space to investigate how Japanese Americans' and Chang's distinct relations to Japanese colonialism challenge US narrative of WWII as an anticolonial and antiracist war.

The Doubly Forgotten Historical Atrocities

By depicting Chang's sense of alienation within both local white and Asian immigrant communities, Choi positions Chang in relation to other subjects occupying different racial, ethnic, and gender positions as part of US imperial structures. Chang's recurring memories interrupt the US narrative of the Korean War. In contrast to Chang's lecture, his memories of

the outbreak of the war do not follow a linear chronology. After the lecture at the church, Chang recalls that the war started without warning. On the day the war started, Chang was drinking with his USIS colleague and a British reporter. Chang's memories question how the start of the war is defined: "He could not refer to the gap and say, *Here was a turning point*. He did not know if there were other fates at all, only that his own seemed to date from that night, in the Banto Hotel, with Lucas Peterfield of Durham, N.C., and Jim Langston of London, and that he was drunk when the war started" (Choi 93). In describing the difficulty in pinpointing the start of the war, Chang indicates that a chronological narrative of the war fails to capture the confusion and suddenness experienced by those who experienced the war. For Chang, the war is not knowing how it began and an event that forecloses possibilities for "other fates" (Choi 93). Chang's memories reveal that the US narrative of the war started by the North Korean invasion is rather arbitrary and questionable. On the day of the outbreak of the war, a military adviser Leo d'Addario happened to be on duty and was "awakened by the sound of artillery fire, but couldn't tell whose it was" (Choi 93). Despite the lack of certainty, the start of the war is framed as an attack from the North: "Later on everyone would agree that it must have been the North, firing on the South; why would ROKA units open fire when their American advisers had repeatedly instructed them against it?" (Choi 93). In underlining that the framing of North Korea as the initiator of the war is first and foremost an assumption, the narration challenges US justification for its military interventions. Also, by highlighting the reasoning that ROKA only acts according to US instruction, the passage reveals that the US is more a dominator than a savior prior to the war.

Chang's memories of MacArthur's Incheon Landing further challenge US myth of liberating Korea. Chang remembers the events before Incheon Landing and reveals that the

US barely cared about the safety of Seoul civilians on the brink of war. Although the USIS was informed that the fighting might spread to Seoul, Peterfield dismisses Chang's suggestion for evacuation, remarking that the US "didn't come all the way to this shit hole to the KPA the minute they came knocking" (Choi 94). When the fighting reached Seoul, Chang found that the US abandoned the shocked civilians. Instead of rescue, Chang witnessed betrayal as he hurried to the USIS office, "elevated by vicarious importance and by the tremendous relief he felt at having his *objectless fear* replaced at last with *a clearly defined and universally acknowledged threat*, and when he arrived he found the office stripped and empty" (Choi 99, emphasis added). Chang indicates that US defense of South Korea is a strategic choice for establishing US global domination. Yet, US domination during time of crisis is revealed to be "empty" and "nothing but blank paper, yellowed clip files, dead pens" (Choi 99;100). Before the Landing, Chang had been hiding for three months in a hole beneath the stairs of his house, which was occupied by the KPA. When MacArthur announced the liberation of Seoul, Chang finds the city rampant with violence tolerated and committed by the US. ROKA shot survivors because being alive was considered "a fair indication of having cooperated with the enemy" while American forces "refused to authorize these so-called retaliations, they tended only to prevent those they actually stumbled upon" (Choi 103-104). Chang's witnessing further uncovers that MacArthur's heroism was staged by the Western media:

> Almost every building he saw was a charred ruin, even the National Library, although later he would learn that it had been preserved throughout the duration of the Communist occupation and only set on fire by the Americans after they returned, to make a dramatic backdrop for MacArthur's ceremony of resorting to

> Rhee the city keys. The ritual had been lavishly filmed and photographed by the world's press. (Choi 104)

Chang's flashbacks elucidate that US narrative of the war masks US imperialism and military violence in Korea. In questioning the start of the war and MacArthur's landing, Chang's war memories illustrate that the "dramatic backdrop" of US heroism that makes the Korean War comprehensible for Americans is built on Korean lives (Choi 104).

Chang's memories not only challenge US rescue narrative but also South Korean narrative of the war as an anticommunist war of justice. The novel illustrates how the forgetting of the Korean War is also produced in Korea and how such forgetting simultaneously obscures South Korean state violence. In the chapter where Chang recalls the outbreak of the Korean War, the narrator opens the narrative with John Hodge's 1945 arrival to oversee Japanese surrender in Korea. By tracing the Korean War to WWII, readers learn that the US succeeded Japanese colonialism by installing Rhee Syngman's regime, which was "repressive, incompetent, and stupendously unpopular" (Choi 65). Rhee's unpopularity sparked peasant uprisings throughout the South, forcing Hodge to deploy the National Police, which is also the legacy of Japanese colonialism. Significantly, the narrator contextualizes the increasing uprisings at the turn of 1948 to 1949 in the successive occupation of Korea:

> Opposition to the partitioning of Korea, then to the stewardship of the U.S. and the USSR, now to the Rhee government, mostly maintained by leftist farmers' unions, had been constant since the Americans' arrival, but now, enraged by the increased power of the National Police, this opposition solidified into an armed guerilla movement, with cells scattered all over the south. (Choi 65)

By underlining that the leftist uprisings were anti-division, anti-colonial, and anti-US-backed

regime, the passage indicates that US labeling of communist insurgency masks the role of the US in dividing Korea and perpetuating Japanese colonialism as well as South Korean state violence that drove Korean civilians to resistance in the first place.

Choi further shows how anticommunist violence in Korea is rendered unknowable to both Korean and Western publics. Specifically, Choi draws attention to Chang's role as translator at the press conference celebrating the campaign against the Jeju Uprising in 1949. It is worth noting that this episode precedes Chang's memories of the outbreak of the Korean War in the novel. By first introducing how the Korean regime produces misinformation about the brutal suppression, Choi underlines that the forgetting of the war also involves forgetting prewar violence imposed by both the US and South Korean state. The press conference parallels Chang's lecture at the church as the Police Chief Ho presents the uprising to the journalists as a victory against communist peasants. Ho explains that the crackdown is like "a little war" where the police kills both the villagers and insurgents by depositing "an army of anti-Communist youth volunteers . . . armed with semiautomatic rifles and bayonets made from bamboo" (Choi 82). Similar with Chang's translation of the Korean War to the church members, Ho's report to international media depicts the guerrillas on Jeju as uneducated peasants. When a reporter questions Chang about Ho's claim that there were no police casualties, Chang replies that the guerrillas "get an order from the Soviet Union. They are poor, and with no any education. They love their country really very much. When they see police, they see they are wrong and they most times surrender" (Choi 83-84). Contradicting the narrator's contexualization of the leftist uprisings at the beginning of the chapter, Chang's answer reveals that his translation at the press conference produces knowledge obscuring US military interventions that galvanized the uprisings throughout the South and South Korean

regime's violence against its civilians. Moreover, we learn that the press conference is a knowledge project not only for the Western public to forget the Korean War but also for Koreans to relearn about the war through Western lens:

> The conference was attended by more American and international news-wire journalists than actual Koreans, which meant that all was as it should have been. The state-run Seoul papers were expected to take their news from the Western-world wires and the *Times,* a method of newsmaking that didn't require much in the way of investigative journalism. (Choi 83)

By depicting that the Korean public learned about the Jeju Uprising via the dual translation of the South Korean regime and Western media, Choi indicates that the knowledge production about the Korean War not only involves American public's forgetting but also instructing the Korean public to understand South Korean state violence as a war of justice against communism. In foregrounding how the Jeju Uprising is translated into justification for South Korean state violence and rendered irrelevant to US occupation, Choi points to the atrocities doubly forgotten by both US and Korean publics.

Chang thus translates the Korean War and Jeju Uprising by obscuring the violence committed by both the US and South Korean regime. As a translator working for the USIS, Chang occupies an ambiguous position as victim and accomplice of the Korean War. Whereas Chang's ambiguous racial position in Tennessee reveals ongoing anti-Black violence, Chang's ambiguous position in Korea elucidates that the USIS operates as a "zone of intentional misinformation" (Choi 84). Chang recalls that he "crossed over" from translating for the South Korean state to working for the USIS after the press conference on the Jeju Uprising because "selling the U.S. to South Korea suddenly seemed much more

attractive than that of selling South Korea to the U.S" (Choi 84). Chang reveals that the US cultural war in South Korea is made possible by unrecognized Korean labor like his: "He was the third thing, that people like Hodge both despised and required. Translation's unnatural byproduct" (Choi 84). However, Choi also underlines that Chang's choice to work for the USIS is not simply an aspiration for US liberation but a way to avoid producing misinformation about urgent issues such as the Jeju Uprising: "He wanted to take refuge there, where wholly irrelevant information was made urgently relevant, rather than the other way around" (Choi 84). In noting that the USIS makes irrelevant information urgent in contrast with South Korean government's press conference, Chang indicates that while his translation produces different kinds of information dependent on whom he works for, both the South Korean regime and the USIS aim to make the war incomprehensible for the public. Whereas the USIS promoted American culture, Rhee's regime masked South Korean state violence as a victory against communism.[8] By foregrounding the different purposes and effects of Chang's translation, Choi illustrates the complicity of both the US and South Korean states in erasing their role in imposing violence on Korean civilians.

Jeju is not simply a background for Chang's Korean War memories in the novel. Rather, Jeju is where Chang experiences the haunting effects of South Korean state violence that is

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[8] In "The Cultural Cold War in Korea, 1945-1950" (2003), Charles K. Armstrong points out that the Korean War is a key moment for the US to reorient its cultural war in Korea. Armstrong underlines, "The Korean War, and especially the U.S.-UN-ROK occupation of North Korea in fall 1950, offers a striking example of the transfer of symbols, methods, and mentalities of the antifascist struggle of World War II to the anticommunist struggle of the cold war" (95). Armstrong also notes that in post-Korean War period, a range of cultural agencies, including Christian organizations, volunteer organizations, and private foundations, carried on pro-American, pro-Western culture attitudes. In "Telling the 'Truth' to Koreans: U.S. Cultural Policy in South Korea during the early Cold War, 1947-1967" (2010), Wol-san Liem traces the development of the USIS in Korea and points out that the USIS envisioned its purpose is to guide Koreans to achieve democracy. The USIS also positioned itself as a neutral institution that only provides facts and truth. Moreover, Liem underlines that the cultural-policy officers recognized that "the effectiveness of their program was enhanced by the fact that it was 'the main contact with the outside world' for many Koreans" (114). In the 1950s and 1960s, the US deployed cultural policy as "a means through which Americans sought to shape the terms in which Koreans understood and discussed the world around them to fit the cold war order that supported U.S. hegemony" (Liem 391).

rendered invisible by the South Korean government and USIS' misinformation he helps to produce. With the outbreak of the war, Chang tries to escape to Pusan on a Japanese freighter, which is lent by Japan to the Americans in Korea "in the hopes of ameliorating the conditions of their 1945 surrender" (Choi 203), but the ship arrives on Jeju Island instead. Upon his arrival, Chang is alerted that the anticommunist violence was intensified in Jeju way before the Korean War: "In spite of the government's efforts the guerrilla presence on Cheju had never completely disappeared . . . National Police and ROKA units patrolled the island constantly, picking up young unenlisted men, older boys, surly trouser-wearing girls. All the risks he had run on the mainland were concentrated here" (Choi 294). Chang also notices the haunting absence of men on the island: "He saw no abled-bodied men at all: only girls, women, cripples leaning on sticks, and sexless children, unattached to anyone, deeply self-absorbed and hungry, trotting on the lookout for food" (Choi 294). By setting Chang's war experiences in Jeju, Choi gestures to the limits of accounting for the Korean War centered on Korean mainland. Through the mainlander Chang's eyes, we witness how Jeju islanders have suffered the aftermath of South Korean state violence justified by US anticommunist containment. Whereas Chang reads the guerrilla warfare throughout the southern provinces as "stories off the foreign news wire, from the UP, the AP, from Reuters, in *Time* magazine" (Choi 89), on Jeju he witnesses the stories turned into a real massacre. As Chang hides in the caves on Jeju, he witnesses how Jeju's villages become empty when Seoul fell again:

> Cheju's villages were emptied of all their remaining boys, young men, older men who had no trouble walking, all of them rounded up by the American MPs and the National Police and gathered into blinking, silent crowds, straw sleeping mats or wool army-issue blankets rolled up and tied to their backs. Small

> children and women and the very old gathered in a crowd opposite and also stood wordlessly, a strange reflection, to watch them walk away in motely columns, without looking back. No one expected them to return . . . If you were a man walking through one of these villages from which every man had been taken, then you were a ghost, or a beast. (Choi 303-304)

In drawing attention to the systematic forced disappearance of Jeju islanders, Chang's witnessing reveals the otherwise obscured US-South Korean state complicity on the mainland. On Jeju, the US is not masked as a benevolent savior but understood as a violent military occupier perpetuating Japanese colonialism with the National Police.[9] As Sonia Ryang points out, the protests on Jeju were "a reflection of the general frustration felt by islanders at the imposition of American military rule immediately after the end of Japanese rule, with no opportunity for Koreans to savor the end of colonialism" (5). In noting that only "a ghost, or a beast" can have an able male body in Jeju, Chang points to the difficulty of tracing violence against Jeju islanders. Whereas the excruciating experiences of running away from the war leave marks on Chang's body, the violence imposed on the islanders leaves no bodies to be witnessed or narrated in the novel.

Through Chang's witnessing of the absent presence of the massacre on Jeju, the novel interrupts South Korean national memory of the Korean War. In relocating Chang to Jeju

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[9] The United States Army Military Government in Korea was aware of the massacre on Jeju island but did not intervene. In 1948, the US urged the ROKA to carry out scorched-earth strategy for four months. By 1954, a tenth of Jeju's population, mostly unarmed civilians, had been slaughtered. In "The Jeju 4.3 Uprising and the United States: Remembering Responsibility for the Massacre" (2018), Jeong-Sim Yang points out, "Being under the spotlight of the international community, the US had to hide the panic it was feeling due to the possible disruption of the election. It had to remain behind the scenes and let its proxies – the Korean military and the police – do the actual suppressing of the rebellion" (46). For historical contexts of US involvement in Jeju Uprising, see also Kim Jongmin, "Early Cold War Genocide: The Jeju Massacre and U.S. Responsibility" (2021), Chang-Hoon Ko, "US Government Responsibility in the Jeju April Third Uprising and Grand Massacre—Islanders' Perspective" (2004), Hun Joon Kim, *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea* (2014).

island on his way to escape the war, Choi indicates how Korean mainland-centric narrative of the war erases the converged violence of Japanese colonialism on Jeju islanders, US occupation, and South Korean regime. The erasure of the Jeju massacre from the national memory of the Korean War also reflects mainland Koreans' historical discrimination against islanders. In her interview, Ryang notes that the Japanese *zainichi* stress the brutality of mainland Koreans before referencing "Syngman Rhee, and then to the migugnom ('American wretches'), whom they viewed as bearing ultimate responsibility for what happened during the uprising" (8). More importantly, by shifting the setting of Chang's war memories to the anticommunist genocide on Jeju island, Choi illuminates that the Korean War is an imperialist war through which the US intervenes in Korean civilian movements. Christine Hong underlines that a key context of the Jeju Uprising is the opposition to US-backed Rhee regime's separate elections in South Korea on May 10, 1948, which would cement Korea's division. The Uprising also reacted against Rhee restoring pro-Japan collaborators. As Hong indicates, "This reactionary backdrop is essential for understanding how Jeju, which by dint of geographic location had suffered under the Japanese colonial heel, was brutally crushed by the American imperial boot" ("White"). In witnessing an already ravaged Jeju in 1950, when the war on the mainland just begun, Chang reveals that the Jeju massacre has "deterritorializing narrative potential" by challenging the imperial periodization of the Korean War and US narrative of the war as a fight for democracy ("White"). The haunting absence of the islanders Chang observes discloses "the mass lethality of U.S. Cold War anticommunist anti-guerrilla campaigns and the collateralization of Jeju as part of a neo-Cold War U.S. policy of encircling China" ("White").

By foregrounding US and South Korean state violence on Jeju island, Choi's text opens a space for South Korean readers to deconstruct perceptions of the US as a figure of democracy and modernity as well as South Korean government's erasure of historical violence. Although the novel is set in the 1950s, the references to the violent suppression of Jeju islanders and peasant uprisings throughout the south gesture to the South Korean government's postwar masking of historical state atrocity. Despite the brutal killings of civilians, the Jeju Uprising remains "hard to trace—hard in a technical as well as in an emotional sense" for decades after the Korean war (Ryang 6). The massacre remained largely unknown to South Korean public until the 1980s when antigovernment student movements galvanized. Ryang attributed the silence around the Jeju massacre to the lack of official documentation and the government's fifty-year ban on investigation and research related to the Uprising.[10] Through branding the Uprising as a communist riot and antigovernment insurgencies, the government makes Jeju what Jeju writer Hyun Ki-young describes as "the worst taboo in Korean modern history" (Hyun). Coerced into silence for the fear of being labeled as communist, the Jeju survivors lived in a kind of "living death" (Em et al. 843). The deathly silence leaves traumatic impact on the survivors, who are forced to forget the extreme violence. As Hyun points out, "Nearly three decades of policies to deliberately crush memories of the Massacre by successive dictatorships have frozen the lips of the islanders. The majority voluntarily killed the memories themselves since it was virtually impossible to live on without trying to erase the brutal scenes from mind" (Hyun). In attending to the

[10] Jeju Uprising did not emerge as part of South Korean national memory until the nation's first civilian government was formed in 1992. In 2000, a special 4.3-related law promulgated to conduct an official investigation. A formal apology was made to the people of Jeju by President Roh Moo Hyun in October 2003. The government established National Committee for Investigation of the Truth about the Jeju April 3 Incident, which published an investigation report in 2003. For an account of the affective aspect of the anticommunist violence and how the civilian victims become "ungrievable" from the Jeju Uprising throughout the Korean War (2), see Su-kyoung Hwang's *Korea's Grievous War* (2016).

silenced histories in the US and South Korea, the novel has the potential to shift the referential framework of reading Asian American literature in Asia. Instead of a text enabling Asian readers to better understand the US, Choi's novel may offer critical remembering of South Korean state violence that cannot be addressed without accounting for US military violence.

In engaging with the intersected histories of Japanese colonialism, US military interventions, and South Korean state violence on Jeju, Choi thus makes the novel not only a Korean American representation of the Korean War but further challenges the boundaries of Asian American literature. As Min-Jung Kim underlines, "Choi's novel then, by telling of the migration to the United States as the political trajectory of Korea–United States–Korea, that is, not just Korea to United States but the intervention back to Korea, pushes the boundaries of transnational American studies that tend to be focused on the United States as the primary object of study or of Asian American literature that often concentrates on the movement from the point of origin to the United States" (377). By highlighting South Korean regime's role in facilitating US war violence, Choi shifts the conception of Asia as a place of origin or a place ravaged by US wars in Asian American literature. In attending to South Korean state violence along with the Korean War, Choi also decenters the US as the sole agent of imperialism and calls attention to atrocity inflicted on Asian subjects that are not recognizably a part of Asian American histories. Placing the Korean War in broader geohistorical contexts, Choi's novel points to the imperial roots of US racism and intersecting US and Asian historical atrocity.

Choi further challenges the official framing of the victims of the massacre by attending to subjects like Chang, whose position as a non-Jeju islander and a collaborator for the US

and South Korean state makes it difficult to categorize him simply as a victim of the uprising. While the postwar South Korean government has conducted an official investigation and established memorial for the Jeju Uprising, the official framing of the victim of the massacre focuses on innocent civilians who are not associated with communism. For instance, the Jeju 4·3 Incident Investigation Report, an official investigation of the massacre published in 2003, underlines that the purpose of the investigation is to "exonerate *the innocent dead from all charges of being reds and their sympathizers* and heal the wounds from the ideological conflicts through reconciliation and contribute to the improvement of human rights, democratization and national unity" (Jeju 48 emphasis added). The focus on clearing charges of communism is indeed significant because the victims and their families were socially and politically stigmatized through the guilt-by-association system. According to Kim Dong-Choon, the commissioner of South Korea's Truth and Reconciliation Commission from 2005 to 2009, while the system was officially revoked in the late 1980, the effects continue to haunt those marked as Reds. Those who are marked leftist suffer restrictions in employment, promotion, and travel. Kim underlines that the Cold War in South Korea makes anticommunism "the foundation of technologies of world making and everyday social habits" and "part of a class system in which the ruling class used violence, including symbolic violence, to disrupt and demolish people's internal solidarity, and to reproduce class domination and social hierarchy" (Em et al. 846). However, the official framing excludes leftists and their sympathizers from acquiring justice. Regarding justice for those who were actually leftists, Kim states: "Armed guerillas were not civilians and cannot be considered victims of state violence. But for those who did not engage in armed struggle but were victimized, the TRCK provided 'exoneration' in the sense that they were wrongfully killed by

the South Korean police or military simply because they were sympathetic to or supported the Left" (Em et al. 844). Under such framing, Chang, captured in Jeju and later tortured in Pusan, cannot be officially recognized as victim because he is also a friend and sympathizer for Kim, the school's poorest student who joined the Communist party before the war and participated in anti-government activism.

Choi further challenges the official framing of the victim deserving justice through the figure of Kim. It is difficult to know Kim because his stories are consistently mediated by others. The difficulty to learn about Kim reflects the difficulty to account justice for martialized civilians. Throughout the novel, readers learn about Kim only via Chang's narration and hearsay from other characters. Chang recalls that had it not been for the US-backed regime that promoted "the imported American enthusiasm for the idea of uplifting the oppressed" and scholarship of the American missionaries, Kim would not have "entered [his] life, Kim newly elevated, and Chang newly impoverished (Choi 70). Despite their friendship, Kim and Chang's different class positions affect their responses to Rhee's regime. Whereas Kim joined the Communist party and participated in attacks of the Korean Constabulary in 1948, Chang recalls that "when he talked about Communism, he was not expressing his unshakable convictions, but hoping such convictions would evolve as he talked" (Choi 76). In addition to elucidating that US-led anticommunism in Korea is anti-labor suppression, Kim also figures as a challenge to Chang's political belief. Chang never met Kim again after 1950, when Kim left Seoul and was heard to join the organized guerrilla warfare in Jeju. Nevertheless, the thought of Kim continues to haunt Chang. For example, when his family's maid Miki questions Chang that Seoul at war is only safe for those working for the government, Chang corrects her that he is not working for the government but the Americans.

Miki retorts, “There’s no difference . . . Kim would say that working for the Americans you’re still working for the divided Korea” (Choi 184). Kim’s leftist position reveals the limits of Chang’s narration by alerting that the US is not a better alternative. Moreover, by representing Kim through other characters’ memories and retelling, Choi highlights the difficulty to account for leftist activists like Kim, whose class and political positions challenge both the US and South Korean national narratives of the Korean War.

Fictionality and Alternative Alliance

Choi further points to the difficulty to know Kim’s war experiences by highlighting the fictionality of Chang’s war memories. While Chang’s experience of being tortured as a communist suspect is narrated, readers are not certain what happened to Kim except through Chang’s imagination. Chang is captured in the caves on Jeju as he tries to search for Kim. After being repeatedly questioned and tortured at the detention center in Pusan, Chang eventually gives out the name of the priest who helps guerrillas seeking a hiding place in the caves. On his way out of the detention center and burdened by the guilt of betrayal, Chang is stunned by a glimpse at a prisoner and thinks he is Kim: “Then he saw him. A pair of outsize eyes met his, stared” (Choi 312). Yet, later when Chang recalls the moment, he is haunted by “irresolvable uncertainty” and “a shock of recognition that bound him to someone he might not have known” (Choi 313). When Chang returns to Seoul, he finds the pair of shoes he gave Kim before he left the city hanging on the tree at Chang’s house. With this trace of Kim, Chang reasons that Kim might have been alive and returned to Seoul. Chang’s imagination becomes the only way for readers to learn about Kim’s end:

> He imagined that Kim had left Cheju long before he arrived, to rejoin the

> fighting. He would have traveled with the current of the Communist retreat, back through Seoul, stopping here before he went across the parallel. In the years to come he would think of Kim in the North, in what was now the other country. (Choi 317)

Chang's imagination indicates that Kim cannot but become a fictional presence in his memories because of the war that divides Korea into two different countries and marks half of the people as communists. The fictional end of Kim points to the difficulty to redress leftist activists that are also victims of US-backed South Korean state violence. In addition, in imagining Kim to continue to fight with the communists in the North, Chang refuses to reposition Kim as a Korean War hero defined by South Korean nationalist narrative. Such refusal is significant especially because postwar South Korean official narrative of the Jeju Uprising positions the victims as "innocents [who] were massacred without knowing what was going on" or selectively remembering victims who later joined the Korean War (Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation).[11]

The fictionality of Chang's memories also alerts us to the desire to comprehend the war through Chang's trauma by leaving space for the unknowable. Throughout the novel, the war frequently returns as flashbacks and nightmares haunting Chang's life in the US; yet we never learn what exactly Chang's dreams are like. Katherine, who also functions as the

[11] At the 70th anniversary memorial service for Jeju Uprising, President Moon Jae-in states that the victims are innocent civilians who sacrificed for ideology. Moon stresses, "Those innocents were massacred without knowing what was going on. Even without the knowledge of ideology, they had lived happily together with no thieves, beggars and no walls separating people" (Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation). Moon then turns to praise victims who joined the Korean War as evidence of Jeju residents prevailing ideological division: "The late Oh Chang-gi was wounded by gunshots fired by the military and police at the time of the April 3 Incident, but he took part in the Battle of Incheon by volunteering to join the Marine Corps after the outbreak of the Korean War . . . Young people who were falsely accused of being communists during the April 3 Incident defended their country in the face of death. Ideology was nothing more than a cause that justified the massacre. The residents of Jeju have overcome the tragedy created by ideology through reconciliation and forgiveness" (Jeju 4.3 Peace Foundation).

readers' stand-in by articulating her curiosity about the Korean War and Chang's traumatic pasts, notices Chang's insomnia and attempts to ask him to share his dreams toward the end of the novel. Chang admits that he dreams of the war in Korea: "Soldiers come behind me and I run, run, run . . . Then I hear a shooting . . . I feel the bullets come in me" (Choi 285-86). Just when readers think Chang is illustrating his war experiences vividly, Chang responds to Katherine's question whether the shooting happened to him: "No. This is never what happened to me" (Choi 288). In not responding to Katherine's curiosity about his wounded body in dreams, Choi refuses to feed readers' desire for true war stories with wounded Asian bodies as proof of atrocity. Moreover, by stressing the fictionality of Chang's experience of being shot during the war, Choi questions the expectation for war testimonies featuring innocent injured victims. Although Chang experiences torture and trauma, he also benefits from assisting the US and South Korean government in producing misinformation justifying anticommunist violence. Similarly, while Chang's imprisonment is part of the Jeju Uprising, his experiences cannot easily represent the massacre Jeju islanders experienced, which does not become narratives in the novel. Rather, Chang's arrival in Jeju is described as an accident on his way to escape military recruitment: "He had never meant to come to Cheju. The history of his actions over the course of the war consisted of lucky accidents and terrible blunders ameliorated by lucky accidents" (Choi 300). In underlining the fictional and accidental elements of Chang's war memories, Choi complicates our imagining of the victims of the war while attending to the varied subjects whose stories exceed the novel's narrative frame.

Despite a central part of the novel, Chang and Katherine's romance does not gain as much attention as Chang's war memories. However, the development of the romance

formulates the backdrop to process their distinct traumatic pasts and points to an alternative way to envision alliance. In an interview, Choi notes that the novel is inspired by her father's experience as a foreign student in Sewanee and that the invention of Katherine enables her to "figure out a plot that would serve both characters, and that's when it became a novel and stopped serving as biography" (Hughes). Significantly, Choi remarks that Chang's war trauma parallels with Katherine's trauma from her affair with Addison: "It interested me because I wanted Katherine and Chuck to view the other as absolutely different from each other and romanticize the other. I was interested in them being attracted to each other because they think they're so different but are really very similar" (Hughes). Choi's comment implies that Katherine's role as a fictional character enables the novel to develop a romance that requires the two characters to see their similar traumas despite of their distinct racial, gender, and national identities. As Chang and Katherine's relationship involves "roamanticiz[ing] the other" (Hughes), it is therefore worth examining how the love plot romanticizes the characters' differences without equating their distinct traumatic experiences.

The romance develops from Katherine and Chang's mutual attraction to each other's pasts and interweaves with Chang's memories. As the couple becomes more deeply engaged, the romance intensifies Chang's flashbacks. Katherine's affair with Addison undermines her relationship with her mother while making her an outcast in the local community. From a conversation between Chang and Mrs. Reston, the vice chancellor's housekeeper, we learn how the locals have been aware of the sexual transgression and yet do not hold Addison accountable. During the chat, Mrs. Reston suggests that the affair was the reason why Katherine's family stopped spending summer in Sewanee: "He's an important man here, and she's a grown woman . . . But she was just a child when he started with her. And he ruined

her" (Choi 162). While Mrs. Reston recognizes that the affair started as a child sexual abuse, she obscures Addison's responsibility by refocusing on Katherine as a *ruined* woman. In stressing Katherine as a grown woman, Mrs. Reston displaces the uneven power relation between Katherine and Addison, who is regarded as "an important man" (Choi 162), by transforming the sexual violence into a consensual relationship. Instead of accounting for Addison's violence, Mrs. Reston transfers Addison's accountability to Katherine's responsibility as a grown-up. In so doing, Mrs. Reston not only participates in cultivating a culture of silence around the sexual abuse but also elevates her own moral position: "I can be friendly with her and lover her if I want to. That's my freedom" (Choi 162). Mrs. Reston's *freedom* to show kindness to ruined women like Katherine in this sense is to display her power as a virtuous woman. The revelation of Katherine's past evokes Chang's memory of being abandoned by Peterfield when the KPA occupied Seoul. Chang recalls that although he determined to "be loyal to nobody but himself," he still finds the betrayal devastating: "Then Peterfield had abandoned him in Seoul, and he knew that in spite of his resolve his loyalty had attached itself to Peterfield like an indiscriminate, compulsive tentacle, expecting loyalty and love in return" (Choi 164). To recover from the betrayal, Chang "declared himself a small principality, and pledged his undivided allegiance again" (Choi 164). Relating the memory of US betrayal to the revelation of Katherine's past, Chang feels "similarly humiliated and similarly determined" (Choi 165). In paralleling Katherine's affair with Peterfield's betrayal, Chang figures that the romance is impossible as Katherine, like Peterfield, will not return a foreigner's love and loyalty. Chang's determination to resort to "loneliness" as cure for his unrequited attachment is also his desire to suppress traumatic memories: "It made him almost happy, to imagine himself in the near future, consumed by

his studies, and with the memory of Katherine Monroe shrunk down to size and confined to the past, pleasant but no longer relevant" (Choi 165). Although Chang's turn to loyalty to himself indicates the trauma caused by US occupation in Korea, his equation of Katherine's affair with Peterfied's betrayal risks reinforcing the patriarchal surveillance on women's sexual transgression. Whereas Peterfield's betrayal is empowered by US imperialism and racism, Katherine's affair traps her in an abusive relationship. Placing Peterfield and Katherine as the same empowered position simply through their shared American identity thus risks overlooking the different unequal power relations they are engaged. In suppressing memory of Katherine, Chang inadvertently participates in displacing Addison's accountability for sexual abuse and makes the affair consensual love.

Katherine's development from Addison's manipulative relation to learning to live with her trauma through loving Chang signals that undoing toxic masculinity and racism masked as liberalism is integral to forming cross-racial and cross-gender alliance. For instance, on a date with Chang at a restaurant, Katherine notices that Chang greeted the black busboy "as if they were both guests at a surprising and solemn affair" (Choi 146). Comparing Chang with Addison, Katherine reflects on Addison's insincere kindness toward people of color: "Whenever Charles did this . . . the gesture seemed boastful. The colored man could never have addressed Charles first" (Choi 146). In addition, romance with Chang enables Katherine realize her relationship with Addison is based on toxic and unequal power relation. After Katherine and Chang reunite and care for her sick mother Glee, Katherine calls Addison in the hope for his confirmation of his love for her but Addison only expresses his love for her "lightness" (Choi 290). The response forces Katherine to examine how the affair reduces her love to serving Addison's needs:

> He had only ever told her what he loved, to impart the way he wanted her to be. Intelligent, but light . . . He had loved her independence so that she never could have needs . . . The loss she'd grieved for all these years wasn't that of some ideal Charles but of herself when she'd first striven toward him, shortsighted and rash but absolutely impelled by her love. (Choi 290-91)

The affair deprives Katherine of her agency to love and reduces her to Addison's object of desire. Her independence becomes Addison's excuse to not care for her needs. In contrast, romance with Chang allows Katherine to repair relationship with her mother, who notes Chang's difference from American boastful masculinity: "He did not do what an American young man of his age would have done—stand too close to her with a familiar, overconfident air, and pretend she wasn't sick, and joke around to hide his nervousness" (Choi 318). Rather than performing masculinity, Chang accompanies Katherine to visit their house in New Orleans as her mother's death wish. Following the scene where Chang reflects that he can no longer be "close to someone" because of the war memories (Choi 318), this scene where Chang accompanies Katherine to stand by her mother's last days indicates that undoing toxic masculinity is crucial to healing their traumatic pasts. For Chang, being able to be close to others again is learning to accompany Katherine through her process of dealing with her trauma and reconnecting with her mother. For Katherine, healing her trauma requires her to love others without denying her own needs her needs and break off Addison's insincere racial liberalism and toxic masculinity. As Glee remarks to Katherine, Addison "patronized your father, he thought he was as stupid as a brick but he flattered him and kept him nearby to boost himself up and your father loved him" (Choi 289). To heal from her traumatic pasts, Katherine needs to examine how Addison's love reduces her to a pedestal boosting his toxic

masculinity masked as kindness.

To love each other, Katherine and Chang need to learn to *wait patiently* for the other to process their distinct traumatic pasts rather than pushing the other to uncover their memories. For instance, in the scene before the novel ends, Katherine drove Chang to the bus station while she stays in New Orleans to car for her mother. Chang realizes "he already knew how to see her" by imagining how Katherine stays with her mother till her death: "He will see her, gathering what's left into a box . . . Rinsing her glass, setting it in the box, standing in the open door holding the box tightly, taking a last look around. Then she pulls the door to" (Choi 323). Rather than probing Katherine's memories, Chang follows Glee's bidding to "wait for Kitty, while she's here with me" (Choi 321). Similarly, Katherine imagines Chang returning to the campus in a letter, which Chang carries around and enables him to anticipate the "wound" of his traumatic memories may become bearable: "She waits with him, patiently. It always takes such a strange summoning of himself, not reluctance, but the need to be poised, every thread of him knit. He breathes deeply, and whirls to face her" (Choi 323). The romance works through accompanying the other facing their traumatic pasts and wait patiently for them to be ready to be close to others. It is a kind of companionship that does not claim others' pain as one's own. By placing Katherine and Chang's romance before the concluding scene where Chang befriends the African American staff, Choi points to a form of alliance not founded on shared trauma but on waiting patiently for others to process and live with their distinct pain.

Fictionality is thus critical for Chang to survive traumatic memories by keeping certain stories to himself. In examining the repressed violence of the Korean War, Grace M. Cho points out that the Korean diaspora in the US has been "haunted by the traumatic effects of

what we are not allowed to know—the terror and devastation inflicted by the Korean War, the failure to resolve it, and the multiple silences surrounding this violent history" (12). While Choi depicts traumatic effects of the war on Chang, she also leaves room for the unknowable pain that cannot be easily narrated into words. For instance, after imagining that Kim lives in North Korea, Chang turns to recalling his family's country estate in the North, figuring, "But that memory, of that place, was sealed like a globe within him" (Choi 317). In describing the memory of the estate where he can never return to as a sealed "globe" (Choi 317), Chang makes the memory of the North a physical part inseparable from his body. Yet, this physical part also creates a poignant split in Chang's body and mind. As Chang remembers walking near the estate "would rush your blood through you, now, that perspiration would begin to dew out on your skin" (Choi 317), he finds his memories of the war alienated from his body:

> All of that was within him, the feel of his body when he walked there was within him, in the way that the other memory was not; that was a full place, it expanded him, where the other thing diminished him. It obliterated itself and took part of him with it, like the injured issue surrounding a wound, fusing together where it shouldn't, and shrinking the body . . . Although he had witnessed every detail, the pain was as distant from him as the distance between two bodies; the other may be there, in your arms, their length matched against yours, but whatever they feel is darkness . . . He could not imagine what the other body felt, and so he became another to himself; and after this happened, how could he be close to someone, when he was two people? (Choi 317-18)

On the one hand, Chang's doubled bodies illustrate that the division of Korea obstructs Koreans in each country from sharing their pain and memories of the war. For Chang, his

experiences of the war involve recalling and feeling physically his life in both North Korea and South Korea. To miss either half is to sever a part of his body and mind, making Chang "another to himself" (Choi 318). On the other hand, the passage also indicates that the alienation of memory of physical pain from his body is necessary for Chang to survive trauma. In choosing to physically remember the North while conceiving the detail and pain he witnesses as "another universe," Chang shows that selective remembering is necessary for war survivors to keep on living. In keeping the memories of pain in "darkness," the passage cautions that seeking to know the war through delving into Chang's trauma risks tearing open a barely healed "wound" (Choi 318, 317).

Unknowable stories leave room for healing and alternative alliance. Although Choi cautions against reading Chang's trauma for a comprehensive account of the war, she does not foreclose possibilities for Chang to "be close to someone" (Choi 318). Indeed, forging relationships with others is difficult for Chang as he is not able to share his war memories with either Koreans or Americans. Aware that he has to live with split mind and body for life, Chang had thought "he would always have two things, the great space within him where his home had to live, and that diminishment, when his body had imploded. Between the two, the excess of memory and its absence, was left *a story he couldn't describe*" (Choi 323, emphasis added). Rather than filling the space between memory and absence with more stories to resolve Chang's trauma, Choi gestures to a space for healing. As Chang reflects, "But the story had begun to circumvent these difficulties. It grew shorter, and simpler. *It would close around that event as his memory had closed around the torture and his body around the wound, and constricting, leave no absence behind*" (Choi 323, emphasis added). In making the story of his past "shorter, and simpler" (Choi 323), Chang points out that leaving parts of

his war memories and experiences unknowable is necessary to heal the wound of his trauma. Filling the *absence* with a simpler story (Choi 323), Choi points to a space for Chang's life not totally determined by the war.

Such space of unknowability further allows Chang to forge relationships and potential alliance with people occupying different racial and gender positions. For instance, while Chang and Katherine eventually become lovers, their romance is not built on apprehending each other's trauma but getting close to others despite not fully comprehending their pain. When Katherine struggles to tell Chang about her affair with Charles, Chang refuses the revelation and says, "It is a secret, . . . if I know it or if I don't know it. I want that you keep it. Not give it to me" (Choi 172). When Katherine questions Chang that his refusal seems "selfish," Chang explains, "It's for you. Sometimes somebody tells too much. Later on they want to die instead of telling it, but it's no any good then" (Choi 172). In not pushing Katherine to share her trauma while not revealing his forced betrayal of the priest during the war, Chang points to relations forged by preserving critical distance for different pasts. As Amy C. Tang indicates, "[In] place of a romance founded upon an 'exchange of histories' or 'empathy or understanding,' both of which suggest a relationship founded on identification, *The Foreign Student* presents a relationship founded upon two people's difference from one another and from their past selves" (64).

By representing Chang becoming close to others not through shared trauma but through understanding the need for silence, Choi thus leads us to Chang's affiliation with the African American staff at the university and his realization of freedom at the end. After losing his student status, Chang works at the university's kitchen and finds that his relationship with the African American staff changes. Whereas previously the staff feel felt uneasy about eating

with Chang at the same table, now they work together and share “talk that carried nothing but their feeling for each other, which was reflexive, and affirming” (Choi 324). The shift of the cross-racial relationship indicates labor solidarity and a form of affiliation that does not force articulation: “They never peered into his thoughtful silences, but they accepted him with humor, and their company sheltered him” (Choi 324). Instead of building cross-racial alliance through equating Black and Asian experiences of racism or equating anti-Black racism with Chang’s war trauma, Choi points to an alternative way to *be close to someone* through allowing *silences* rather than assimilation (Choi 318, 324). As Tang points out, the novel thus “invites us to imagine how . . . affiliations between Asian Americans and African Americans might emerge not through a direct extension of past experiences . . . but specifically through a break with them” (64). Rather than resolving Chang’s trauma through other’s comprehension, Choi suggests that unrecognition allows Chang’s life to be not fully defined by the war. At the conclusion, while riding the bus with his African American colleagues, Chang recalls a similar “certainty and self-possession” he felt when he was released from the detention center and reunited with his family in Pusan (Choi 324). When he arrives at his family’s house, his mother thinks he is a beggar and dismisses him. Rather than feeling disappointed, Chang is “relieved”:

> In his mother’s failure to recognize him, his duty to his family was done; and the suspicion that he had, despite shame and uncertainty, secretly harbored all along—that this could not be his life, that this war would never define him—finally prove to be right. (Choi 325).

By linking the moments of Chang’s affiliation with African Americans and his homecoming through unrecognition, Choi’s ending suggests that keeping certain distance from the past is

necessary for Chang to survive in the present. Such a break from the past allows Chang to feel "free" not so much by forgetting historical violence but by releasing Chang from others' anticipation for his war stories (Choi 325). As Tang points out, "[W]hile Asian American cultural criticism typically insists on a 'traumatic' continuity between past and present as the basis for its political interventions, here Choi seems to suggest that it is rather trauma's rupturing of the link between past and present that enables new solidarities in the present" (66). In so doing, Choi points to an alternative politics of memory that counters Cold War forgetting while not limiting alliances to recovering the past.

The Foreign Student thus challenges the US and South Korean nationalist narratives of the Korean War by foregrounding Cold War knowledge production in the US and Korea. By interweaving Chang's war memories with US forgetting of the war and legacies of anti-Black violence Chang experiences in Tennessee, Choi illustrates that the Korean War is a racial war rendered unknowable to the US public. In addition to highlighting US forgetting of its military interventions in Korea, Choi further attends to how the war is justified as an anticommunist war by US-backed South Korean regime through foregrounding the massacre on Jeju island. By representing the Jeju Uprising through Chang's witnessing, Choi elucidates the historical atrocity is obscured by both the US and South Korea while complicating South Korean official framing of the victim deserving transitional justice. Making explicit US-South Korean complicity in the genocide of Jeju, the novel thus brings intervention back to South Korea. Finally, in stressing the fictionality of Chang's memories, Choi leaves room for the unknowable stories necessary for Chang to survive traumatic memories while gesturing to alternative ways to forge alliances through getting close to others' unrecognizable and unsharable pain.

Chapter Two

Translation as Anti-Neocolonial Intervention in Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony*

The fact is that deterring threats and underwriting stability is as vital today for not only the Peninsula but for the world—for the world. That's what the President and I spent the last couple of days talking about. It's not just the Korean Peninsula, it's the world. And so—Should I stop and have that translated? (Laughter.)

—US President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., "Remarks at the Air Operations Center's Combat Operations Floor on Osan Air Base"

I come from a land where we are taught that the US saved us from Commies and that North Korea is our enemy. I come from a land of neocolonial fratricide. I come from such twoness. I speak as a twin.

—Don Mee Choi, *Translation is a Mode = Translation is an Anti-neocolonial Mode*

The first quote comes from the remarks President Joseph Biden made on the third day of his visit to the Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, South Korea. The visit was part of Biden's first Asia trip as president in 2022 to secure military and economic alliance with South Korea and Japan and to showcase Biden administration's "rock-solid commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific" ("Statement"). On his last day in South Korea, Biden and South Korea's newly-elected president Yoon Suk Yeol visited the Osan Air Base, home to the headquarters of Seventh Air Force and Republic of Korea Air Force, and greeted U.S. service members and military families. I draw attention to Biden's pause for translation because it creates an intriguing moment of silence that highlights another form of translation. Before the pause, Biden refers to the Korean War while simultaneously obscuring US military interventions in

Korea: "[O]ur alliance was formed through shared sacrifice of the Korean War. And now, seven decades later, thanks to you, the Republic of Korea is a strong, thriving, and innovating democracy. And our alliance grows stronger every single day because of you all" ("Remarks"). By reframing US military occupation in South Korea into "alliance" necessary for South Korea's democracy, Biden translates ongoing US military presence after the supposedly ended Korean War into everlasting "integration and coordination" between US and South Korean forces. Biden further obscures US militarism in Asia by rephrasing US military presence in Korea as vital existence to deter "threats . . . for not only the Peninsula but for the world" ("Remarks"). While Biden does not specify the threats, Yoon's following expression of gratitude for KAOC as "the center of Korea's three-pillar system to defend the North Korean missile threat" reveals the Korean War is ongoing. By rephrasing US militarism in Korea as alliance for global stability, Biden performs a form of translation that converts US military violence into world peace ("Remarks").

I use *translation* to analyze Biden's speech not only because it involves interlingual translation but also because the speech instructs the audience to conceive US presence in South Korea as what South Koreans and the world need and desire. That is, even in its original English form, Biden's speech is already a translation because it does not simply deliver corresponding meanings in different languages but more importantly generates new knowledge that can change how one understands US military presence in Korea. In replacing US military interventions with enduring alliance with South Korea, Biden's translation is a knowledge project of rewriting US imperial history. By referring to the Korean War at the base that embodies US military occupation in South Korea while simultaneously suppressing US imperial history with discourses of integration and democracy, Biden's remarks illustrate

how US empire operates through translating explicit military violence into a nonviolent language that transforms US militarism in South Korea into the "linchpin for peace and prosperity in the region" ("Joint Statement"). It is the duality of US imperial language that Don Mee Choi underlines in her theorization of translation. By speaking as a "twin," Choi underscores how US anticommunism divides Korea into two while indicating that such division also creates a language of "twoness" that translates US salvation into "neocolonial fratricide" (*Translation* 1). By highlighting how anticommunist discourse obscures US colonial violence, Choi deploys translation as a language of twoness articulating how US empire operates through both material military violence and liberalism. In contrast with Biden's imperial translation that renders implicit US colonial histories and militarism in Asia and the Pacific, Choi's translation accounts for the duality lost in US imperial translation.

My approach to Choi's translation does not focus so much on interlingual translation as a site producing alternative knowledge formations suppressed by the narrative of US imperialism. Although Choi does not explicitly thematize translation, I suggest that by revealing how US empire violently dehistoricizes and transforms Koreans into racialized Other, Choi performs a form of translation that intervenes in what Tejaswini Niranjana theorizes as colonial translation. In analyzing British translation of Hindu texts in the eighteenth century, Niranjana argues that translation in colonial context is not only an interlingual practice but also a project of writing universal history based on Western philosophy notions of representation and reality and erasure of colonial violence. As Niranjana underlines, "In forming a certain kind of subject, in presenting particular versions of the colonized, translation brings into being overarching concepts of reality and representation. These concepts, and what they allow us to assume, completely occlude the

violence that accompanies the construction of the colonial subject" (2). Adopting post-structuralist critiques of historicism, Niranjana proposes interventionary translation as a textual practice that questions universal history by probing "the absence, lack, or repression of an awareness of asymmetry and historicity" (9). Interventionary translation is a way of writing history by engaging with *historicity*, which Niranjana defines as "effective history . . . or that part of the past that is still operative in the present" (37). Niranjana's discussion of the politics of translation demonstrates that translation produces knowledge inseparable from historiography. Moreover, while translation produces colonial "strategies of containment" (Niranjana 3), it also generates alternative knowledge questioning the suppression of colonial histories. By borrowing Niranjana's notion of interventionary translation, I analyze the ways Choi foregrounds how US imperialism makes violent equations of nonequivalent languages and subjects by punning the racist designations with other possible meanings.

In this chapter, I investigate how Korean diasporic poet and translator Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* (2016) and *DMZ Colony* (2020) interrupt the imperial narrative of the Korean War as the forgotten war through translating the duality of US empire. I deploy translation as an analytical frame both to examine how the US obscures military violence through discourses of humanitarianism and justice and to highlight the varied methods Choi deploys to represent a critical historiography. To this end, I read Choi's deployment of punning in English and Korean, rewriting archives, and conversion of words into images as a form of translation that foregrounds the obscured US and South Korean military violence while leaving space for unknowablity. As such, I follow Amie Elizabeth Parry's understanding of translation "in the broader theoretical sense as the site of disparate and even incommensurate yet overlapping structures of knowledge formed through imperialist histories" in her analysis

of how Cold War US minority immigrant writing and avant-garde writing from Taiwan elucidate the suppressed history of US neocolonialism and imperial expansion in Asia (14). Weaving poetry, prose, photographs, and hand-written texts, *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony* represent the ongoing Korean War and its entanglement with postwar violence of South Korean military regimes. By focusing on how Choi deploys translation of different media and languages as a way to intervene imperial narrative of US wars in Asia, I argue that *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony* illuminate the obscured duality of US liberal empire in Asia and the intertwined histories of South Korean subimperialism.

***Hardly War*: Twinning the Language of US Empire**

Hardly War represents a creative archive of the Korean War and the Vietnam War with a collection of photographs, news, memoir, and drawings. Building on the images by Choi's father, a professional photographer, of the Korean War and Vietnam War and the following establishment of South Korean military regimes Choi curates varied materials into prose and poetry in three sections titled "Hardly War," "Purely Illustrative," and "Hardly Opera." "Hardly War" depicts the difficulty of conceiving the Korean War as an actual war while elucidating how the war is embedded in US racial wars in Asia. "Purely Illustrative" traces how the Korean War is intertwined with the Vietnam War and US antiblack racism and South Korean subimperialism in Vietnam. "Hardly Opera" stages Choi's interview with her father about his war experiences by imagining figures living inside his camera. For the purpose of my analysis, I focus on the first two sections. In exploring her memories of Korea, her relationship with her father, and migrations in juxtaposition with photos and other media representing wars in Korea and Vietnam, Choi's poetry defies national boundaries and

challenges readers to read her poetry as a product stemming from the entwined histories of US and Korea—histories Choi describes in a talk as "neocolonial condition" (Literaturhaus Berlin). Reading *Hardly War* is a difficult reading experience, as the text switches between different materials that at times are interlinked with shared themes and at times interrupt each other. The seemingly fragmented materials are accompanied with Choi's notes referring to the sources she draws upon and are rearranged into poetry. In so doing, Choi attends to the histories underlying the poetry without attempting to restore a comprehensive narrative of US imperialism in Asia. By enfolding the geopolitics of US wars in Asia in her poetry, Choi illuminates the historical military violence and US neocolonialism obscured by US discourse of the Cold War and South Korean nationalist discourse of postwar development.

In this section, I examine how Choi illuminates the duality of US empire by translating the obscured historical violence during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. By focusing on how Choi deploys puns in English and Korean, pairing images, and rearranging media representations of wars, I contend that *Hardly War* performs an epistemic translation by foregrounding the invisible intertwined histories of US neocolonialism in Asia and South Korean subimperialism in Vietnam. Through juxtaposing images and archives of US wars in Korea and Vietnam, Choi reveals that the wars are the invisible twin of US liberal empire embedded in a genealogy of US racial wars. Investigating Choi's use of doubled images and meanings of words, I argue that *Hardly War* intervenes in the historiography of US imperialism in Asia by showing that US military interventions have played a central role in Korean history and the epistemological violence of transforming histories of military violence into histories of liberation and development.

Choi's poetry illustrates the discursive erasure of US imperialism in Asia and how such

erasure continues in postwar South Korean national development. Discourses of US imperialism shift significantly after WWII and the Cold War as US military presence in Asia and the Pacific become rendered into discourses of democracy and racial liberalism. The discursive erasure of US imperialism on the one hand obscures racism within the US while justifying US imperial expansion abroad on the other. As Christina Klein indicates in her study of middlebrow cultural representations of Asia, US Cold War politics operates through a *global imaginary of containment* and a *global imaginary of integration* (*Cold War* 23). Klein underlines that global imaginary of integration serves as a model of sentimental education that represents the Cold War as a project of forging emotional bonds with people in Asia and Africa. The ideology of integration is central to securing support for the Cold War as it produces "a discursive mechanism for constructing the Cold War as a concrete, positive project that ordinary Americans could own through their participation" (*Cold War* 58). Christine Hong further emphasizes that US post-WWII military violence in Asia and the Pacific persists despite the discourse of multiculturalism obscures the structural linkages between US domestic racial wars and wars abroad. US recuperation of militarism in Asia and the Pacific derives from the evolution of "militarized multiculturalism" through the deployment of desegregated forces and humanitarian baby-lifts of orphans consequent to US wars in Korean and Vietnam (*Violent* 11). As Hong indicates, "The expansion of civil rights in a newly desegregated U.S. military, and the assertion of those rights over and against the human rights of occupied peoples, further obscured structural linkages and entanglements between differently subjugated populations" (*Violent* 11). Choi's poetry delineates such discursive erasure of US imperialism by playing puns in Korean and English and dramatizing the limits of translation and representations of war.

The first section entitled "Hardly War" illuminates how US empire obscures its racial wars in Asia through an epistemic translation. The title plays with the doubled meanings of the word *hardly,* which can mean both "violently" and "barely."[12] By adding the adverb to war, Choi coins an ambiguous phrase that vigorously challenges readers to unpack *hardly war* in the varied contexts of the following poems and images. On the one hand, *hardly war* signifies a war fought violently. On the other hand, *hardly war* refers to a war that is barely a war. In so doing, Choi pushes readers to account the binary meanings while simultaneously questioning the binary frame that renders war both as an actual event and barely existence. The doubleness also makes *hardly war* a phrase in translation whose meanings remain undecided and hanging between different interpretations. Translation, as Joyelle McSweeney points out, is "anti-binary" and "a place of uncertain and incomplete possession, a place where the power structures which separate and antagonize subjects wobble, warp, and weaken but are not entirely eradicated." Furthermore, in highlighting the ambiguity, *hardly war* captures the difficulty of making the Cold War intelligible as hot wars. As Sunny Xiang points out, "The distinctiveness of such a war—indeed, the violence—lies in transforming the very concept of war. A 'cold' war fought by a 'benevolent' empire pioneered a style of warfare that was deemed unconventional, and it created an experience of wartime that is often quotidian and still ongoing" (3). By making it difficult for readers to define *hardly war*, Choi indicates that defining the Korean War through a binary frame overlooks that the violence of the war lies in a limited conceptualization of violence as explicit military violence.

The section opens with a piece entitled "Race=Nation," in which Choi illustrates that US

[12] "hardly, adv." *OED online*. Oxford UP. Jun. 2022. Web. 14 Jun. 2022.

military expansion in Asia is an imperial poetics that requires translation to foreground the obscured violence. Choi begins by narrating her biography and memories of migrations interwoven with South Korean history:

> I was born in a tiny, traditional, tile-roofed house, a house my father bought with award money he received for his photographs of the April 19, 1960 Revolution. The student-led revolution overthrew the authoritarian South Korean president, Syngman Rhee, installed by the US government in 1948 . . . And what he cannot forget are the shoeshine boys, Korean War orphans who eked out a living on the streets of Seoul. Many of them gave up their lives in the uprising. Police opened fire, killing about 180 and wounding thousands. (3)

By placing her life stories in South Korea in the intertwined histories of US military interventions in Korea, Choi cautions readers against reading her biography simply as an ethnic narrative of a South Korean American writer. In narrating her life with the historical events taking place before her birth, Choi counters the linear chronological order of history-writing and underlines that the revolution was a historical outcome of a regime established by the US before the Korean War. By contextualizing the 1960 revolution in the establishment of Rhee's regime and her father's memories of the Korean War orphans, Choi indicates that the Korean War is a critical historical force conditioning the uprising. Choi's father's memories perform a critical relational historical frame by interconnecting those who were displaced, orphaned, and impoverished by the Korean War with those who protested Rhee's regime in 1960. In rewriting the history of the 1960 Revolution by foregrounding its historical linkages with the Korean War, Choi illuminates that while the Korean orphans who died in the

uprising were killed by the South Korean police, US military presence was equally responsible for their death. By highlighting the role the US has played in producing Korean War orphans and causing the Revolution, Choi shows that US military presence in Korea kills without directly committing the act. Moreover, in accounting for the death of Korean War orphans in the Revolution, Choi elucidates that US continues to wage war at the expense of Korean lives.

Choi's first-person narrative illustrates that the personal stories and the national histories are inseparable from US Cold War geopolitics. Choi further narrates her memories of migration, "In 1972, the height of the US-backed dictatorship under Park Chun Hee, we bade farewell to the house I was born in. Even after several decades of living outside of South Korea, this is the house I still return to. It is my psychic and linguistic base, a site of perpetual farewell and return, a site of my political act—translation and writing" (3). In underlining her translation and writing as "political act" embedded in US interventions in South Korea (3), Choi conducts an epistemic translation against the discursive erasures of US imperialism. In writing geohistories of US Cold War interventions into her biography, Choi reveals that herself, along with the Korean orphans, South Korean regimes, and protestors in 1960, are the obscured twins of US empire. Like the students and Korean War orphans who resisted against US-backed Rhee's regime, Choi's displacement from South Korea is inseparable from another US-backed regime. Linking her becoming a Korean American with the Koreans participating in the uprising through US-backed South Korean regimes, Choi reveals that the Korean War not only produces orphans and diasporas but also postwar South Korean state violence—violence conditioned by US imperialism and thus cannot be reduced to Korean national history.

Choi furthers the epistemic translation in the following passages by delineating US racial wars with puns and translation in English and Korean. Choi narrates that South Korean nationalist education operates as a form of translation by creating equations between distinct words: “My early education in South Korean trained me to think of race as nation and of nation as race, hence race=nation” (3). While the equation between two distinct words seems to critique the epistemic violence of South Korean nationalism, Choi underlines the historical contexts of the equation by noting that “A Korean term, *uri minjok*—our race, our national identity—was imagined, a crucial construction and a mobilizing force in the anticolonial, independence movement during the Japanese occupation, 1910-45” (3). By contextualizing the equation in Japanese colonization of Korea, Choi points out that *uri minjok* cannot be understood simply through its English translation “our race, our national identity” without engaging with Korea’s colonial histories (3). To simply equate the English translation with the Korean term therefore creates a bad translation that vacates historical contexts.

Choi further intervenes in the bad English translation by tracing race=nation in longer histories:

> When Korea fell under the control of the US military government in 1945, a part of our race had split off as *ppalgaengi*, Reds or Commies. But really, anyone in “those white pajama things,” traditional pants, which the majority of the Koreans wore back then, was seen as gook. This is how a gook=nation was born. Our race, our national identity, even our clothing became racialized and geopolticized within the global class war. Therefore, when I was born in the tiny, tile-roofed house, I was already geopolitically raced. Hence, me=gook. (3-4)

In this passage, Choi illustrates how US imperialism in Korea undermines the anticolonial

context of race=nation and *uri minjok* by performing multiple processes of translation. By highlighting how US anticommunist policy splits off "a part of our race" by labelling part of Koreans as "*ppalgaengi*, Reds or Commies" (3), Choi points out that terms such as Reds and Commies are not simply translated into the Korean word *ppalgaengi* but also act as a violent process of dividing half of Korean people as an enemy race. In underlining the forced split off by US Cold War anticommunism, Choi elucidates how *uri minjok* is decontextualized from its anticolonial histories and transformed into "race" for division within Korea. While "race=nation" and "gook=nation" share the same word structure (3), Choi underlines that the creation of the equations involves drastically different power relations. Derived from anticolonial contests, "race=nation" is a term to translate Korean people into one united nation and race (3). In contrast, "gook=nation" translates "anyone in 'those white pajama things'" into a racist naming "gook" and reduces Korea to a nation of racial inferiors (3). By using equal sign, Choi depicts how translation transforms different concepts into equations in order to make sense of the foreign Other. Ignoring the differences between the equal sign thus risks privileging one side of the equation as the standard of universal meaning. In highlighting that "gook" is applied to all Koreans despite US anticommunist rhetoric claims to label only part of Koreans as "Reds" (3), Choi shows that the Korean War is embedded in the genealogy of US racial wars in the Philippine-American War of 1899.[13] By inserting the word gook in the series of equations, Choi evokes the word's etymology of racial and gendered violence against multiracial subjects, including Asians, Haitians, and Arabs.[14] As

[13] In *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, The United States, and The Philippines* (2006), Paul A. Kramer notes that the term ''gu-gu,'' or ''goo-goo'' used by US soldiers against Filipinos is "almost certainly the linguistic ancestor of 'gook'" (127). Kramer indicates that the term has two possible origins. One comes from the Tagalog term for a slippery coconut-oil shampoo and used to refer to "the enemy's elusiveness" (127). The other origin comes from a minstrel tune sung by US troops on the voyage to the Philippines. The song contains a line using "goo-goo eyes" to describe Filipinas, which Filipino men considered as an insult (127).

[14] In "Gook: The Short History of an Americanism" (1992), David Roediger traces the term's multiracial

Jodi Kim points out, the word gook serves as "a genealogy of the United States' protracted triangulation of race, empire, and war, and reveals the peculiar resonance and recursiveness of Cold War epistemology, a resonance that exceeds and outlasts the event itself" (*Ends* 3). By supplementing the colonial contexts erased from US colonial translation of Korean "traditional pants" into "white pajama things" (3), Choi illuminates that US imperialism is a violent translation that simply equates Korean people and culture with English naming through racism.

In addition to foregrounding the obscured colonial contexts, Choi's translation further interrupts the violent equations of racism through puns in English and Korean. While "gook=nation" calls out US racism, the word gook also puns with the pronunciation of nation (국)in Korean. By adding the sonic pun, Choi disrupts the racist equation and instead opens the equation to doubled meanings. The equation can be understood both as an American expression of racism and a Korean claim of nationalism. Both interpretations require readers to engage with the histories of US militarism in Korea. By doubling the meanings of the word, Choi further highlights the impact of US racial wars on Koreans who have not crossed the national border by referring to her childhood: "Therefore, when I was born in the tiny, tile-roofed house, I was already geopolitically raced. Hence, me=gook" (4). On the one hand, "me=gook" elucidates that US war in Korea racialized Choi before she was born even though she did not directly experience the war (4). Although Choi was born Korean, the Korean national identity is already transnationalized by the entangled histories of the US and Korea.

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designation and argues that "the broader pan-racist past of gook provides almost a short history of modern U.S. imperial aggression and particularly of the connections between racial oppression and war" (50). Roediger tracks the term to 1920, when Herbert J. Seligman wrote in the *Nation,* "The Haitians, in whose service United States Marines are presumably restoring peace and order in Haiti, are nicknamed 'Gooks' and have been treated with every variety of contempt, insult, and bestiality" (qtd. in 50). US troops applied the term to varied racial subjects, including Filipinos, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Arabs, Hawaiian natives, Koreans, and Vietnamese. The term also has gendered usage in designating "tarts," referring to "camp-following prostitutes" (50).

In addition, by punning "me=gook" with the Korean word for the US (미국), Choi alerts that only if one mistranslates 미국 into "me gook" simply through sonic similarity can one interpret "me=gook" as an expression of identifying oneself with a gook (4). That is, if readers make sense of "me=gook" through English without attending to histories of US imperialism (4), they risk rendering Choi into an object of the racist gaze like what US troops did in wars. By punning "me=gook" with 미국, Choi overturns the racist gaze by translating the term into Korean naming of the US (4). In so doing, "me=gook" both delineates the obscured histories of US colonialism and resists against the erasure of colonial violence (4).

In addition to punning words in English and Korean, Choi challenges discursive erasure of US imperialism by recontexualizing the word *hardly* in "Hardly War" section. Choi terms her poems as "geopolitical poetics" which "strings together the faintly remembered, the faintly imagined, the faintly discarded, which is to say race=nation gets to speak its own faint history in its own faint language. Its mere umbilical cord is hardly attached to anything at all. Hence, hardly=war" (4). In underlining that the language of race=nation is "faint history in its own faint language" and "hardly attached to anything at all" (4), Choi reveals that "hardly" cannot be simply understood as description of the lack of distinctive features of war. Rather, the word "hardly" is reconceived as "war" by the irreducible "faint history" of racial wars (4). In the following poem "Woe Are You?" Choi further deploys *hardly* in ways that cannot be easily used to mask violence. The speaker of the first part of the poem speculates whether the Korean War is a war: "It was hardly war, the hardliest of wars. Hardly, hardly. It occurred to me that this particular war was hardly war because of kids, more kids, those poor kids. The kids were hungry until we GIs fed them. We dusted them with DDT. Hardly done. Rehabilitation of Korea, that is" (6). Positioned in the GI's view,

"hardly" is used to obscure and transform the Korean War into a humanitarian act by the US. Reframing the war into a mission to rescue kids from hunger, the GI speaker's use of *hardly* disavows US military violence. However, such erasure of violence is challenged by the reference to DDT and the immediately following attempt to deny the action with "Hardly done" (6). The immediate denial and turn to "[r]ehabilitation of Korea" shows the discursive erasure of US imperialism. Moreover, Choi's reformulation of "hardly=war" in the opening prose has prepared readers to translate *hardly* in the contexts of US racial wars (4). Placed in the "faint history" of US military violence (4), the erasure of US imperialism is made explicit despite the speaker concludes: "We are just lending them a hand until they can stand on their own two feet. A novel idea. This is why it occurred to me that this particular war was hardly war, the hardliest of wars" (6). By placing *hardly* in the doubled contexts of US humanitarianism and military violence, Choi elucidates that the doubled meanings of *hardly* root in how US imperialism obscures its military violence through discourse of benevolence.

Choi also critiques the representation of the Korean War by pairing photographs of similar themes and reframing the images with her poetry. In a piece titled "6.25," Choi narrates her father's witnessing of a North Korean fighter plane on June 27th 1950: "My father missed the chance to capture the Yak-9 with his camera. That late afternoon the yet-to-be nation's newspapers were in print, but no photos of the war appeared in any of them. After all it was hardly war, the hardliest of wars, neverthelessly Yak" (9). The lack of photographs to show Choi's father's witnessing refuses to offer first-hand accounts from Koreans while underlining that the absence of photos precisely captures "the hardliest of wars" (9). Following the poem, we encounter a war photo featuring a Korean girl with a baby on her

back (See Fig. 1). The image is a 1951 photo from the US National Archives entitled "With her brother on her back a war weary Korean girl tiredly trudges by a stalled M-26 tank, at Haengju, Korea." It is one of the most widely circulated photos of the Korean War online. Although the photo seems to fill the absence of visual proof of Choi's father's witnessing, Choi interrupts attempts to comprehend the war simply as feminized and infantilized Asian bodies by framing the image with untranslated Korean lines and declares repeatedly in English: "I refuse to translate" (10). The refusal alerts that the photo is also a form of translation that renders the Asian bodies into figures of victims of the Korean War by emptying out histories. Whereas the poems preceding the photo show that Korea is historically entwined with the US, the refusal to translate cautions against claims to full knowledge about Korean perspective of the war. By inserting untranslated Korean lines, Choi's translation of the photograph gestures to Johannes Göransson's formulation of translation as "deformation zones" that challenges "a mode of reading that subsumes and homogenizes both international and U.S. literature into one literature, ruled by certified 'masters' and gatekeepers" (Göransson). Framed by English and Korean, the photo thus cannot be defined by its English title. The untranslated Korean texts significantly reframe the photo by borrowing the technique of wordplay from Yi Sang, a Korean experimental poet during the Japanese colonization era.[15] In the footnote, Choi notes that Yi Sang created offensive wordplay with numbers to get away with censorship. By repeating each line five times, Choi plays with the pronunciation of number 5 in Korean, which sounds the same with

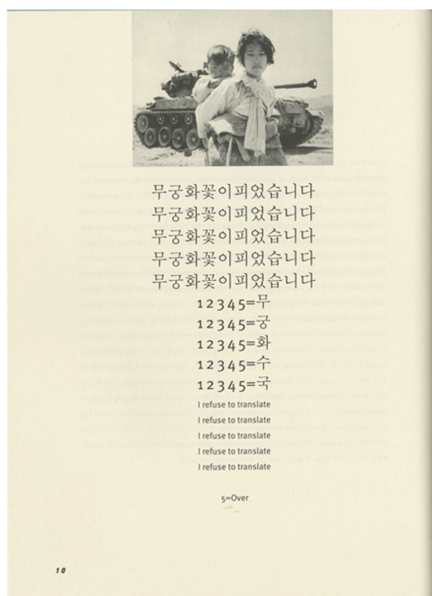
[15] Yi Sang has been a significant influence on Choi's poetry and translation. Choi has translated Yi's works in *Yi Sang: Selected Works* (2020). In "Yi Sang's House" (2020), Choi traces Yi Sang's influence on her to her father, who used to read Yi Sang's stories to help him through his bleak childhood. Choi observes, "For Yi Sang and my father, Japanese was their colonial language as English is a colonial language for me. We did not choose it; it chose us, historically, and that's the nature of a colonial language. It finds you. It can even track you down via the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-missile system and make a foreigner out of you in your own country, which is to say, your home is no longer your home" ("Yi Sang's House").

letter O. The wordplay also refers to the 5 petals of the rose of Sharon (무궁화), national flower for South Korea. the repeated lines "무궁화꽃이피었습니다" (Rose of Sharon has blossomed) is a chant Korean children sing when playing the game Red Light, Green Light (10). Recontextualized under the photo, the repeated chant of blossomed rose of Sharon and number 5 counter the gaze at the passive Korean victims and declares the blooming South Korean nation. Ending the poem with "5=over" (10), Choi plays with the sound of number 5 in Korean and gestures to the blossoming 5 petals of rose of Sharon that are decidedly not over.

Choi further unsettles the representative authority of the war photo by pairing the photo with her own photo of carrying her brother on her back three pages later. Choi's photo shares a similar composition with the previous photo, but the lack of the tank in the background makes it difficult for viewers to determine its relation with the Korean War (See Fig. 2). Choi ties the photo with the Korean War by layering the photo with quotes from BBC report on the Korean War on June 25, 1950. BBC's report is called into question by Choi's inserted lines. The quotations are framed by a first-personal narrative beginning with, "I was narrowly narrator,/ yet superbly so" (13). Layered on the photo, the line alerts readers that the photo is a form of representation subjected to mainstream media's framing. In highlighting the subject of the photo as "narrowly narrator" (13), Choi reminds us that the Korean children in the photo "With her brother on her back" too are barely narrators of their own image. Framed by a title that simply describes without contextualizing why a M-26 tank was in Korea in the first place, the photo leads viewers to see the Korean children simply as exhausted Asian bodies walking along with the tank. Choi challenges Western media's representation of the war by foregrounding the unspoken presumption of authority. For instance, in introducing

BBC's report about Truman's rationale, Choi writes, "Then the naturally convincing BBC/ reported the morally essential point:/ By their actions in Korea, communist leaders have/ demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles/ on which the United Nations is founded, Truman said" (13). While Truman justified the war by stressing communists' lack of morality and legality, Choi's inserted descriptive phrase "naturally convincing" indicates that the justification is made "morally essential" by Anglo-American framing of the war as a "communist invasion" (13). Choi thus illustrates that Western media such as the BBC also functions as a form of epistemic translation that converts the Korean War into Western nations' defense for international law. Choi's use of adverbs in the inserted sentences intervenes in the BBC report's justification for the Korean War by highlighting the uneven power relation of representation and fallacies of the rationale for the war. For instance, "narrowly" in the line "I was narrowly narrator,/ yet superbly so" underlines that the lack of Korean perspective on the war in the report is precisely what makes Korea a superb narrator (13). The adverbs also add an ironic tone to the presumably convincing BBC news by revealing how the report struggles to formulate a justification for Western intervention in Korea. For example, by underlining that BBC "generously reported" North Korea's justification for "counter-attacking against border incursions by the South Koreans" (13), Choi uncovers that the brief note on North Korea's perspective is hardly a generous gesture since the report is dominated by US rationale of the war as a just reaction against communist breach of UN "moral principles" (13). Choi further shows that BBC hastes to dismiss North Korea's justification by underscoring how BBC "counter-counterly stressed nothing in particular that would destabilize the seven-power commission of the UN in Korea" (13).

Deploying the series of adverbs, Choi elucidates how Western media struggles to reason for invading Korea other than because the US said so.



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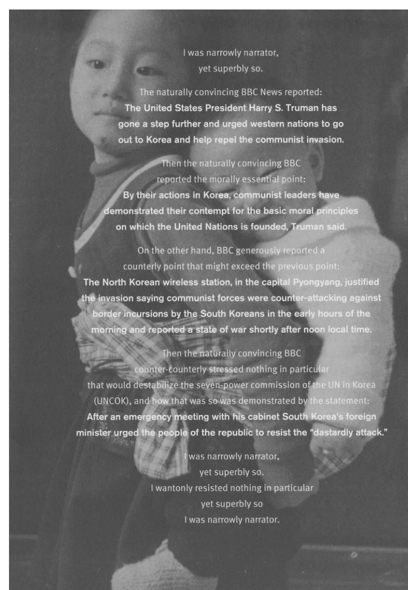
12345=무
12345=궁
12345=화
12345=수
12345=국
I refuse to translate
I refuse to translate
I refuse to translate
I refuse to translate
I refuse to translate

5=Over

Fig. 1



I was narrowly narrator,
yet superbly so.

The naturally convincing BBC News reported:
The United States President Harry S. Truman has gone a step further and urged western nations to go out to Korea and help repel the communist invasion.

Then the naturally convincing BBC
reported the morally essential point:
By their actions in Korea, communist leaders have demonstrated their contempt for the basic moral principles on which the United Nations is founded, Truman said.

On the other hand, BBC generously reported a
counterly point that might exceed the previous point:
The North Korean wireless station, in the capital Pyongyang, justified the invasion saying communist forces were counter-attacking against border incursions by the South Koreans in the early hours of the morning and reported a state of war shortly after noon local time.

Then the naturally convincing BBC
counter-counterly stressed nothing in particular
that would destabilize the seven-power commission of the UN in Korea
(UNCOK), and how that was so was demonstrated by the statement:
After an emergency meeting with his cabinet South Korea's foreign minister urged the people of the republic to resist the "dastardly attack."

I was narrowly narrator,
yet superbly so.
I wantonly resisted nothing in particular
yet superbly so
I was narrowly narrator.

Fig. 2

By pairing the photos, Choi elucidates that Western representation of the Korean War obscures violence through discourses of justice and rescue—discourses that erase how US empire operates both through violence and nonviolence. Choi further shows that the duality also entwines histories of US wars in Korea and Vietnam in the second section entitled "Purely Illustrative." The section begins with pairing the American and British voice-over of 1952 newsreels of Tarzon, a new bomb US deployed in the Korean War and terminated in 1951 because of design flaws and the failed mission in Sinuiju mission.[16] While the original voice-overs are accompanied with newsreels presenting the accuracy of the Tarzon bomb,

[16] The first Tarzon was dropped in Korea in 1950 and for four months a total of thirty missions were flown. Paul G Gillespie points out that in a special presentation to the Guided Missile Committee of the Research and Development Board in March 1951, an Air Force representative lauded Tarzon's performance in Korea, noting that "Tarzon had scored a direct hit on a hydroelectric installation, challenging the conventional wisdom that guided weapons were suitable only for long, narrow targets" (58). The testing of Tarzon took place within the US and abroad. According to Vernon R. Schmitt, several bomb tests were made at Alamogordo, New Mexico in 1950, using a B-29 aircraft. Tarzon was also deployed in Okinawa for possible use in Korea. Tarzon was terminated in 1951 because its critical design flaw surfaced during the Sinuiju mission in North Korea.

Choi renders the voice-overs into texts demanding readers' close-reading. In so doing, the voice-overs can no longer be "purely illustrative" as the section title highlights but instead become texts illustrating how US military violence is obscured. With minor differences, the voice-overs describe the bomb as a "wonder bomb" that guides itself to the target (30). Positioning the bomb as a subject with its own mind, the voice-overs praise that the bomb "seeks out [the target] with an uncanny, almost human understanding" (31). By narrating the bomb as an intelligent being "guided by an invisible hand" (30), the voice-overs erase who is responsible for deploying the bomb to kill while rendering the lives subject to such violence simply as "a perfect bull's-eye" (30). However, the differences between the paired texts ironically reveal the obscured US military violence. For example, whereas the American voice-over declares, "A secret new wonder bomb, the result of exhaustive testing and experimentation, is dropped from a B-29 over a secret proving ground somewhere in the United States" (30), the British voice-over wryly remarks, "America's secret new wonder bomb, the Tarzon, is dropped over a hush-hush testing ground somewhere in the United States" (31). In underlining the secrecy of the bomb, the British voice-over indicates that the production of the bomb already involves imposing violence within the US. The differences of the voice-overs also reveal that the bomb is set to aim at communists in Korea. While the American voice-over describes that "in actual combat in Korea, the guided bomb seeks out the underwater structure of a dam vital to the Reds" (30), the British voice-over shows that Tarzon bomb is an intended aggression by the US as it "is released to seek out the underwater structure of a dam vital to the Reds" (31). Despite the differences, the voice-overs overlap in noting the secretive role of the US military. For instance, the American voice-over wonders, "Is the Tarzon in mass production? Is it used regularly in Korea? The Air Force doesn't say"

(30). Similarly, the British voice-over observes, "The American Air Force refuses to give any details of the Tarzon's range and operation" (31). Juxtaposed together, the voice-overs do not demonstrate the force of Tarzon. On the contrary, the texts illustrate the obscured violence the US imposed in Korea and elsewhere.

Choi further highlights the silenced military violence by inserting her lines and quotes from other references. Following the paired voice-overs, we encounter "The Tarzon's Guide to History" which presents a rewritten voice-over. Rather than focusing on the bomb, the passage begins with the impact of bombs: "Like fried potato chips—I believe so, utterly so—The hush-hush proving ground was utterly proven as history—Hardly=History—I believe so, eerily so—hush hush" (32). In the footnotes, Choi notes that the line "Like fried potato chips" is a quote from historian Bruce Cumings's reference to the effect of napalm bombs on human skin. By inserting the quote, Choi interrupts the erased referent of "hush-hush proving ground" and rewrites the voice-over as a line "utterly proven as history" of Korea serving as a proving ground for US bombs (32). Moreover, in inserting "Hardly=History," Choi reminds readers of the discursive erasure of US imperialism illustrated in the first section of the collection while pinpointing the voice-over "hush hush" as a phrase exemplifying US military violence in Korea (32). By replacing the period symbols in the original texts of the voice-overs with the inserted lines, Choi gives readers no chance to pause and be deflected attention from history of war violence. Without a period to end the passage, the passage continues with "the eerie human understanding is released to seek out the underwater structure of a dam that may be vital to—Hardly=Humans—no details to—Hardly=History—unload, if I may say so, utterly so—follow me" (32). Following the line we encounter a page titled "Again A Perfect Bull's-Eye," a line from the voice-over demonstrating the accuracy of

Tarzon. Here, the line becomes the title of a photo of civilian daily life taken by Choi's father in South Vietnam during the Vietnam War (See Fig.3). By linking the rewritten voice-over to the photograph, Choi shows that US bombing does not stop in the Korean War but continues with another racial war in Vietnam. Furthermore, in framing the photograph with a line from the voice-over, Choi refuses to use the word "a perfect bull's eye" to describe the accuracy of the bomb by underlining that what serves as target is the Asian flesh and blood (33). By using a photograph of civilian life rather than ravaged bodies as proof of military violence, Choi draws attention to the less explicit violence of rendering lives into "Hardly=Humans" (32).

Fig. 3

Rather than centering on US military violence, Choi further attends to South Korea's integral role in rendering the intertwined Korean War and Vietnam War hardly history. Choi again plays with puns and translation in representing South Korea's development into a subempire through US racial war in Vietnam. Choi places the images of a postcard featuring the USS *Kitty Hawk* (CVA-63) her father never mailed from Vietnam. Without English translation of her father's message, readers can only rely on Choi's brief note explaining that her father used "simple language to explain the role of the *Kitty Hawk* in the Vietnam War,

instructing us to keep the card safe" (93). Instead of serving as English readers' access to a witness account of the Vietnam War, the postcard refuses to translate the war into a souvenir for consumption. In the following poem entitled with the *Kitty Hawk*'s nickname "Shitty Kitty," Choi highlights that both Black soldiers and South Korean military serve as gendered racialized labor of US empire during the Vietnam War. Rather than showing a tourist view of the *Kitty Hawk* like the photograph of the postcard, "Shitty Kitty" opens by referring to the race riot on the *Kitty Hawk* in 1972: "Here comes Shitty Kitty en route to the Gulf of Tonkin or en route to a race riot?" (41).[17] In questioning the *Kitty Hawk*'s destination, Choi indicates that the ship is not simply a carrier enabling US invasion but also a connection between US racial wars at home and abroad. The poem further challenges US discourse of humanitarianism by revealing how refugees are seen as questionable objects of rescue: "That is also my film and meanwhile all refugees must be treated as suspects . . . That is the question and meanwhile she was the mother of the boy or that is what the translator said or Shitty Kitty or shall we adhere to traditional concepts of military discipline tempered with humanitarianism?" (41). By highlighting that refugees are simultaneously seen as suspects, Choi reminds that the race riot on the *Kitty Hawk* is entwined with humanitarian assistance of refugees produced by US military violence. In revealing the speaker's question about whether to "adhere to traditional concepts of military discipline tempered with humanitarianism" (41),

[17] The race riot took place during 1970s, when Black Power Movement arose and the Navy's advertising campaign designed to "convince young blacks that they would be welcome in an institution that had been so closely associated with southern white Protestant males" (Graham 229). However, despite the promise of multiracial equality, African American sailors found themselves performing menial jobs and receiving low test scores on the AFQT, the military's classification test. Confronting feelings of emasculation and racial discrimination, racial relations on the *Kitty Hawk* were tense. Conflicts between Black and white sailors increased during the stay at Olongapo, the Subic Bay port city, with only black sailors were called to the ship's investigative office for questioning. The failure of the military justice system sparked the race riot in 1972, ending with 23 Black sailors charged with participating in the riot and only one white sailor was court-martialed. Herman Graham III observes, "Only one white sailor was court-martialed, even though the riot was partly a continuation of the fight that began at the Subic Bay night club and even though groups of whites had attacked African Americans on the aircraft carrier that fateful evening" (239).

the passage shows that refugees can easily be subject to what Daniel Y. Kim terms a *racial DMZ*, which is "a zone of indiscrimination, and are subjected to technologies of knowledge production that purport to distinguish between those who constitute the proper objects of humanitarian care and those who are legitimate objects of military violence" (*Intimacies*12). While such humanitarianism identifies certain civilians as objects of rescue, it is simultaneously embedded in a military mode that targets the same populations as "suspects" legitimate to kill for warfare (41).

"Shitty Kitty" illustrates that the *racial DMZ* not only subjects racialized people to violence but also operates as military industry generating economic interests (*Intimacies*12). Following the observation on the military violence underlying humanitarianism, the speaker notes, "That is the question and meanwhile South Korea exports military labor left over from the war. That is also my history or is that your history?" (41). The passage points to the unnamed Korean War while reframing South Korea not simply as a victim of US war but as an active exporter of its citizens to fight for another US war. In interconnecting the race riot, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War through US racism, the first-person narrative becomes uncertain as "my history" and "your history" can both refer to US, South Korean and Vietnamese history (41). The prose turns into a chorus with a stage direction assigning "Dictator Park Chun Hee and his soldiers in Ray-Bans" (41). The chorus lists equations of the massacres South Korean military conducted in Vietnam and the amount of money Lyndon Johnson paid:

> How much?
>
> $7.5 million=per division
>
> or Binh Tai massacre=$7.5 million

or Binh Hoa massacre=$7.5 million

[…]

or Mighty History? (41)

Deploying the similar equations uncovering US military violence in Korea, the equations of South Korean military violence in Vietnam with US dollars elucidates how South Korea erases its role in the Vietnam War in building its own "Mighty History" (41). The conversion of South Korean military labor and Vietnamese lives into US dollar also challenges South Korea's nationalist narrative of economic success in the 1960s and 1970s.[18] As Remco Breuker indicates, the discourse of South Koreans' suffering during the Korean War and the Vietnam War sustains "the myth that the miracle on the Han was completely homegrown instead of funded by the Vietnam War and the myth that Korea has never invaded another country" (56). Furthermore, the series of equations of South Korean labor and massacres in Vietnam with US dollar places the Korean War and the Vietnam War in US anticommunist interventions during the Cold War. As Heonik Kwon points out, the Cold War bipolar geopolitical structure is central to US-South Korea violence in Vietnam, and that the anticommunist network "drove the minor actor, which some earlier observers called 'America's rented troops,' to be more active in violent village pacification operations than the dominant one without attracting attention from the international community" (*After* 2).

In foregrounding the interlinked racial wars, Choi challenges the masculine narrative of

[18] In *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (2010), Jin-kyung Lee underlines that economic development played an important role in Park regime's deployment of South Korean military in Vietnam. In return of the deployment, South Korea received vast financial compensation from the US for nine years, on average, 200 million dollars per year from the Vietnam War. Lee indicates, "If South Korea operated as an offshore military-industrial complex for the United States during the Vietnam War years and beyond, South Korea's military-industrial relations with Vietnam functioned in a similar way, compelling us to trace South Korea's current economic subimperialism in Southeast Asia back to South Korea's submilitarism in the Vietnam War" (41-42).

South Korea's rise as Asian tiger by playing with associations of *kitty* in the following poems "Neocolony's Colony" and "Kitty Stew." In analyzing Korean military labor in the Vietnam War as "intranational class surrogate labor for South Korea and as transnational racialized surrogate labor for the United States" (39), Jin-Kyung Lee indicates that enthnonational masculinity is central to Park regime's claim of the Vietnam War as an occasion to recover South Korean masculinity after the Korean War. Park regime's tactic association of South Korean soldiers in the Vietnam War with remascuninization of the nation was "enormously effective in the context of a South Korean patriarchy that had suffered political, economic, and military subordination to the United States since 1945" (Lee 43). The narrative of remasculinzation erases the historical fact that the South Korean military fought as military labor for US empire and that South Korea's economic development profited from the Vietnam War. In the poems, Choi challenges the association of tiger with South Korean masculinity and economic miracle by rendering tiger into cat. For instance, "Neocolony's Colony" illustrates South Korea's subordinate position to the US with a speaker taking an order to translate words into war: "You provide the prose poems, I'll provide the war. Aye, aye, Sir!" (43). The speaker offers a translation of the places where South Korean military committed massacres in Vietnam into ungrammatical English sentences:

> Me translate, Sir!
>
> Me Bin Tai/Me been there, Sir!
>
> […]
>
> Me Vinh Xuan/Me VC no, Sir!
>
> Me Tiger, Sir!
>
> ME~OW. (43)

The address to "Sir" in each sentence shows the translator's subordinate position to the English language and its speakers. Rather than offering a "correct" English translation of the Vietnamese, the translation reveals South Korea's presence in Vietnam at US' order. In stressing that he is not "VC" but "Tiger" (43), the translator points to the constant risks of subjecting to US racialization of communists and Asian bodies.[19] As Daniel Y. Kim underscores, "humanitarian and military Orientalism comprise the militarized edge of the Cold War Orientalism that took shape during the Korean War, one that was deployed to distinguish Asian and Asian American populations loyal to the United States from those that threatened its existence" (*Intimacies* 14). The self-identification with the tiger, however, does not masculinize or humanize the speaker but rather becomes a cat vocalization. On the one hand, the transformation of the tiger into general Felidae illustrates the Orientalist gaze erasing differences and feminizing Asian subjects. On the other hand, the cat vocalization also evokes the race riot on the Kitty Hawk by associating the sound with *kitty*. Like the Black Navy whose participation in the Vietnam War masks the US racial war as demonstration of US multiracial democracy, the Korean military in Vietnam can only be a cat subordinate to white supremacist US empire. By destabilizing the associations of a tiger, Choi's "bad" translation elucidates South Korea's role as racialized military labor for US empire.

Choi's intervention in the erasure of South Korean military violence in Vietnam culminates in "Kitty Stew," which represents South Korean participation in the war as a stew that recycles ingredients from the Korean War. The poem is juxtaposed with a photograph

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[19] Tiger may also serve as a pun of the Brave Tigers Division of South Korean troops in the Vietnam War. Jin-Kyung Lee notes that a military marching song for the division stated that South Korean soldiers in Vietnam made possible the "sweet sleep of (their) parents and siblings" in Korea (qtd. in Lee 41).

showing South Korean soldiers of the White Horse Division capturing a tiger during an ambush operation in the jungle of the Hon-Ba valley in 1969 (See Fig.4). Posing as a triumph over the fearsome animal in the jungle, the photo demonstrates "Korean soldiers' covert activities of ambushing deserved to be highly praised because even a sensible tiger couldn't catch soldiers' stealth operation" (Choi). However, Choi's poem reframes the photo as a product of a recipe tracing leftovers of US racial wars:

> Meow I love SPAM!
>
> SPAM patties
>
> Browned in lard or Crisco
>
> Leftover sour kimchi
>
> Don't be a pussy cat (44)

Like the pun of tiger and cat in the previous poem "Neocolony's Colony," Choi again recalls the race riot on the Kitty Hawk by rendering the speaker into a cat. In juxtaposing the speaker's crave for US processed meat and the order not be a "pussy cat" (44), Choi points out that the South Korean masculinity represented in the photo is in essence insecure because the masculinity is not guaranteed by serving as racialized surrogate labor for the US or by declaring endorsement for US food. Moreover, by highlighting Spam, Choi associates kitty stew with the ingredients of *budae jjigae* (army base stew) and the dish's gendered and racialized histories. According to Crystal Mun-hye Baik, *budae jjigae* first surfaced in Uijeongbu, a city north of Seoul and home to an installment of the US Second Infantry Division during the Korean War, when starving Korean civilians scavenged military bases for leftovers. Symbolizing "American abundance in the face of scarcity among Koreans" (Baik 5), canned meats such as Spam were precious commodities in the black market and became

associated with Korean women's sexualized relations with US soldiers exchanged for US commodities.[20] By reframing the photograph with ingredients deriving from the unfinished Korean War, Choi indicates that the South Korean masculinity represented by the photo reproduces US military violence Korea. In so doing, Choi also challenges the Park regime's appropriation of Korean War memories as justification for South Korean military fighting for Vietnam's freedom from communism.[21]

Fig.4

By deploying translation and pun in English and Korean as an intervention in the discursive erasure of US military violence in Korea, Choi's *Hardly War* elucidates the gap between US liberal rhetoric and military actions. Rather than translating Korean language and histories into English, Choi's refusal to perform interlingual translation highlights the difficulty of grasping Cold War geopolitics. By juxtaposing and rewriting photographs of the Korean War and the Vietnam War, Choi recontexulizes the wars in the genealogy of US racial wars while foregrounding South Korean military violence in Vietnam. Twinning the erasure of historical violence of the US and South Korea, Choi points to a relational historiography

[20] See also Grace M. Cho, "Eating Military Base Stew" (2014).
[21] Jin-Kyung Lee points out that the memory of the Korean War aided Park Chung Hee's exploitation of anticommunism for his political power into a "quasi-religious cause, articulated in the two most common slogans for the South Korean military in Vietnam: 'crusaders of peace' and 'crusaders of freedom'" (41).

accounting for varied allies and gendered racialized labor of US empire.

DMZ Colony: Translation as Creative Archive

Whereas *Hardly War* illustrates the epistemic erasure of US empire in Korea, *DMZ Colony* draws attention to the repressed historical atrocity committed by South Korean dictatorship before and after the Korean War. Divided into eight sections, *DMZ Colony* explores how to create an archive for obscured violence of US-backed South Korean regimes by bringing together a collection of photos, interviews with a political prisoner and activist, and imagined testimonies of survivors of the Sancheong-Hamyang massacre in 1951. Without a distinct narrative arch, each section deals with an aspect of historical violence on Korean civilians. To examine how Choi deploys translation as a creative way to archive historical atrocity, my discussion focuses on five sections. "Sky Translation" and "Mirror Words" each interweaves the histories of the creation of the DMZ with Choi's displacement from South Korea and challenges readers to translate texts rendered into mirrored words. "Wings of Return," "The Orphans," and "The Apparatus" illustrate the limits of language to represent repressed South Korean state violence through rearranging Choi's interview with Ahn Hak-sop, imaginary testimonies of the Sancheong-Hamyang massacre, and Western theories of state apparatus. Interweaving historical documents, personal narratives of migrations, and scribbles in English and Korean, Choi highlights the limits of language and historical records representing the disavowed histories of South Korean state violence embedded in Cold War anticommunist geopolitics. Underlining the difficulties of knowing and representing the ongoing war dividing Korea, Choi's use of imagination and archives creates what April Yee describes as docupoetry that "seeks to highlight the incompleteness of the historical record"

(19).

In this section, I investigate how Choi traces South Korea's obscured state violence. Focusing on how Choi deploys translation and imaginary associations with words and images, I argue that *DMZ Colony* offers a creative archive of the ongoing Korean War while cautioning against the risks of turning witnessing accounts into spectacle of violence. By examining how Choi uses different forms of translation between English and Korean, images and words, I contend that Choi deploys translation as a creative language that generates unexpected extras and gaps exceeding the dictation of Cold War ideology. Moreover, in highlighting the traces of mediation, Choi's use of translation reveals the difficulties of representing historical violence. By investigating how Choi interweaves archives and scribbles, I show that Choi illustrates the overlapped gendered violence on Korean women of US empire and Korean military regimes erased from historical records.

DMZ Colony opens with reframing the DMZ as a mode of interpretation compelling the diasporic speaker to translate geography and nature into a call for returning to Korea. The section "Sky Translation" begins with an image of a dotted line framed by two lines of description: "the waist of a nation" and "the 38th parallel north" (5). The description transforms the otherwise meaningless dotted line into a part of a nation from bird's-eye view. By converting the line into a national geography viewed from the sky, the image illustrates a mode of reading from distance that empties out specificity on the ground. However, the following paragraph retranslates the image into a complex time-space: "The DMZ runs across the 38th parallel, a division created after World War II, with the end of the 35-year-long Japanese occupation of Korea. The US occupied the south, and the Soviet Union the north. The US still occupies South Korea with military installations, bases, and troops" (5).

Detailing the creation of the DMZ, the paragraph highlights that reading the 38th parallel north from a distance erases the histories of an ongoing divided nation. By tracing the histories of Japanese occupation and the following US military occupation of South Korea, the paragraph illuminates that the US perpetuates Japanese colonialism rather than liberating Korea. The historical specificity also points to the limits of describing the DMZ simply through its size, which is "approximately 160 miles long and 2.5 miles wide" (5). From the bird's-eye view, the DMZ is reduced to a dotted line. Yet, even by supplementing the facts and histories of the DMZ, the militarized reality and enduring war on the ground remain difficult to capture. Juxtaposing the image with the paragraph, Choi illuminates the difficulties of representing and comprehending the DMZ as "one of the most militarized borders in the world" (5).

Rather than providing detailed description of the US military installations on the ground, Choi turns to translation as an alternative way of understanding US military occupation of Korea. Following the introduction of the DMZ, readers encounter another dotted line representing Saint Louis, Missouri located at similar latitude with the DMZ. Choi the speaker recalls her poetry reading at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation in 2018, when she heard the flock calls of migrating snow geese. The calls transform into a chorus instructing Choi to " . . . return . . . return . . . return . . . return . . . return . . . return . . ." (7). Hearing the calls, Choi speculates that the snow geese are sending a message to her, "the homesick sparrow from a faraway place," from the sky: SEE YOU AT DMZ" (7-8). In cutting to Missouri and shifting perspective to Choi on the ground looking at the sky, the passage shows that for Korean diasporas the DMZ is a borderless longing for return. Even though Choi is in Missouri, far away from the DMZ, the longing compels her to become a sparrow that translates the sky and

snow geese into a call for returning to the place that forces its migration in the first place. By positioning Choi as a sparrow on the ground, the passage indicates that the DMZ transforms migrants like Choi into diasporas living like birds longing for a place of no return. As Choi narrates her family's forced migrations in the 1980s in the following section, the family, scattered in West Germany, Hong Kong, Australia, and the US, are "all ailing from separation and homesickness . . . In light, we lived like birds" (17). Furthermore, Choi's imagining of the message from the snow geese in English shows that the DMZ also forces migrants to become bilingual on two levels. In terms of language, Choi becomes bilingual in English and Korean through her displacement to the US. On a more metaphorical level, Choi becomes an interpreter who translates the birds and sky in Missouri into traces of displacement. That is, Choi's displacement makes her a translator who translates the histories of the DMZ into English as well as the scenery of Missouri into traces of US military interventions.
Adopting the forced bilingual skill, Choi calls, "Translator for hire! Hire, hire me" (8). Choi's call transforms into three images of skies layered with the letters DMZ like birds (See Fig. 5). In translating the birds in the sky into DMZ letters, the images counter the bird's-eye view of the 38th north parallel and reinterpret the skies from the ground through the diaspora's bilingual lens.

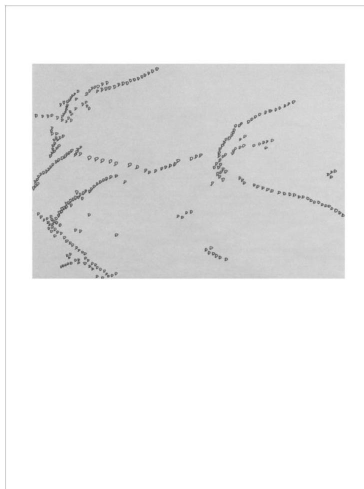

Fig. 5

The translation of the birds into Ds, Ms, and Zs also crucially refuses the postwar discourses of the DMZ as an environmental sanctuary. With the documentation of rare and endangered species in the DMZ area in the 1990s, various projects by the state and NGOs promoted the DMZ as a zone of ecological preservation and ecotourism. According to Jin-Sook Shin, the shift in conceiving the DMZ as "potential peacebuilding cornerstone for reducing the high level of inter-Korean conflicts" derives from the South Korea's democratic movements in the 1980s and the turn to globalization and international cooperation in post-Cold War era (337). The transformation of the DMZ into an eco-peace area is reinforced by the development of Eco-Peace-Oriented Discourses, which became one of the most important research topics of DMZ discourses in the 1990s. Shin indicates that the Eco-Peace-Oriented Discourses idealize the DMZ as eco-peacebuilding framework that "hypothesizes that in order to preserve the ecological and environmental structure of the DMZ area and to develop it economically, it is necessary to minimize the damage from inter-Korean political conflicts" (328). In 2007, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism branded the DMZ as "Peace and Life Zone" and capitalized the biodiversity of the DMZ as "a vehicle for cooperation and

exchange through the promotion of the DMZ as a greenbelt of peace and understanding" (Kim 314). With the promotion of the DMZ as an accidental environmental sanctuary, one of the most popular representations of the DMZ are images of birds perching on barbed wire.[22] The endangered red-crowned cranes, which winters in the Cheolwon plain, also become an icon of the DMZ's "ecological renaissance" (Kim 323).

However, the idealization of the DMZ as an eco-peace area often mythologizes the DMZ as embodiment of pre-Korean War lifestyle focusing on peace or as "a primitive or uncivilized ecological peace itself, understood as something that Korean society in the modern era has lost or passed over" (Shin 342). As Shin points out, the peaceful mythology dehistoricizes the DMZ and transforms the zone into "a quiet, pure, peaceful place that had never been experienced in the historical legacy of the divided and warlike Korean Peninsula" (343). Centering on the ecological value of the DMZ, environmentalists adopting the eco-peace discourses even perceive the military and landmines of the DMZ as protection from pollution and human disturbance.[23] By describing her diasporic life as living "like birds" and translating the sight of birds into letters of DMZ (17), Choi challenges naturalizing the DMZ as an environmental haven. Rather than a sanctuary, the DMZ transforms human into birds

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[22] See Claire Harbage, "In Korean DMZ, Wildlife Thrives. Some Conservationists Worry Peace Could Disrupt It" (2019) and Lisa Brady, "How Wildlife Is Thriving in the Korean Peninsula's Demilitarised Zone" (2012).

[23] In "How Wildlife Is Thriving in The Korean Peninsula's Demilitarised Zone" (2012), Lisa Brady remarks, "For humans, its thousands of landmines and the millions of soldiers arrayed along its edges pose an imminent threat. But the same forces that prevent humans from moving within the nearly 400 square miles of the DMZ encourage other species to thrive" (Brady). Framing the DMZ as "the last haven" for endangered species, Brady goes so far to remark, "A unified Korea would obviate the need for the DMZ and potentially imperil the existence of the various ecosystems the dividing line presently supports" (Brady). In "In Korean DMZ, Wildlife Thrives. Some Conservationists Worry Peace Could Disrupt It" (2019), Jung Suyoung, a South Korean researcher at the National DMZ Botanical Garden fears, "Demining inevitably destroys the nature" (Harbage). The approach of the biodiversity of the DMZ as a symbol of peace problematically erases the violence of US militarization. For instance, in "Life in the DMZ: Turning a Diplomatic Failure into an Environmental Success" (2008), Lisa M. Brady relates the "accidental wildlife sanctuary" in the DMZ with US testing ground in Colorado and Puerto Rico and contends, "Similarly, the U.S. Navy ordnance testing ground at Vieques, Puerto Rico also escaped development during the Cold War and now enjoys national wildlife refuge designation" (606).

that cannot stop migrating and nonhuman subjects into letters reminding the displaced diasporas of the ongoing militarization in Korea.

The opening section thus shows a form of translation that associates words and images with imagination while underlining that such translation is made possible by US military interventions in Korea. Choi's deployment of translation of words into images further offers a method of archiving historical violence of US-backed South Korean dictatorship in her interview with political prisoner Ahn Hak-sop, a political prisoner from 1953 to 1995 who currently lives in a farming village in the Civilian Control Zone. Before turning to the interview, Choi narrates how her family "scattered all over" Hong Kong, Australia, and the US under Park Chun Hee dictatorship (17). While Choi's personal stories gesture to the obscured violence of US-backed Korean dictatorship and the Korean War as an "ever-pending war" (18), Choi also problematizes approaching the narration simply as a witness account teaching readers Korean history by juxtaposing the narration with a photo of the day Park Chung Hee's military coup declared martial law in front of Seoul City Hall in 1961. The bottom of the photo shows Choi's father holding his camera with which he filmed the day of martial-law declaration. Choi narrates that on that day her father briefly met Park and "complained to Park about the censorship of the news" (15). Also on that day her father's film "made it out of Kimpo Airport to Tokyo, and his news footage appeared worldwide" (15). While Choi begins her narration with a photo validating her father's witnessing of the first day of Park's regime, Choi also cautions against reading the photo and her father's experience as representation of bygone history. Instead, Choi underlines the histories continue and are mediated by her memory: "Because I was an infant, I have no memory of this infamous day except through my father's memory. Memory's memory. Memory's child.

My memory lives inside my father's camera, the site where my memory was born, where my retina and my father's overlap" (15). In highlighting that her memory is "[memory's] memory" (15), Choi cautions that the photo and narratives are inevitably mediated and therefore cannot be simply read as historical records restoring forgotten histories. In underlining that her memory of Park regime derives from and overlaps with what her father captures with his camera, Choi points to the difficulties of representing the violence of post-Korean War regimes.

By highlighting that her narrative of her family's displacement fuses her memories and her father's, Choi cautions Anglophone readers against reading the narrative simply for consuming the historical violence Korean diasporas experienced. Choi's childhood memories render the aftermath of the Korean War into fear induced by everyday militarization. Following the depiction of the photo of martial-law declaration, Choi recalls, "The drills at school in preparation for attacks by North Korea kept me anxious at night. I feared separation from my family due to the ever-pending war . . . I stood at bus stops to see if I could spot any North Korean spies, but all I could spot were American GIs" (16). In depicting daily anticipation for war, Choi points out that the war continues through fear of separation and anxiety for safety despite not in the form of explicit violence. Moreover, Choi's memory also indicates that it is American GIs rather than North Korean spies that continued to occupy South Korea after the war. However, Choi's memory does not render South Korean dictatorship into comprehensive narrative. Rather, Choi remembers from a child's perspective: "Like rats, children can be happy in darkness. But the biggest darkness of all was the midnight curfew. I didn't know the curfew was a curfew till my family escaped from it in 1972 and landed in Hong Kong" (16). By describing the curfew as darkness

incomprehensible to her as a child, Choi refuses to deploy her memories as readers' access to the violence of South Korean regimes while gesturing to the limits of language to represent living through the martial law.

Such caution against reading Choi's narratives as comprehensive account of South Korean military regimes furthers in Choi's interview with Ahn Hak-sop. Instead of simply transcribing Ahn's experiences as a political prisoner, Choi situates the interview as translation by introducing her return to Korea for the interview: "I returned in the guise of a translator, which is to say, I returned as a foreigner" (18). In positioning herself as a foreigner who "understood only the language of wings" (18), Choi alerts readers that the interview cannot be simply read as a Korean diaspora's search for roots. In making explicit her role as a translator and foreigner seeking "language of return" (18), Choi foregrounds her role in rendering Ahn's experiences into narratives rather than playing the role of a native informant of South Korean state violence. In positioning herself as a translator, Choi also points to the shared language of her experiences of displacement with Ahn's experiences under South Korean military regimes without erasing their differences.

Choi's interview with Ahn contextualizes Ahn as a political prisoner under South Korean regime in the legacies of Japanese colonialism and US military occupation of Korea and US anticommunist containment in post-Korean War era. However, Choi refuses to deploy Ahn's experiences of torture to create an account centered on the historical atrocity of South Korean regimes and the US. Choi does so by foregrounding her attempt to capture Ahn's experiences and translate into words and images. For instance, we first encounter Ahn's life story of how he became an anti-American activist and his imprisonment as a transcript of Ahn's first-person narrative. Recalling growing up under Japanese colonialism and the

following liberation, Ahn narrates, "I really thought America liberated us . . . in Incheon when people came out to welcome the Americans they were shot indiscriminately . . . the American troops were not liberators but occupiers . . . I was sixteen in 1946 and began participating in the movement against the US military's occupation" (21). By inserting eclipses into Ahn's narration, Choi highlights the gaps of knowledge necessarily involved in rendering Ahn's lived experiences into words as well as translating his words into English. Ahn's life story challenges the narrative of the Korean War as the US liberating Korea from Japan while contextualizing Ahn's turn to anti-American movements beyond Cold War binary framework of communism versus US liberalism. By underlining that the American troops were occupiers, Ahn points out that his change of political view was not anti-liberation but anticolonial resistance against US imperialism.

In addition to making explicit US military violence, Ahn's life story also recounts the historical atrocity of South Korean regimes. Rather than rendering Ahn's experiences of torture into a spectacle of violence, Choi problematizes attempts to comprehend historical atrocity solely through depictions of suffering and pain. Ahn's narration of his experience of imprisonment is represented in fragmented sentences as he recalls, "1956 . . . will you change your political view or not? If not write down your reason . . . those of us who refused to change our political view were beaten . . . twenty to twenty-two of us were packed into a tiny cell that was big enough for only eight people. . . we weren't allowed to lean our backs on the walls either . . . we were deprived of many rights" (22). While Ahn tries to describe what it is like to be deprived of human rights by quantifying the size of the cell and the number of prisoners, the ellipses point to the limits of language to describe the extremity of violence. By interrupting the flow of the sentences, the ellipses question reading the portrait of tortured

bodies as evidence of historical violence. Ahn's narration further challenges the reader to examine how they read and believe his lifestories intertwined with the histories of US-backed South Korean regimes as Ahn recalls, "when the dust settled it was about 2 millimeters thick . . . I know it sounds like a lie . . . I was going to die one way or the other . . . from the beatings or from getting sick" (22). In noting that his listener may dismiss his narrative as a "lie," Ahn challenges the desire for detailed description of tortured Asian bodies as legible account of historical atrocity. Rather than depicting the torture, Ahn concludes, "I won't say what they did to me . . . I'll leave it up to your imagination . . ." (22). By leaving what happened to imagination, Choi cautions English readers against reading Ahn's narration as testimony of historical violence simply through empathizing with depictions of Asian bodies in pain without accounting for their implications in the violent histories. As Daniel Y. Kim indicates, Choi's rendering leaves readers with "an uneasy sense of complicity in the histories it depicts, rendering them highly self-conscious of and discomfited by the encoding/ decoding practices in which they and Choi have been engaged" ("Hardly Emotion" 686).

Choi further challenges assumptions of knowability in determining what read as legible archives by interweaving the scribbles in her interview notes with Ahn's narration. Choi's scribbles translate Ahn's narration into images and vocabulary in English and Korean. Rather than offering a more comprehensive visual narrative of Ahn's experiences, the scribbles indicate that imagination is central to reading and representing historical atrocities. For instance, Ahn recalls an episode of torture during his imprisonment but does not provide details of the incident. Rendered into poetic lines, Ahn narrates, "Then terror came/ 10 prisoners were stuffed into a cell, barely 24.9 square feet, which is 0.000571814/ acres to be exact, to be exact is to be stuffed into 24.90821784, to be, terror/ in October, in 1971 or 1972/

I said to the fellow prisoners this is when we need to keep our heads down/ Like I thought, we were rounded up and beaten" (26). While Ahn tries to describe the narrowness of the cell by providing the exact size in different measures, the scale of the terror remains abstract and hard to grasp for readers. Terror simply came without notice. The difficulty of representing Ahn's experience is furthered by the scribble inserted in Ahn's narration. Noting the word 태로 (terror), the image illustrates Ahn's description of the cell with a square encircling the phrase 10 명 representing 10 prisoners (See Fig.6). Without Ahn's narration, readers cannot make sense of the image and yet Ahn's description is equally difficult to grapple. In highlighting the limits of language and image to represent the violence Ahn experienced, the passage points out that reading representations of historical violence requires one to imagine the impossible scale of terror rather than seeking to know histories of South Korean military dictatorship through depictions of torture.

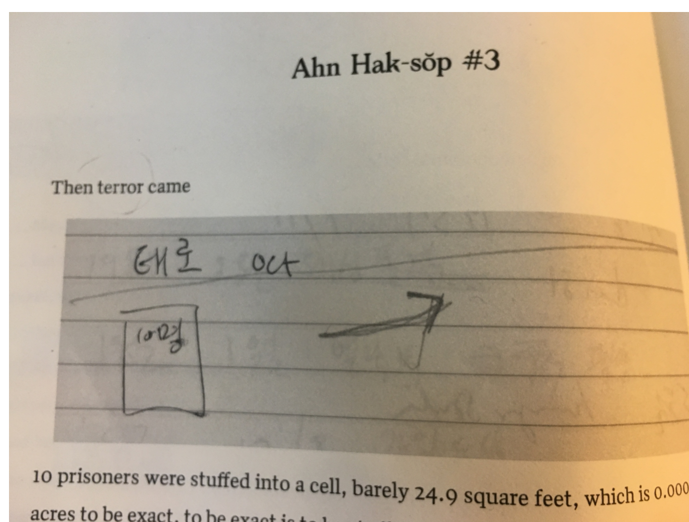


Fig. 6

Choi translates Ahn's interview with imagination rather than offering literal translation of Korean. While Ahn's narration describes different forms of "terror" he experienced in the prison such as beatings and depravation of sleep (26), Choi's scribbles and notes in English

and Korean produce an unexpected language of resistance. For example, toward the end of "Ahn Hak-sop #3," Ahn's narration moves from describing acts of violence to abstract lines: "Operators of/ spoons/ bean sprouts/ beat, beat, beat/ then everyone came/ then terror/ then korea" (29). Transformed into items and actions without clear indication of subject and object, the lines point to the indescribable terror that founded Korea. Following the passage, we encounter another scribble of the word terror in Korean (See Fig. 7) inserted in a passage that reframes the meaning of the word: "Then we knew/ GH 로/ Toward Global Humanity" (29). By (mis)reading the Korean word 태 as English characters G and H, Choi deploys a creative method of translation that defies seeking correspondent meanings between different languages. Separated from 태, 로 becomes a Korean transition meaning "toward" or "to," thereby making "GH 로" into "toward GH" (29). In refusing to translate 태로 and instead imagining meanings between unrelated words, Choi gestures to reading Ahn's account with critical distance. By pushing readers to read in translation, Choi highlights the violence of rendering Ahn's account into knowledge about South Korean regime. Such unknowability is especially critical as Ahn recalls that overreading gestures was deployed by the Central Intelligence to torture the prisoners: "if you dropped your chopsticks or rice bowl . . . What's that signal? . . . What's that code? . . . they beat the shit out of us . . . they demanded meaning . . . meaning . . . yet meaningless" (24). By not offering interlingual translation, Choi refuses to represent Ahn's narration through anticommunist censorship while elucidating differences and extras necessarily involved in translation. Translating with imagination, Choi creates a language that not simply describes the terror of historical atrocities but also coining new meanings unsettling the language of violence.

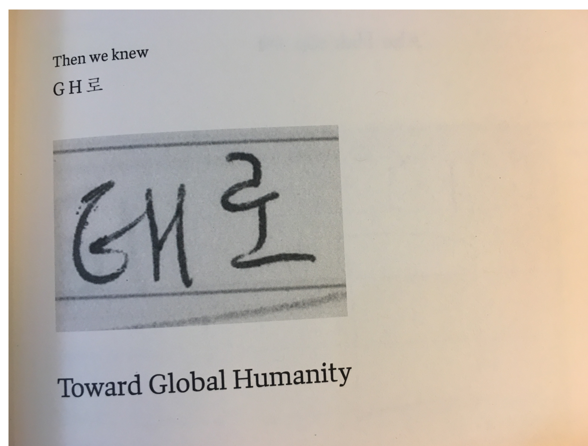
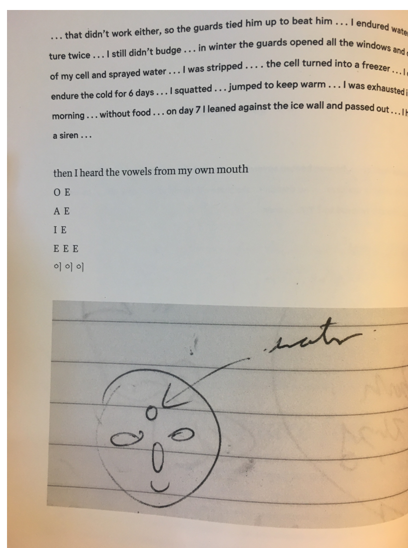


Fig. 7

Instead of interlingual translation, Choi coins a language of pain by disrupting syntax and spelling in English and Korean. Ahn remembers an army lieutenant who was arrested and tortured because he refused to change his political view. In narrating the episode, Choi again interweaves her scribble with Ahn's narration by deconstructing the word convert in Korean and English. Choi's scribble of the word "전향?" is followed by lines of possible meanings of the word: "convert?/ change?/ view?" (31). In turning the Korean word into uncertain English translations, Choi destabilizes the violent act of changing the army lieutenant's political view by questioning the order to change one's view. Choi furthers the difficulty of representing the language of torture and the prisoners' bodies in pain by breaking the words "convert," "change," and "view." Following Ahn's narration of the army lieutenant, who "was all skin . . . he still refused to ??? . . . then" (31), we encounter lines of consonants: "water torture/ ???/ CNC/ NVH/ VRN/ RTG/T??/ CHV/ HNW/ NG?/ G?" (31). Rearranging the consonants of "convert?/ change?/ view?" (31), the passage does not depict water torture but instead alerting readers of the inevitable abstraction of the violent act experienced by the prisoners' bodies when one attempts to articulate the experiences into words. Rather than providing an account of the torture, Choi makes explicit the unrepresentable bodies in pain by

juxtaposing Ahn's narration with the scribble and rearranging Ahn's account. For instance, Ahn narrates, "I endured water torture twice . . . I still didn't budge . . . in winter the guards opened all the windows and doors of my cell and sprayed water . . . I was stripped . . . the cell turned into a freezer" (32). The narration is followed by a passage of Choi's rendering of Ahn's narration into a first-personal narrative and a scribble (See Fig. 8). The passage pushes readers to imagine from Ahn's point of view: "then I heard the vowels from my own mouth/ OE/ AE/ IE/ EEE/ 이이이" (32). By taking the vowels of "convert?/ change?/ view?" and associating the pronunciation of E with 이(31), the passage shows that the language of atrocity cannot be heard without deconstructing language's function to make sense. The difficulty to make sense is reinforced by Choi's scribble. Marked with an almost unrecognizable word "water" (32), the scribble attempts to represent Ahn's body under water torture as the following passage narrates, "my face/ browless/ earless/ my eyes/ my nose/ my mouth/ moonless/ my comet" (33). Naming only parts of the face and turning to unrelated "comet" (33), the passage on the one hand alerts that free imagination of the scribble risks erasing the historical atrocity inflicted on the body. On the other, the invitation to imagine the scribble beyond torture also points to a critical way to imagine the unrepresentatble historical violence.


. . . that didn't work either, so the guards tied him up to beat him . . . I endured water to
ture twice . . . I still didn't budge . . . in winter the guards opened all the windows and doo
of my cell and sprayed water . . . I was stripped . . . . the cell turned into a freezer . . . I cou
endure the cold for 6 days . . . I squatted . . . jumped to keep warm . . . I was exhausted in th
morning . . . without food . . . on day 7 I leaned against the ice wall and passed out . . . I hear
a siren . . .

then I heard the vowels from my own mouth
O E
A E
I E
E E E
이 이 이

Fig. 8

Critical imagination is also central to Choi's representation of the imaginary testimonies of the orphans of the Sancheong-Hamyang massacre of civilians by the South Korean army in 1951 in the section "The Orphans." Under Cold War logic of anticommunism, the ROK 11th Division ordered that all residents in unpacified areas be shot, ending up killing mostly women, children, and elders.[24] Choi again deploys translation not to offer an interlingual translation but to challenge readers to read the testimonies as a foreigner. Before proceeding to the testimonies, in the section "Planetary Translation," Choi narrates her interview with Ahn-Kim Jeong-Ae, a feminist scholar and activist who had been investigating abuses committed by South Korean military under Park Chung Hee and Chun Doo Hwan dictatorships. With scribbles of circles representing "unspeakable orbits of torture and atrocities" (39), Choi positions herself as a translator and foreigner: "The language of capture, torture, and massacre is difficult to decipher. It's practically a foreign language . . .

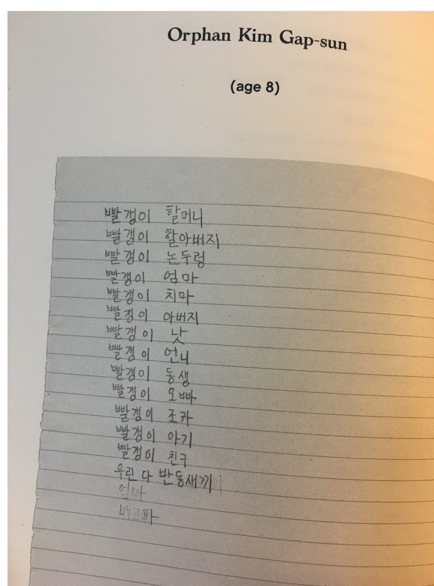
[24] According to Seung Joon Paik and Soul Park, there were numerous instances of systematic killings on top of sexual violence and the troops attempted to kill entire villages in multiple locations. Paik and Park point out, "To cover up this arbitrary killing, the regiment falsely equated casualty numbers to guerrillas killed in its after-action report to division headquarters" (26). See also Son Jun-hyun, "TRCK Admits Firing Investigator for Disclosing Civilian Massacre" (2010) and Philip Gowman, "2010 Travel Diary #31: Remembering the Struggle Against the Partisans" (2010).

Difficult syntax! It may show up as faint dots and lines, but they're often blood, snow, and even dandruff. How do I know? Foreigners know" (43). In placing herself as a foreigner and translator, Choi indicates that reading accounts of unspeakable atrocities demands one to become unfamiliar with language and not claim to be a target reader. With this framing in mind, we encounter a series of witness accounts in Korean and English of the Sancheong-Hamyang massacre. Juxtaposing handwritten accounts in Korean with English translation, the accounts narrate the stories of eight girls who survived the massacre. Narrated from children's point of view, the testimonies depict brutal violence but do not explain the cause or whom to be accounted for the atrocity. For instance, one orphan Cheo Geum-jeom recalls, "Somehow a bullet pierced through my left foot. Somehow it was so quiet that I could hear everything inside my head. Somehow I jumped up. All the corpses were burning. Somehow my mom was headless . . . We ran across the creek and up the mountain. The soldiers saw us and started shooting again" (51). In repeating "Somehow" (51), Cheo's account underlines that for those experiencing the massacre what matters is the atrocity inflicted on their bodies rather than understanding the reason for the violent action. Another orphan Kim Gap-sun points to red-baiting by listing a series of labeling: "commie grandma/ commie grandpa/ commie rice paddy . . . commie baby/ commie friend/ we are all commie bastards" (57). In listing different objects and people marked as commie, the passage shows how the labeling functions as a violent reduction of all to "commie bastards" subject to atrocity (57). The words are not only a marker but also an act enabling violence. By representing the massacre through fragmentary memories, the accounts point to the difficulty of knowing how the massacre is embedded in Cold War ideological division.

In drawing attention to the civilian massacre, Choi gestures to the difficulty of

addressing the historical atrocities that are obscured by a sole focus on the Korean War. Choi further indicates that representing such obscured violence committed by South Korean regimes calls for a creative way of archiving. While the testimonies are presented as handwritten archives with English translation, Choi reveals in the note that the testimonies are actually "imagined accounts" based on her interview with Ahn-Kim (126). Rather than historical records, the handwritten testimonies in Korean are created by Choi, who then translates the stories into English. Choi notes that the accounts cannot be read simply as ahistorical imagination as "these imaginary stories are based on reality—history—yours and mine, and dreams—theirs and mine, and memory—theirs and mine. This is just another way of saying that 'The Orphans' are poems, poetry of the unconscious" (126). By representing the massacre through imaginary stories, Choi points out that archiving erased violence demands imagination beyond restoring facts. By underlining that the histories of the imagined accounts are "yours and mine" (126), Choi challenges readers to imagine what the survivors and the deceased would have seen and said and to further recognizing that our histories are inseparable from the histories of South Korean state violence. In other words, readers cannot read the stories through exempting ourselves from the histories producing the violence. Choi further interrupts using the English translation of the imaginary accounts as an excuse to skip the Korean accounts as she underlines, "These poems in Korean and English are not exactly identical, as no translations are. It's just that there are always two of us—the eternal twoness" (127). In noting the differences in English translation, Choi alerts the possible loss and extras if one only reads the translation. For instance, Orphan Kim Gap-sun's Korean account shows traces of erased Korean words 엄마/배고파 but the English translation does not show the erasure (See Fig. 9). Differences like these thus create a

haunting presence cautioning readers that not all is knowable while pushing us to imagine the unrepresentable atrocity. By rendering the massacre into poetry, Choi's imaginary archives point to a way to account for South Korean regime's complicity with US imperialism.


Orphan Kim Gap-sun

(age 8)

빨갱이 할머니
빨갱이 할아버지
빨갱이 논두렁
빨갱이 엄마
빨갱이 치마
빨갱이 아버지
빨갱이 낫
빨갱이 언니
빨갱이 동생
빨갱이 오빠
빨갱이 조카
빨갱이 아기
빨갱이 친구
우린 다 반동새끼
엄마
배고파

Fig. 9

In addition to representing South Korean state violence through imaginary archives, Choi also foregrounds the overlapped gendered violence on women by both the US and South Korea by reinterpreting the concept of apparatus. In the section "The Apparatus," Choi presents dialogues among the Penal Colony, the Neocolony and the DMZ Colony by interweaving quotes (themselves already translated texts) from Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" (1971) and Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus" (2001) with inserted lines from a figure named "the translator." By inserting Korea's neocolonial histories in the quotes from the theories on state apparatus, the translator indicates that the concept of apparatus cannot be applied as a universal theory. For instance, in a passage paraphrasing interviews with Ahn Hak-sop and Ahn-Kim, Choi interweaves Althusser's quote that defines, "The State apparatus, which defines the State as a force of repressive execution and intervention 'in the interests of the ruling classes [and the neocolonizer]' in the class

struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat [the neolocolonized], is quite certainly the State, and quite certainly defines its basic 'function'" (77). By inserting "the neocolonizer" and "the neocolonized" in Althusser's quote (77), Choi points out that Althusser's approach to the state apparatus as class struggle does not address neocolonial states such as South Korea, whose repression on its civilians also serves in the interests of the neocolonizer US. Furthermore, Choi underlines that South Korean state apparatus is not simply a function of the state but material violence embedded in US military interventions: "And '[before the war the US-backed commandant, Syngman Rhee, kept a list of 300,000 commies in order to eradicate them]'—'[of course we couldn't count every single civilian who was killed]'" (76). By recontextualizing Althusser's quote in South Korea's neocolonial histories, the passage shows that US hegemony transcends national boundary and kills without being held accountable as the direct perpetrator of violence.

Furthermore, Choi underscores that women experience intersected violence of neocolonialism and patriarchy. For example, whereas the dialogue of the penal colony illustrates that power is established through inflicting violence on the male body, the dialogue of the neocolony shows how gendered violence on women is rearticulated as "wisdom" (77). In the penal colony, the figure of the officer contends that the prisoner does not need to know his sentence, stating "There would be no point in telling him. He'll learn it on his body '(the officer)'/ Whatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow '(the officer)'" (77). However, in the neocolony, the officer is replaced with a series of order: "(HONOR THY SKY!) 'the old wisdom'/ (YOU EVIL BITCHES!) 'the neocolonial wisdom'/ (HONOR THY KING!) 'the old wisdom'/ (YOU SCUMS OF SOCIETY!) 'the neocolonial wisdom'/ (HONOR THY HUSBAND!) 'the old wisdom'/

(YOU!) 'the neocolonial wisdom'/ (HONOR THY SON!) 'the old wisdom'" (77-78). By juxtaposing and framing the orders as old and neocolonial "wisdom" (77), Choi highlights that while the violence of the penal colony can be revealed on the male body, in the neocolony violence on women is reframed as wisdom to obey the patriarchal nation, society, and family. Moreover, the neocolony not only orders women to obey but also imposes physical violence on women's bodies. Choi illustrates that the physical violence on women is more difficult to represent than the violence on the male body by describing a woman released from the reform camp "under the command of a new commandant [one more US-backed dictator, a.k.a. 'Your Excellency']" after she was "clubbed nonstop for an entire month" (78). Whereas violence on the male prisoner under penal colony produces the order "HONOR THY SUPERIRORS!" (77), the woman's body becomes abstract as she finds in shock that "[her] whole body was blue! There wasn't a single part of her body that was not blue from the savage beatings" (78). The woman's body elides the language to describe the material impact of the beatings and instead turns into a color. Furthermore, the woman's body is reduced to number: "after all the police had to fill a certain quota of women [300 out of 60,000]" (78). Rendered into a quota, the woman's body and the gendered violence of the US and South Korean state are obscured and made meaningless. By highlighting the lack of language to describe neocolonial violence on women, the passage reveals the difficulty to account for gendered violence even in witness accounts such as Ahn Hak-sop's. In translating the abstract description "(BLUE x 300!)" into a drawing of 300 blue women (78), Choi points out that archiving such gendered violence demands imagination beyond language (See Fig. 10).

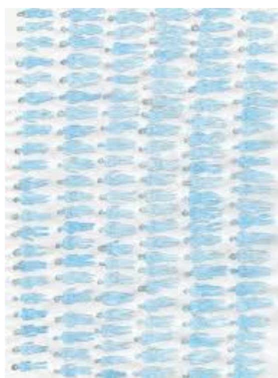


Fig. 10

While the language to represent US neocolonialism in Korea is limited, Choi deploys translation as an anticolonial act to "create other words" against "[order] words [that] compel division, war, and obedience around the world (99). Choi terms her other words as "mirror words" that "are meant to compel disobedience, resistance" (99). In the section "Mirror Words," Choi performs such radical translation through reframing photo archives of the Gwangju Uprising in 1980. Before we encounter the photo, Choi compels us to do the work of translation by demanding, "Now look at your words in a mirror. Translate, translate! Did you? Do it again, do it!" (99). Rather than expecting Choi to be the translator, the declaration urges readers to upend passive reading of South Korean histories and act to translate accounts of violence into resistance. Following this demand, we encounter a passage of mirrored texts juxtaposed with a photograph capturing the moment of a student about to be beaten by the police during the Uprising (See Fig. 11 and Fig. 12). Breaking capitalization rule of English, the mirrored texts are incomprehensible unless readers first translate the text by themselves. Against readers' expectation for a description of the photo of state violence, the texts, after translated, read, "youR excellencY, iS it martial laW? brutaL empirE!/ youR illegals, youR refugees, youR collateral damage of the world unitE against youR rear. wE are alive" (100). Placed next to the photo of state violence, the mirror words warn against passively

consuming the violent scene and reframe the photo as an archive of resistance. Addressing "brutaL empire" (100), the text also points to the absent presence of US empire in the photo whose support of South Korean regimes conditions the violent act. Furthermore, by inscribing "Toward Global Humanity" on the photo (101), Choi recalls the retranslation of 태로 in Ahn Hop-sok's account (29), thereby reinscribing the photo of violation of human rights as an act toward solidarity. The mirrored words framing the photo again requires readers to do the work of translation to read: "translatioN is a mode/ translatioN is an anti-neocolonial mode" (101). By making readers translate the text by reading backward, the mirror words also push us to reverse our bystanding gaze at the photo as a record of historical atrocity. Instead, we are exhorted to actively reread the photo as a call for anticolonial movements toward global humanity.

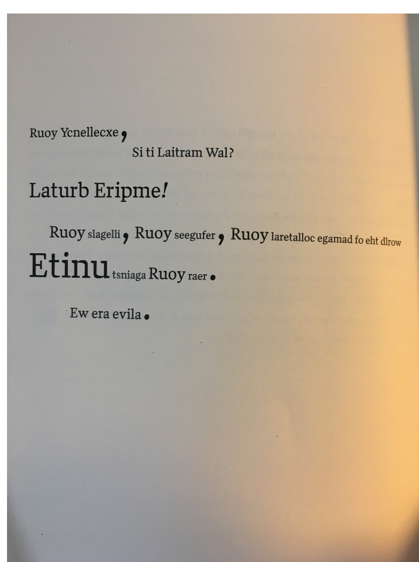


Fig. 11

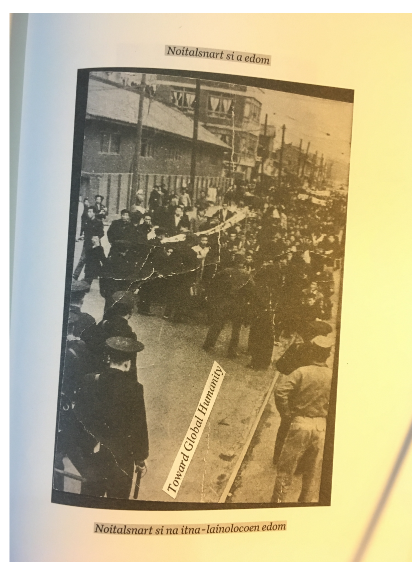


Fig. 12

In this chapter, I have investigated how *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony* shed light on the benevolent and violent sides of US imperialism and the entanglements of US empire with historical violence of South Korea military regimes. By focusing on how Choi deploys puns in English and Korea and paired images, my reading of *Hardly War* shows that Choi's

representation contextualizes wars in Korea and Vietnam as twinned wars embedded in the genealogy of US racial wars while accounting for South Korean subimperial violence in Vietnam. By examining how *DMZ Colony* interweaves imagination and archives of atrocity on civilians committed by US-backed South Korean regimes while compelling readers to do the work of translation, I contend that Choi points to a creative way to archive obscured historical atrocity. Representing US military interventions in Korea and its ongoing legacies in South Korean state violence by foregrounding the limits of language, Choi thus gestures to an account for US imperialism in broader and relational contexts.

Chapter Three

Unlikely Imperial Destinations: Reading Cold War Ruins Lee Issac Chung's *Minari* and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*

This chapter investigates how Lee Issac Chung's *Minari* (2020) and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* (2019) represent the trajectories of ongoing US war in Korea unfolding in 1980s Arkansas and contemporary South Korea. Juxtaposing Chung's semi-autobiographical depiction of Korean immigrants' struggles with American Dream and Bong's representation of neoliberal South Korea, I argue that this unlikely pairing elucidates the afterlives of the Korean War and the less explicit South Korean state violence following the war. By analyzing both films' implicit references to the Korean War in a supposedly postwar moment in sites seemingly remote from the war, I contend that reading these Cold War afterlives reveals Arkansas and Korea as imperial destinations intertwined by US wars in Asia.

Minari: Korean War in Arkansas and Difficult Life in Korea

Minari narrates a Korean immigrant family's struggles to get by as they move from California to rural Arkansas in the 1980s. Tired of the low-paid labor as chicken sexors in California, the family's patriarch Jacob purchases a plot of land in Arkansas to grow Korean produce to sell to the increasing Korean immigrants, a decision greatly disappointing his wife Monica. Whereas Monica worries that living in the rural area risks their son David's heart issues, Jacob believes they will succeed in Arkansas. Jacob's plan encounters multiple challenges, forcing the family to bring his mother-in-law Soon-ja from South Korea to babysit the children Anne and David. Soon-ja, whose husband died in the Korean War, drives the development of the film as her relationship with David changes from tense cultural

conflicts to David's gradual acceptance of her and their reliance on each other. Soon-ja's arrival also evokes Monica and Jacob's memories of the Korean War that shaped their move to the US. The film culminates when Soon-ja, suffering from a stroke, accidentally burns down all the produce just when Jacob settles a deal with a vendor in Oklahoma City. The fire makes Jacob realize the importance of his family. The end of the film shows Jacob, who initially insists on the Korean way of farming, eventually hiring a water diviner to find a spot for a well. Instead of ending with assimilation to American lifestyle, the film ends with Jacob and David harvesting minari—a Korean plant Soon-ja planted at her arrival and represents resilience to survive in a difficult environment.

In this section, I focus on the film's elusive references to the Korean War and its consequences by examining how the Yis' presence in 1980s Arkansas gestures to the entwined histories between Arkansas and Korea. When put in broader contexts, the implicit references to the war and the absence of postwar South Korea in their narrative reveal that Korean immigrants such as the Yis cannot be simply categorized as immigrants driven by economic needs. Rather, I argue that the Yis' presence in Arkansas evokes the entangled histories of US racial exclusion at home and Cold War military interventions in Asia. To do so, I borrow theorizations of Korean diaspora that highlight the prolonged afterlives of the Korean War. In "Moved by War: Migration, Diaspora, and the Korean War" (2005), Ji-Yeon Yuh argues that the Korean War is an "ever-present threat" shaping Korean migrations decades after 1953 (280). Significantly, Yuh points out that viewing postwar Korean migrants as immigrants fails to capture how the consequences of the Korean War also shape migrations of those seemingly not related to the war such as marriage and professional migrations. As Yuh contends, "Although ostensibly migrants or immigrants rather than refugees fleeing from

an immediate danger, their life narratives demonstrate that flight from war and its consequences is a crucial factor in their migration" (281). Yuh theorizes the term *refuge migration*, which highlights the enduring insecurity and trauma driving Korean migrations (281). Yuh's account of the lasting effects of the Korean War illuminates that defining refugee as those fleeing immediate danger risks erasing US militarization and reproducing Cold War historiography.

Furthering Yuh's theorization, in *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory* (2020), Crystal Mun-hye Baik attends to Korean diasporic movements as *militarized migrations*, which indexes "the racialized, gendered, and sexualized conditions underlying Korean diasporic trajectories" (39). Examining a series of immigration legislation making exceptions for military brides and mixed-race children immediately after WWII, Baik reveals that "the protracted history of Korean militarized migrations from 1945 to the present blurs the boundary between those seeking refuge from war and those recognized by the 'receiving' state as bona fide immigrants (and the children of 'assimilated' immigrants)" (39). Yuh's and Baik's emphasis on the long-term effects of the Korean War shaping Korean immigrants will be crucial to my reading of *Minari*. Before I do so, I first turn to an examination of Asian American reception of the film, which reveals the limits of the immigrant narrative.

Minari has received critical acclaim, winning several awards including the Oscars, Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild Award and British Academy Film Awards. Despite the critical recognition, controversies erupted when the Golden Globe categorized *Minari* as Foreign Language Film, reinforcing the histories of treating Asian immigrants as permanent aliens.[25] Touching upon the controversy in his acceptance speech, Chung stresses, "*Minari* is

[25] *Minari* was not able to compete for the Best Film Award because it does not meet the Hollywood Foreign Press Association's category guidelines, which require films featuring at least 50% English dialogue. For an

about a family. It's a family trying to learn how to speak a language of its own. It goes deeper than any American language, any foreign language" ("Golden Globe"). Chung's remark suggests that the sole focus on rejecting the controversial categorization risks reducing the film to a political propaganda for affirming Asian American identity.

Chung's emphasis on the family narrative points to the limits of framing Asian American immigrant narratives and Asian American films solely as means to make Asian Americans visible. According to *Minari*'s editor Harry Yoon, the focus on the Yis' struggles with their broken relationships is produced by carefully chosen cuts to make the audience attend to "the family's journey, which ultimately got the film to feel as intimate and as identifiable as it was because we never lost that thread." (Giardina).[26] For Chung, reading *Minari* and Asian American films solely in relation to America is to reinforce the white gaze. In a *New York Times* roundtable discussion with a group of Asian American filmmakers, Chung expresses his hesitance about reading *Mirani* as a critique of the American dream. Chung contends, "What's happening now is that shift where we're just telling our stories as people and it doesn't have to be in relation to white America or a majority culture. We're just people. We didn't want [*Minari*] to be a 'by us, for us' sort of film" (Yu). Chung also expresses hesitance about labeling *Minari* as an Asian American film in stressing that he intentionally did not make *Minari* an "identity piece." (Yu). Chung's hesitance suggests that mainstream notion of Asian American film tends to see Asian American films as works serving to make Asian

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analysis of histories of how Asians in America are constructed as a race of permanent aliens from 19th century to 20th century, see Robert G. Lee's *Orientals: Asian Americans In Popular Culture* (1999).

[26] In "Choosing Shots to Keep Focus on the Family" (2021), Harry Yoon points out that the chosen shots drive from discussion with Chung to "speak to the truth and authenticity of what he wanted to convey, particularly in trying to present a balanced portrait of that experience, not just from the younger generation's viewpoint, which is often the case with immigrant stories, but also from the first generation, the parents' viewpoint." Yoon states that cutting out the "detours" such as the character Paul and balancing different generations' viewpoints make the film "feel so universal."

Americans seen on screen. Chung adds, "I hear the American dream thrown around a lot [about *Minari*], and that could mean all kinds of things that I was intentionally not getting into with the movie. I feel like people don't know how to look at films except through the lenses of the discourse that's out there" (Yu). Chung suggests the possibilities of producing and reading Asian American representations beyond those centering on binary relation with white America.

Echoing Chung's concern about Asian American label, Asian American reception praises *Minari*'s careful depiction of family struggles instead of making anti-Asian racism comprehensible for white audience. Marrian Zhou remarks that *Minari* "goes out of its way to not let external forces, such as racism, take away who these immigrants are 'on a human level'" (Zhou). For these reviewers, the film creates a new way to narrate Asian immigrant stories by refocusing on Asian Americans' humanity and internal struggles.[27] Other Asian American reviewers argue that *Minari* represents critical American histories. Asian American critic Viet Thanh Nguyen argues that labeling *Minari* foreign ignores that Asian Americans have historically been cast as foreigners. Nguyen contends that using English to define *Minari* foreign ignores that English "often has associations with whiteness, just like 'America' itself has associations with whiteness" ("*Minari*"). These reviewers contest English as the language defining American and argue that *Minari* is an unquestionably

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[27] Hannah Amaris Roh contends that *Minari* provides an alternative Asian representation that does not present model minority or suffering Orientals for the sake of representing Asians in mainstream culture. Roh praises that the focus on the Yi family's humanity opens possibilities for a new kind of immigrant cinema, one that gives Asian American experiences the kind of care and complexity they had rarely been afforded on film." (Roh). Roh comments that the warmth of *Minari* emanates from "the intimate portrait of this family" (Roh). Similarly, reviewers have praised *Minari* as a groundbreaking immigrant story because of its focus on the family's internal struggles rather than struggles with racism. Alyssa Songsiridej posits that *Minari* rejects whiteness by breaking the binary between "American story" and "immigrant story." Instead, Songsiridej stresses that *Minari* "refuses this binary by leaving out the concerns of white people altogether."

American film.[28]

Nevertheless, some reviewers call for reconceiving Asian America and caution against simply claiming *Minari* as American. Tracing the histories of Yellow Peril discourse, colonialism in Asia, and the surge of hate crimes against Asians during the pandemic, Mendy argues that targeting the foreign film category as the sole problem risks reducing "Asian American" into subjects aspiring to be Americans and overlooking how imperialism and settler colonialism condition Asians living in America. Similarly, Nicole Kim cautions against claiming the Korean diasporic family as American for the sake of American audience's comprehension of the film. Kim stresses that *Minari* is not claiming a problematic belonging but "an interior-facing project, a kind of mirror meant to gently remind us of these intimate, painful moments of diasporic life" (Kim).

Cautioning against simply claiming *Minari* as an American film, some reviewers underscore that US imperialism is significant to the Yis' migration. Peter Kim George, for instance, argues that *Minari* is not so much a story about the American Dream as a story about US empire. Importantly, George points out that simply framing the film as a story about becoming American erases how US-backed South Korean regimes since the 1960s conditioned the Yi family's displacement and migration to the US. He contends, "The traces of American empire are everywhere in *Minari* with the proper historical framing. Without it, the film can appear as a Western, a frontier narrative, a Korean-American twist on manifest destiny" (George). Unlike those who read *Minari* as an Asian American representation of a family's struggles, George refuses to affirm Asian American identity through claiming

[28] In "In *Minari,* I Saw My Family. But Hollywood Has Made Asian Americans Outsiders, Once Again" (2021), Rosanne Tung contends that in addition to the American cast and production team, what makes *Minari* an American film is that it "evokes both the universality and the specificity of the American experience" (Tung).

America. His reading resonates with Amy Kaplan's analysis of US empire, which indicates that the notion of the domestic is integral US imperialism and national identity. On the one hand, the notion of the domestic imagines the family and the nation in opposition to "everything outside the geographic and conceptual border of the home" (25). On the other hand, the notion of the domestic also entails conquering the racialized foreign Other.

As the reviews discussed above show, Asian American reception indicates that centering on anti-Asian racism and dominant immigrant narrative cannot capture *Minari*'s broader contexts. While the film does not depict US war in Korea, memories of the Korean War surface with Soon-ja's arrival in Arkansas. Attending to traces of the protracted war, my reading focuses on how these implicit traces push us to see the 1980s Arkansas as an imperial destination rather than a site remote from US empire.

While Asian American reception reflects critical views on *Minari* as a representation of Asian American experiences, these discussions of US imperialism and racism largely ignore the film's setting in Arkansas. Alexis Cheung commends Chung's representation of Asians as agricultural workers when the dominant stereotype of Asians today is that of the urban labor: "Asians came to work the land, to care for it, to make it profitable, and, when permitted by law, make it their property and, thus, their own" (Cheung). Others also point out that the geographical setting enables an atypical immigrant story that does not focus on racism and poverty. Jane Hu points out that *Minari* "transmutes social conflicts onto its natural environment, in which the most dramatic things that happen in this film happen to its landscape instead of its people" (Hu). While these reviewers notice the significance of the setting atypical to Asian American narratives, they do not engage the specificity of Arkansas as the film's setting.

In *Minari*, Arkansas is introduced to viewers as a remote rural area with little connection to other places. The film opens with serene melody accompanied by piano and choir as if welcoming viewers to a church. The camera then cuts to David in the car, whose eyes lead us to the opening scenes of the film (See Fig. 1). In this shot from David's viewpoint, we see the rearview mirror reflecting his mother Monica, who is anxiously looking out of the windows at something unknown to the audience (See Fig. 2). Just as the disconnect between Monica's tense body language and the peaceful non-diegetic sound becomes increasingly clear, the camera returns to David viewing the expansive landscape with cattle and haystack (See Fig. 3). In contrast with Monica's uneasy gaze, David's brings calm and releases the unspoken discomfort in the previous shots.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Arkansas in the film is often presented as vast natural scenery or land developed for agricultural use. Represented as expansive plains, Arkansas is visually presented as huge plots of land with small population. On the one hand, the scenery represents nature without human intervention and symbols of hope amidst the Yis' crises. For instance, while Monica is restless at the sight of Arkansas scenery, the camera turns to the blooming flower on the ground and sunshine streaming down the trees (See Fig. 4 and Fig.5). Represented through scenery shots, the nature of Arkansas becomes signs of silver lining. On the other hand, Arkansas is also presented as proof of human labor. Throughout the film, scenes of Jacob laboring outdoors and cultivating the land for commercial produce show the amount of work required for the Yis to settle in this land. The scenes also reflect Jacob's view of Arkansas's geography as a piece of land ready for development. Furthermore, Jacob's view of the land echoes his masculine aspiration to become a useful man, unlike the male chicks discarded for being not as tasty as the female at the hatchery. The scenes of Jacob laboring to turn undeveloped land into useful farm thus imply Jacob's corresponding transformation into a useful patriarch. As signs of hope and proof of gendered labor, the scenery of Arkansas

becomes a setting absent of histories before the Yis' arrival.

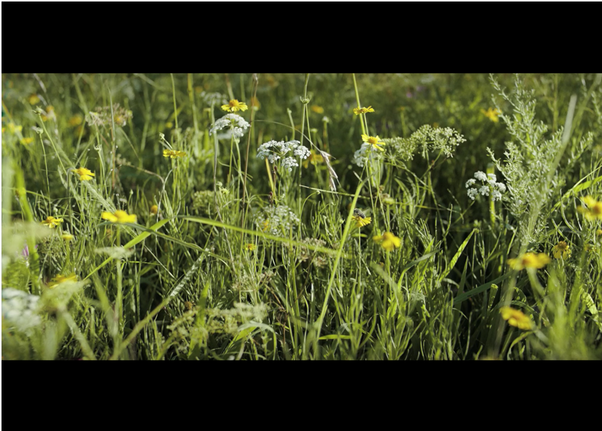

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Framed by David's gaze at the opening, the landscape becomes a plot of land whose histories and meanings remain unknown to us except as a place in the US where the Yis settle. However, this putatively US landscape is unsettled when the title "Minari" flashes on the screen and covers the scenery. The insertion of the Korean word thus interrupts attempts to view the scenery solely as American landscape (See Fig. 6). Monica and Jacob's conversation in Korean following the opening scene further challenges the US framing. Rather than a remote place in the US, Arkansas becomes a transnational site implicated in migrations. Although the opening shots of nature imply that the family has arrived at a place of hope, Monica and Jacob's divergent conceptions of the place challenge such American dream discourse about land. Shocked by the mobile home, Monica asks "What is this place?" and claims "This isn't what you [Jacob] promised" (*Minari*). Whereas Monica refuses to see Arkansas scenery as a start for new life, Jacob sees the land as potential capital. Holding the soil in his hand, Jacob remarks, "This is the best dirt in America" (*Minari*). While the framing

renders Arkansas as a remote "place" and "dirt" (*Minari*), the Korean dialogue and title scene indicate that Arkansas cannot be easily viewed as a state in the US isolated from broader geohisotrical contexts. Positioned as a destination of the Yi family's migration, the remoteness of Arkansas in the film points to Arkansas being what Emily Mitchell-Eaton terms a "new destination of empire" where people displaced by US military interventions abroad settle (137).

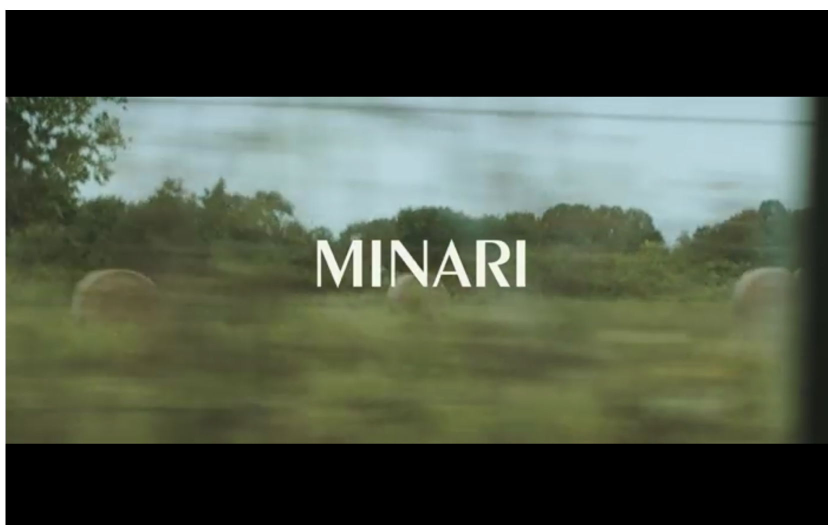

Fig. 6

Moving to rural Arkansas deprives Monica of social networks with Korean communities accessible while she was in California. Unable to speak English as fluently as Jacob, Monica is isolated. Noticing his wife's loneliness, Jacob follows Monica's wish to attend the local church. However, instead of a sense of belonging, the family encounters whiteness of which they are not a part. At their first visit, the Yis find themselves an odd presence among the white attendees. The scene where David is asked "Why is your face so flat?" highlights David's difference from the white attendees. The remark pushes viewers to notice the overwhelming racial homogeneity in Arkansas and further evokes the haunting absence of

Black population.[29] Juxtaposed with David's encounter with whiteness, the scene where a white girl asks Anne to identify her "language" from a series of gibberish reveals how Anne is marked as foreign (*Minari).*Anne and David's encounters point to the making of racialized foreign Other, central to US empire's "contradiction of the domestic sphere to exclude persons conceived of as racially foreign within those expanding national boundaries" (Kaplan 142). Immediately following David and Anne's encounters, the camera cuts to Monica and Soon-ja silently standing away from the crowd. The shot of Monica and Soon-ja illustrates their distance from the white crowd while indicating that Arkansas is not remote from US interventions in Korea as prior to the church visit Monica and Jacob each remembers how the Korean war shapes their migration to the US—a point I will return to.[30]

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[29] Significant to the making of Arkansas into a white state is the forced removal of Indigenous and Black populations. According to Mitchell-Eaton, Indigenous removal from Arkansas and surrounding regions created the material condition of white settlement. Indigenous displacement can be traced to 16th century when Spanish colonizers occupied Indigenous land and forcibly removed Indigenous populations. The forced removal uprooted the Indigenous people from their homelands and created tremendous spiritual crises. As Donna L. Akers indicates, "The Choctaws saw themselves as part of the soil, an integral element of the ecosystem, tied inextricably to this specific part of the earth" (Akers). The forced removal and resettlement undergirded white settlement in Arkansas in the 1830s. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Arkansas, along with towns across the US, implemented sundown policies, which excluded Black residents. The policy created sundown towns, mandating Black people to leave by sundown. Guy Lancaster observes that sundown town should be approached as racial cleansing not less violent than lynching as it creates an atmosphere of insecurity. In *Racial Cleansing in Arkansas, 1883–1924: Politics, Land, Labor, and Criminality* (2014), Lancaster underlines while such racial cleansing violence was not often deadly, it effectively altered "the demography of entire geographical regions because it was explicitly couched in terror directed at an entire community, and so there was no realistic expectation that the violence might subside when a particular alleged wrongdoer was apprehended and eliminated" (n.pag). In *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (2017), Perla M. Guerrero indicates that racial terror directed at African Americans in northwest Arkansas "would be critical in the future, creating a homogeneous 'white man's heaven and setting a precedent for dealing with racial difference" (29). Anti-Black racism also shaped Arkansans' different responses to Vietnamese refugees and Cuban refugees in the 1990s. In "Yellow Peril in Arkansas: War, Christianity, and the Regional Racialization of Vietnamese Refugees" (2016), Guerrero points out that the undesirability of Cubans in contrast with responses to Vietnamese refugees illustrates "anti-Black racism shapes the lives of refugees and immigrants and reveal the anti-Black structures that continue to exist across the United States" (233).

[30] Arkansas is implicated in US war effort during WWII and the following wars in Vietnam and Korea both through dispatching soldiers and receiving finance from various defense projects. S. Charles Bolton points out that WWII produced economic modernization transforming the South into prosperous Sun Belt. The military involvement in turn makes Arkansas a destination for migrants produced by wars. Since the 1940s, the economy of Arkansas benefitted from Japanese American internment camps and training camps. Camp Chaffee, also known as Fort Chaffee, became a facility processing refugees, including refugees displaced by the Vietnam War in the 1970s and Cuban refugees during the Mariel boatlift (1980), and Haitian asylum-seekers in the 1990s. As Mitchell-Eaton indicates, Arkansas's capacity to detain people is rooted in US militarism, which makes WWII "pivotal in Arkansas's economic development and in its production as a site where imperial migrants could be detained, processed, used for their labor, and resettled" (158).

The intertwined racial exclusion in the US and US imperialism abroad is also reflected in the Yis' limited choice of occupation. Monica and Jacob's argument about their struggles as chick sexors, in which Jacob yells at Monica that working as a chick sexors for a decade in California only gets him "living in a tiny house" (*Minari*), illustrates that their immigration to the US has not saved them from poverty but rather locked into a racialized industry without hope for social mobility. As a racialized industry derived from WWII political economy and Japanese American internment, the chick-sexing industry is a haunting reminder of the entwined anti-Asian racism at home and US wars in Asia—conditions of the Yis' migration to the US.[31] According to Eiichiro Azuma, the industry was "response to institutional racism" against Japanese American during WWII (247). The blue-collar nature of chick sexing made the Japanese monopoly of the industry acceptable in white America. Japanese monopoly of the trade decreased as Korean and Mexican sexors came as cheaper labor with the enactment of the 1965 Immigration Act. Jacob's frustration with his work reveals that the racial trade that restricted the Nisei in the racial and class hierarchy during WWII continues to contain post-1965 Asian immigrants.[32]

Although the Yi family rarely talk about their life in Korea, the continuation of US war in Korea is foregrounded as an absent presence even in conversations not intentionally started

[31] According to Guerrero, poultry industry in northwest Arkansas grew through federal monies for infrastructure such as roads and rails in the 19th century. In 1887, Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station was established through federal funding provided by Hatch Act. Raising chicken became an industry with the entrepreneur John Tyson's success in Springdale. Guerrero notes that WWII was a turning point for entrepreneurs like Tyson as the US army contracted the entire production of the Delmarva region and allowed small business to compete for domestic consumers. The rationing of red meat also increased chicken consumption. In 1987, Tyson Foods became the top poultry processing company and by the end of WWII it accounted for 90 percent of the poultry produced in Arkansas.

[32] In "Race, Citizenship, and the 'Science of Chick Sexing': The Politics of Racial Identity among Japanese Americans" (2009), Eiichiro Azuma indicates that during WWII, race ironically empowered Nisei to control the chick sexing labor market because white America's racial presumptions led "hatchery owners and government officials to view its Japanese identity as an objective measure of excellence that was hard to replace" (252). However, the trade still signified "the inferior position and containment of Nisei practitioners within the established hierarchy of U.S. race and class relations" (264).

as sharing of war memories. For example, Jacob's interview with Paul, a local he hires for the farm, illustrates how the Yis' presence in Arkansas is entwined with the Korean War. Sensing Jacob's doubts about his ability to grow Korean vegetables, Paul shows a banknote. Surprised, Jacob remarks, "This is old money. It's Korean War money" (*Minari*). Pleased with Jacob's recognition, Paul replies, "I was there. It was a hard time. I'm sure you know" (*Minari*). Although both Paul and Jacob refer to the war in the past tense, Jacob's silence and subdued expression in response to Paul's comment on the hard time of the Korean War suggests that the war cannot be easily seen as a past event even in the 1980s. In contrast with Paul's willingness to share his memories of the war, Jacob reticence does not allow viewers to understand the war as a past event ready to be articulated and shared as memory. What viewers know is Paul's remark that "The minute I saw you, I knew we were gonna be friends" (*Minari*). Yet, Paul's certainty of his friendship with Jacob gestures to a sense of familiarity with Korea made possible by US military interventions. Jacob's silence troubles Paul's narrative of the war by not offering a closure to the war from the Korean side and instead suggesting that the difficulty of articulating the war continues in the 1980s.

The following scenes further draw attention to the intertwined structure between Korean migrants and the protracted Koran War. In response to his daughter Anne's question as to whether growing American vegetables is a better choice, Jacob proudly replies, "Every year, thirty thousand Koreans immigrate to the US. Wouldn't they miss Korean food?" (See Fig.7). While Jacob's optimistic plan does not explain the reasons behind the increase of Korean immigrants, Monica and David's conversation immediately following the scene points to the war that continues to generate Korean diaspora. In this intimate scene where David is lying on his mother's knees to have her clean his ears, Monica tries to persuade David to welcome

her mother Soon-ja moving from Korea to live with them by narrating her family history. Holding her son, Monica says, “Mommy’s dad died during the war. You know what that means, right? That’s why Mommy has no brothers or sisters” (See Fig.8). Monica’s memory complicates Jacob’s view on incoming Korean immigrants as potential consumers and Paul’s presumed friendship with the Yis by revealing that the unended war is one key force driving the incoming Korean immigrants. Monica’s critical memory rendered in the form of her family history pushes the audience to see the Yi family’s life events through the “present-pastness” of the Korean War (Baik 50). In tracking her lack of siblings to the loss of her father during the Korean War, Monica elucidates how her transnational migration and the loss of possible intimate relation with her father are anchored in US military violence. By building an intimate moment with David through sharing Monica’s war memories, the scene illustrates that the intimacy the Yis shared in 1980s Arkansas is intertwined with Monica’s loss of her father and Soon-ja’s loss of her husband in 1950s Korea. Containing haunting loss in a place and time not represented explicitly in the film, the intimate moments in Arkansas are living reminder of the ongoing war.

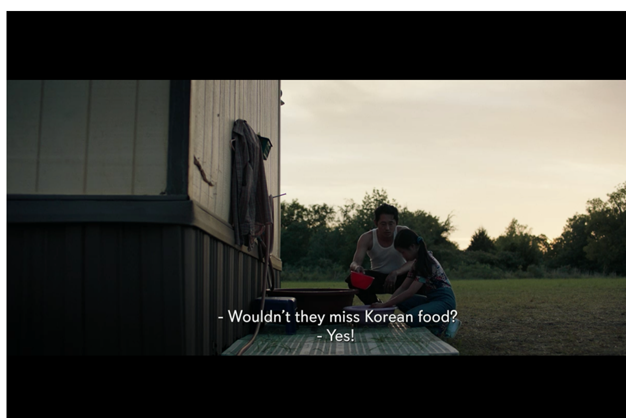

Fig. 7 Fig. 8

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the two scenes highlights how the war has evolved in postwar Korea and shaped the Yis' migration. The aftermath of the war is not a past the Yis have left behind but continues to remind the Yis why they left Korea and why they cannot leave the US. The scene where Monica and Jacob argue at the hospital illustrates how 1980s Arkansas is connected coevally with postwar Korea. On the brink of a family breakdown, Jacob recalls, "Life was so difficult in Korea. Remember what we said when we got married? That we'd go to America and save each other" (*Minari*). This rare moment when Jacob mentions the life in Korea crucially points out that life in postwar Korea continues to be difficult and pushes Korean emigration. Although Jacob does not directly refer to the war like Monica does, his vague reference to the difficult life points to the obscured South Korean postwar regimes and migration policies implemented in South Korea and the US. In tracing the series of US emergency orders and amendments between 1945 and 1956 that made exceptions to accommodate American soldiers' spouses from Japan and Korea, Baik stresses that Korean postwar emigration was also bolstered by a "synergetic set of migration policies" implemented by the South Korean state (52). Backed by US and Japanese finance, Park Chung-hee regime (1961–1979) pursued an industrialization model. In 1962, the Park regime designed emigration policies and guest worker programs encouraging South Koreans to become "productive workers" and settle abroad in Europe (especially Germany), Middle East, and Americas (Baik 52). The policies served South Korean state's interests through global remittances and relieving the pressure of postwar rapid growth of population.[33] As

[33] In "International Linkage and National Class Conflict: The Migration of Korean Nurses to the United States" (1988), Tomoji Ishi indicates that postwar South Korean nurses migration was a result of South Korean

Baik indicates, the South Korean emigration policies are biopolitical tactic to remove excess bodies and build on "preceding policies of extraction stemming from the Korean War—most notably, the extrication of orphans-cum-adoptees from the country" (52). Baik's account significantly elucidates that post-1965 Korean migrations are produced by the coeval policies of extraction and immigration between the US and South Korea.[34] As Baik contends, the post-1965 South Korean migrations are "militarized migrations" anchored in "the reverberating consequences of the Korean War, American militarized occupation, and synergetic migration policies coalescing in the United States and South Korea" (54). Placed in these contexts, the Yis' arrival in 1980s Arkansas embodies the converging forces of displacement by both the US and South Korean state.

Jacob's comment on the difficult life in South Korea also hints at South Korean regime's anti-labor policies and suppression of social movements in the 1970s and 1980s. While not a direct remark on postwar South Korean politics, Jacob's comment reveals the underside of South Korea's rapid economic growth. Contrary to the nation's narrative of its economic miracle, Jacob's memory of difficult life gestures to the "compressed modernity" that attained economic growth through patriarchal authoritarianism and abuse of labor (Chang 34). Moreover, Jacob's silence about the politics contributing to the difficult life hints at postwar US-South Korea complicity in suppressing social dissident and uneven redistribution. As Chang Kyung-Sup points out, the US military occupation following Japanese colonialism

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emigration policies and the liberalization of US immigration in the 1960s. In the 1960s, South Korean state designed emigration policies and overseas employment program to lessen pressure of population growth and to attain foreign exchanges. South Korean government was heavily involved in exporting South Korean cheap labor. For instance, the semi-governmental agency Overseas Development Corporation promoted Koreans as "faithful, ingenious and peace-loving people" (qtd. in 31). South Korean Ministry of Labor also controlled conditions of contract workers such as wages and working conditions.

[34] According to Baik, the coeval policies between South Korea and the US were extremely successful, with more than 260,000 Koreans moved to and resettled in the US between 1965 and 1979 (52).

incapacitated South Korean civil society by enforcing compressed transition from military dictatorship to civilian authoritarianism.[35]

Compared with Monica, Jacob's more implicit word choice "difficult" points to how the pursuit of masculinity through property ownership prevents him from expressing weakness and his experiences with the Korean War. On the one hand, Jacob's silence about the Korean War is an outcome of his patriarchal duty of supporting his family both in Korea and the US. Jacob's frustration with being a chick sexor is both economic and gendered. Fighting with Monica, Jacob argues that owning a farm in Arkansas is necessary to their living and to take care of his family in Korea as the eldest son. Jacob's obsession with becoming a landowner in Arkansas is driven by his deprived masculinity as a chick sexor. As he tells David that the male chicks are discarded because they are of no use, Jacob warns his son that both of them need to be useful. Jacob's insistence on becoming a property owner reveals the stereotype of depraved Oriental sexuality and racial stigma associated with the trade.[36] How the chick sexing industry operates through racialized and gendered labor is shown on the Yi couple's first day of work when the white male manager introduces them to other workers, all of

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[35] The bloody crackdown of Gwangju Uprising (1980), for instance, was enforced by US-South Korean complicity in prioritizing economic interests over democratic reform. The uprising was anchored in longer histories of South Korea's uneven development of capitalism. Driven by economic collapse caused by rapid industrialization and US surplus agricultural products since the 1950s, workers and farmers in Gwangju–Jeonnam area had long suffered from poverty. Moreover, Ahn Jean notes that the Honam area in particular was subject to "intense exploitation under the feudal system, and continued to be the major area for imperialistic plundering during the Japanese colonial era and the United States military government era" (171). Georgy Katsiaficas further points out that Chun Doo-hwan regime's violent military suppression of the uprising was supported by the US officials, who viewed the uprising as a threat to US investors. Investigating US official documents, Katsiaficas reveals that the US government approved suppression of Gwangju at a White House meeting on May 22, 1980. In addition to approving the suppression, official such as Secretary of State Edmund Muski also decided to sanction the president of US Export-Import Bank's visit to Seoul in June so that he could arrange ROK contracts for nuclear power plants and expansion of the Seoul subway system. In linking foreign policy toward Korea to US economic interests, the US support for the suppression marked "the bloody beginning of a neoliberal accumulation regime on Korea" (202).

[36] See Azuma, "Race, Citizenship, and the "Science of Chick Sexing": The Politics of Racial Identity among Japanese Americans" (2009), 259.

whom are Asians. The scene where Jacob accidently drops a box of chicks because he overworked his arms while farming further illustrates how chick-sexing damages the masculinity of men of color. Told by his colleague to discard the chicks because they have become damaged products, Jacob turns to look at the white male manager passing by. Jacob's awareness of the white male gaze at his failure not only underscores people of color as cheap labor but also men of color themselves as damaged products.

Masculinity is a haunting presence in the film as Jacob prioritizes his success over the stability of his family. The haunting presence is often evoked by the neighbors when they mention the failure of the previous owner of the Yis' farm. Straight broke, the previous owner Bucky Reed shot himself. David learns the haunting tale from Johnny's (the white boy who made a racial comment on David's look at the church) father Billy when he sleeps over at their place on the day when Soon-ja has a stroke. Asking David whether his father is "doing things right," Billy remarks that Bucky Reed's suicide is "what a man does" (*Minari*). Bucky Reed's tale highlights that Jacob's pursuit of success defined in white masculine terms could be fatal and questions Jacob's pursuit of American Dream.

It is worth noting that David's point of view releases viewers from Jacob's pursuit of toxic masculinity by deescalating Monica and Jacob's fights with childish innocence and turning blame onto Soon-ja. For instance, David responds positively to his father's view on owning a big piece of land as success as well as his insistence on finding water by himself rather than seeking help from the water diviner. Through David's viewpoint, the struggles become playful episodes. In another scene where David witnesses Jacob's confrontation with Monica for revealing too much private information about their family with Paul, he whispers to sleeping Soon-ja that it is her fault for coming to America. Supporting Jacob's dream in

Arkansas while resisting Soon-ja, David's perspective favors the present life in the US and does not offer viewers a space to reflect on the past in Korea.

In contrast, the women's points of view intervene in the narrative of American Dream. Unlike Jacob's romantic view on the land as a "big garden" and David's innocent view on the farm as a playground (*Minari*), Monica and Anne see through the unrealistic underside of such romantic gaze. Since their arrival at Arkansas, Monica's anxious gaze at the surroundings interrupts Jacob's optimistic view on Arkansas as a place to start. When Jacob proclaims to David that he's going to make a "big garden," Monica interjects, "Garden is small" (*Minari*). Similarly, different from her brother's playfulness, Anne is the first one to notice the water outage, caused by Jacob channeling the running water to the farm. Unlike David's rejection of Soon-ja, Anne expresses concern for the sick Soon-ja and assures Monica that Soon-ja will be fine. Shot from a third point of view, viewers observe the mother-daughter talk at the hallway without the male characters' presence and share the private conversation with them. Anne and Monica's conversation scene serves as a turning point before Monica decides to leave Arkansas with the children and Anne is the one informing David about the decision.

Importantly, the women's gaze also refuses assimilation through forgetting the past. Although the film ends with the Jacob finally recenters his care for his family and learns to incorporate Arkansas way of farming, the scene following the devastating fire cannot be easily interpreted as a happy ending. Following the shot of the burnt down barn, the scene cuts inside the house and shows pictures of Monica and Jacob in their youth and family photos with the children. The camera then cuts to the Yi family sleeping beside each other on the floor, exhausted by the fire the night before. Just when we see the peaceful scene as

hopeful resolution, the camera zooms in to Soon-ja, who sits on the chair watching the Yi family with a subdued expression (See Fig.9). Only then do the viewers realize that we are looking at the scene through Soon-ja's gaze. Unable to speak after her stroke, Soon-ja's gaze alerts viewers of her absence in the photos and the shot of the sleeping Yis. Resisting narrative foreclosure, Soon-ja's gaze gestures to the haunting absence in the photos and film shot informing viewers of the Yi family's past and present in the US. Despite the photos and the shot of the sleeping family present the family's happy life in the US, Soon-ja's absence reminds viewers of the unrepresented war memories surfacing in the family's daily conversations. Although the photos seem to portray Monica and Jacob's life story in full in tracing their youth to finding their home in the US, Soon-ja's looming absence challenges the domesticated narrative by evoking the couple's life in Korea rendered invisible by the photos. Following Soon-ja's gaze, the viewers are alerted how little we know Soon-ja's past throughout the film and the difficulty of knowing fully the unspoken and unrepresented past in Korea outside the frames.

Fig. 9

Similar with Soon-ja's silent gaze, Monica's more explicit reference compared with Jacob's reticence shows that critiques of how South Korean state perpetuates the afterlives of

the Korean War are harder to make than commenting about the war. Jacob's brief reflection on the difficult life in Korea elucidates that the Korean War not only produced immediate destruction but also prolonged aftermath of postwar complicity between the US and South Korean state that has contributed to Korean emigration. Lacking detailed description, Jacob's reference to postwar Korea resonates with how US-backed South Korean regime silenced discussions of politics amongst both South Korean citizens and Korean diasporas. After the Korean War, South Korean authoritarian state legitimated political repression through anticommunist policy in the 1950s and 1960s.[37] As Namhee Lee elucidates, anticommunism in South Korea was an effective technology for social control and state power as communism became a broad label for any potential opposition to the state.[38] Baik also observes that the effect of South Korean anticommunist policy was transnational as the FBI and South Korean CIA collaborated to blacklist both South Koreans and Korean diasporas suspected of North Korean associations.[39] As Baik points out, the anticommunist governance in South Korea was "not a discrete effort but part of the Cold War global surveillance system" (57). Jacob's silence about postwar South Korea may be seen as part of the global anticommunist surveillance both the US and South Korean state were part of.

Cast in the "present-pastness" of the Korean War and postwar US-South Korean

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[37] After 1953, South Korean state expanded the 1948 National Security Act, which punished suspected organizing activities. In the 1960s, Park Chung-hee regime further implemented the Anticommunist Law designed to eradicate potential dissidents in the name of suspected affiliations with North Korea. See Baik, *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (2020), especially 55-56.

[38] In *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (2011), Namhee Lee points out, "The enemy was not only the North but anyone perceived to harbor a notion different from that of the state on how society should be changed" (92).

[39] See Baik, *Reencounters: On the Korean War and Diasporic Memory Critique* (2020), especially 56-57. Namhee Lee also points out that till late 1980s, it was dangerous for individuals or groups to support those with presumed connections with North Korea. Lee notes that the division between North and South Korea hit unification movement in South Korea and among Korean diasporic communities particularly hard. As Lee indicates, "The overseas Korean communities, particularly foreign students' communities in the United States and the former West Germany, were extremely cautious about any unintended link with North Korea" (107).

complicity (Baik 50), Monica and Jacob's memories of Korea gesture to the difficulty of making known the coeval forces that continue to shape their migrations to and within the US. Furthermore, the Yis' presence in 1980s Arkansas challenges us to read local histories of both Arkansas and Korea structurally entwined by Cold War dynamics and racial exclusion. However elusive the references to the afterlives of the Korean War are in *Minari*, they reveal the difficulty of remembering *and* forgetting the putatively ended war. In this sense, the minari seeds brought by Soon-ja—a living reminder of the legacies of the war—may not be easily read as a symbol of integration with American life. Rather, the thriving minari in the closing scene transforms the creek from a property to accumulate capital in the US into a place to remember the plant representing Soon-ja's lesson on alternative economy enjoyed both by the rich and the poor. Evoking memories rather than forgetting, the ending scene may open to seeded diasporic memories of difficult histories. To address the complex entwined Korean War legacies, I now turn to Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*, which engages with the unlikely presence of the war in contemporary South Korea.

***Parasite*: Haunting Absence of the Korean War in Contemporary Korea**

Whereas *Minari* portrays the absent presence of the entangled histories between postwar Arkansas and South Korea, Bong's *Parasite* points to the haunting absence of the US in the economic development and neoliberalization in post-Korean War South Korea. Focusing on how *Parasite* represents the afterlives of the Korean War in contemporary South Korea, I argue that reading the haunting absence of the Korean War in the film foregrounds the remnants of the intertwined US military interventions and South Korea's postwar economic liberalization.

Set in contemporary South Korea, *Parasite* represents three families divided and yet intertwined by economic disparity. Centering on the Kim family's change of fortune as the son Kim Ki-woo becomes an English tutor for Da-hye, the daughter of the wealthy Park family. The film develops as the Kims gradually infiltrate the Park family by posing as workers unrelated to each other. Just as the Kims' plan seems to succeed, taking over the positions of housemaid, tutors, and chauffeur, the story suddenly spirals down as the Kims discover the former housemaid Moon-gwang's secret: Moon-gwang's husband, Geun-sae, has been living for years in the bunker—a legacy of the Korean War—underneath the Parks' house. *Parasite* has been critically acclaimed, winning four Oscars, one Golden Globe, and one BAFTA. Yet, the global praise for the film often overlooks US Cold War interventions and multilayered colonial histories in South Korea that are importantly represented, however briefly, in the film.

Many in the news and social media have interpreted the film as a story about the universality of capitalism. One of Bong's most quoted comments is his acceptance speech at the Golden Globes. At the ceremony, Bong remarked in Korean, "Once you overcome the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films" (NBC). Switching back to English, Bong concluded, "I think we only use one language: the cinema" (NBC). Bong's code switching between English and Korean, accompanied by Sharon Choi's smooth translation, was interpreted by many in the audience as an invitation to cross the language barrier and view foreign language films as a universal story comprehensible for all.[40] This tendency to read *Parasite* as a universal story was reinforced

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[40] In "South Korea's *Parasite* Crashes the Subtitles Barrier" (2020), Thelma Adams quotes Rajendra Roy, who observes that *Parasite* is able to cross the language barrier because it represents "a story [the crisis of late-stage capitalism, which is a global phenomenon, and puts it in a microcosm of Korean society] that could have been told in any number of advanced countries." *Parasite*, in this view, is foreign and yet universal for US audience

by Bong's comment in an interview. Answering the question about what makes *Parasite* specific to Korean culture, Bong explained that "Essentially, we all live in the same country called Capitalism" (Birth). Bong's remark later became a viral meme as international audiences read *Parasite* as a critique of capitalism.

While the violence of capitalism is central to *Parasite*, reading the violence as a universal and recent phenomena risks erasing longer histories of capitalist development in Asia. Postwar economic development in Asia was implicated in US Cold War interventions and the Korean War served as a key engine enhancing the political economic significance of Asia. As Jodi Kim indicates, the Cold War was "one particular phase in in the globalization of capitalism and the competition for markets and resources both natural and human" (*Ends* 24). Kim notes that such globalization of capitalism made Asia a significant region through neocolonial restoration of trades and reliance on military Keynesianism. The Korean War resolved post-WWII economic crisis by boosting Japan's economy and increasing militarization. As Thomas J. McCormick points out, the Korean War inaugurated "the second Cold War, the Vietnam era, and the Long Boom" (99). The war was part of two decades of "Rimlands War" through which the US fought to keep "the Asian periphery open to the Japanese economy and thus insure Japan's retention as a functioning member of the world-system and, conversely, to prevent Japan from drifting into the Sino-Soviet external world" (McCormick 100). Along with increasing militarization, the period coincided with and "helped produce the most sustained and profitable period of economic growth in the history of world capitalism" (McCormick 99). Within this context, as I will elaborate further in my analysis of *Parasite*, the bunker underneath the Park's mansion points to the occluded role of

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to understand and related.

the US in shaping South Korea's postwar economic boom.

The focus on capitalism in *Parasite*'s reception reflects the difficulty of accounting for the continuation of the Korean War and post-Cold War economic liberalization. To highlight the traces of historical continuity in my reading of the film, I borrow Lisa Yoneyma's account for the "transwar continuities" of US competition over discourse of anticolonialism during WWII and the Cold War Americanization of racial justice (*Ruins* 19). In her investigation of post-1990s redress movements for Japanese colonial violence as a genealogy of how the US transformed into an empire for liberty, Yoneyama indicates that the Cold War persists through amnesia of US colonial violence. The Cold War's ruins, in Yoneyama's formulation, are "traces of geohistorical violence" (*Ruins* 210). In light of South Korea's comfort women redress activism, Yoneyama indicates that the activism's account of historical connectivity of Japanese colonial legacies, US Cold War political economy, uneven processes of industrialization, and suppression of progressive movements counters Cold War production of history. Yoneyama's notion of Cold War ruins provides a deeper critique of the entangled pre-war colonialism, Cold War US hegemony, global capitalism and decolonization activism. Yoneyama's stress on "transwar connectivity" thus may help reexamine the lack of attention to the traces of the Korean War and US presence in the reception of *Parasite* (*Ruins* 49).

In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), Lisa Lowe argues that the distance between Asian American culture and national culture is not so much a failure of integration. On the contrary, this distance "preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy" (60). In defining Asian American culture as a site of critical memories and forgetting, Lowe's notion might be pushed further to

apply to texts that critically represent “the palimpsest of lost memories” (6). Futhermore, Lowe underlines that Asian Americans are “determined by the history of U.S. involvements in Asia *and* the historical racialization of Asians in the United States” (16). In highlighting US global interventions, Lowe indicates that Asian American critique is a method that contests US nationalist histories and instead attends to the mutually constitutive histories connecting the US and Asia.

Furthering Lowe’s view, Jodi Kim reframes Asian American critique as an “unsettling hermeneutic,” which for Kim functions as an interpretive method that aims to unsettle US nationalist histories and to read Asian American literature as critique of the genealogy of US empire rather than as a form of ethnic literature (*Ends* 10). By considering the Cold War not as a historical context but as an ongoing “knowledge project” that generates an ontology through which Asian Americans are known as an identity category whose history of formation is rendered irrelevant to US imperialist projects in Asia, Kim’s re-envisioning of Asian American critique disrupts a US nationalist understanding of the Cold War (*Ends* 8). Kim’s formulation of Asian American critique highlights the interconnected histories between the US and Asia, and the inadequacy of approaching Asian American as only an identity category situated in the context of the US civil rights movement.

The US discourses surrounding *Parasite* erase intersected histories between South Korea and the US that Lowe and Kim point to. Reviews of *Parasite* in the US and Asia can be roughly divided into two themes: a concern for Asian American representation and attention to economic disparity. Reviews that specially attend to issues of Asian American representation vary and do not present a coherent narrative. For some reviewers, the celebration of *Parasite* as a success of Asian Americans risks perpetuating the myth of Asian

Americans as permanent foreigners as well as ignoring Asian Americans' distinct sense of alienation in the US.[41] Other reviewers such as Eng-Beng Lim, however, see *Parasite* as a critical text for Asian American studies to broaden its scope of analysis instead of focusing solely on identity politics.[42] Still other Asian American reviewers see the film as a challenge to model minority discourse as well as a proof of Asian American long-term support for Korean cultural productions.[43] Some Korean American reviewers appreciate *Parasite* because it relates to their immigrant experiences.[44]

Despite their different approaches to *Parasite*—addressing the issue of Asian American representation or offering an alternative Asian American critique of capitalism—these reviews share the tendency to obscure historical linkages between the US and South Korea in their discussions. South Korea, in these reviews, remains either as a country under capitalism like the US or as a place of origin for Korean Americans. That is, South Korea represented in *Parasite* is made legible to US audience through either analogous to the US or rendered as a disparate site of cultural roots. In this framing, South Korea becomes a place without historical connections with the US.

Reviews not specifically concerned about Asian Americans tend to read the film as a portrayal of class conflicts. In reading *Parasite* as a critique of capitalism, these reviews

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[41] See Walter Chaw, "*Parasite* Won, but Asian-Americans Are Still Losing" (2020).
[42] Lim argues that the representation of predicaments of capitalism in *Parasite* enables a transnational critique of global inequality. Lim contends that just like the capitalist crises in the film are not limited to South Korea, Asia/America should be understood as a geopolitical space to consider "inter-continental and inter-Asian predicaments that may in fact be countryless."
[43] See Kimmy Yam, "Asian American Members of the 'Bong-hive' Share Significance of *Parasite* Win" (2020) and Brian Hu, "Commentary: *Parasite* Became an Oscars Success Story Overnight Because of Years of Asian American Support" (2020). Asian American critic Viet Thanh Nguyen celebrates the winning of *Parasite* by tweeting "'We do not have enough movies about poor Asians...who want to overthrow a system of global capitalism that enables the lifestyle of wealthy . . . Asians who would be just as problematic if they were white.' PARASITE! And the need for narrative plenitude" (Yam).
[44] See Mike Choi, "Thread by Mike Choi" *Twitter*" (2020) and Inkoo Kang, "Critic's Notebook: The Liberating Power of the *Parasite* Oscar Win" (2020).

overlook how US postwar military and economic aid and the Vietnam War conditioned South Korean economic growth.[45] Erasing US interventions in Asia, this reading sustains what Jodi Kim calls an epistemological project of the Cold War. Such Cold War lens is more explicit in the few reviews that do mention South Korea's complex colonial histories. For instance, reading *Parasite* as a story about "class set in an unequal country," Bo Seo attributes South Korean economic disparity to the rapid economic growth after devastating Japanese colonialism and the Korean War. Seo contextualizes South Korean economic boom in the state's development strategy of rewarding the moneymakers. However, Seo overlooks that South Korea's development into an economic miracle, as Bruce Cumings elucidates, is implicated in US hegemony in Asia.[46]

Reception in East Asia also tends to render US presence in *Parasite* absent. In general, reviews in selected East Asian sites (Taiwan, Hong Kong, China) mainly focus on class and capitalism. They also lack attention to shared inter-Asian colonial histories and US presence in Asia. Reviews in Taiwan and Hong Kong in particular tend to view *Parasite* as a representation of the underside of capitalism.[47] It is worth noting that compared with the reviews in the US, more reviews in East Asia mention US interventions in South Korea and

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[45] In *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (1999), Cumings provides a succinct account of the different historical experiences of colonialism in Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Cumings underlines that "postwar economic successes in northeast Asia have roots going back well before the Rostovian period of 'taking-off' in the early 1960s" (88). Cumings indicates that northeast Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are "semisovereign states" enmeshed in a US-dominant "hegemonic web" (94).

[46] In "The Origins and Development of the Northeast Asian Political Economy: Industrial Sectors, Product Cycles, and Political Consequences" (1984), Cumings underlines: "The United States, of course, did not just give military and economic aid to Taiwan and the ROK but deeply influenced economic programs and the societies themselves. Often it was difficult to know if natives or Americans were writing the plans and policies; the aid missions pushed through land reform on Taiwan and forced it through in Korea; here, in short, was by far the best example in the world of what Wallerstein has called 'development by invitation'" (25).

[47] The translation of the title of *Parasite* in Taiwan and Hong Kong already reveals a focus on class strife. In Taiwan, *Parasite* is translated as "寄生上流," meaning "living on the upper class." Similarly, Hong Kong translation is "上流寄生族," meaning "parasite of the upper class." See also Huang Hsiang "*Parasite*: Cohabitation of the Rich and Poor in Basement" (2019), Sunny Wu, "*Parasite:* The Prevalence of Class Society" (2019).

its multilayered colonial histories. For example, Liu Hsin points out that Geun-sae's repeating the word "Respect" in addressing the Park patriarch in *Parasite* is a metaphor of the parasitic relation between South Korea and the US after the Korean War. Liu observes, "Parasitic relation captures the current South Korea, who cannot break away from US control . . . Both South Korea and the US benefit from such relation. Who is the real parasite?"[48] More reviewers in China make sharp observation of the presence of the US and North Korea by attending to South Korea's multilayered colonial histories.[49] Contextualizing *Parasite* in US military occupation of South Korea after the Korean War, Mars contends that the film is not so much about class division as "parasitic relations between nations and contemporary Korean histories."[50] Another Chinese reviewer Li Kung points out that the Parks not only represents capitalist but also specifically pro-US capitalist. Kung further indicates that the Park boy's playing Indian is a metaphor of US colonization of Indigenous peoples and lands.[51]

The discourses surrounding *Parasite* discussed above reveals that the Cold War, as Jodi Kim underlines, is not simply a historical context but also a lens through which US presence in Asia is rendered implicit. However, while the selected reviews in the US and Asia share a tendency to erase US presence in reading *Parasite*, such absence may offer a space to examine the difficulty of grasping US Cold War interventions in Asia. As discussed above,

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[48] Translation mine. The original text reads, "所謂寄生，就是不能擺脫其中的關係，也就是現在南韓無法擺脫美國控制的田地 . . . 在韓美的關係中，雙方都互有好處，所以究竟誰才是真正的寄生蟲呢？"

[49] *Parasite* is translated as "寄生蟲"–literally meaning parasite—in China.

[50] Translation mine. The original text reads, "這部電影講得不是"階級寄生" ，而是 " 國家寄生"，這分明是一部韓國近代史."

[51] Kung writes, "In some sense, the US is the largest colonial country in the world. The first generation of settlers in the US seized lands and resources through massacring Indigenous peoples." Translation mine. The original text reads, "某種意義上，美國是世界上最大的殖民地國家，當年來到這片土地的人們，屠殺了原住民，獲得了大量廣闊的土地資源."

some of the reviews, particularly reviews in Asia, attend to the multilayered colonial histories of South Korea, thereby foregrounding the otherwise implicit US presence represented in *Parasite*. If examining Cold War legacies in post-Cold War, late colonial Asia, as Lisa Yoneyama posits, is integral to the "productively unsettling qualities of Asian American studies," reading *Parasite* and its discourses as a form of Asian American text may enable an unsettling Asian American critique ("Travel" 298).

Reading Cold War Ruins in *Parasite*

To highlight the traces of US geohistorical violence in *Parasite,* I first situate my reading of Bong's film in longer histories of South Korean film industry in the 1950s and 1960s. In analyzing Bong's *Memories of Murder* (2003) and *The Host* (2006), Christina Klein argues that Bong's reworking of Hollywood genre conventions embodies "an ambivalent relationship to Hollywood, and they bear the marks of the equally ambivalent relationship between South Korea and the United States" ("Why" 872). Klein indicates that Bong's hybrid style derives from the culturally and stylistically hybrid films of Korea's Golden Age cinema in the mid-1950s. During the Golden Age, directors enhanced their skills on USIS newsreels during the Korean War and through the film technology and equipment provided by foreign aid programs after the war.[52] Bong, growing up watching Hollywood films on the Armed Forces Korea Network, is influenced by such stylistic hybrid tradition, which is embedded in US military interventions in Korea. As Klein indicates, Bong's cinematic style derives from a historical continuity of "an ongoing desire among filmmakers to grapple with the costs and consequences of Korea's experience of modernization" ("Why" 894).

[52] For a more thorough study of Korean commercial films during the Golden Age, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Cosmopolitanism: Period Style in 1950s Korean Cinema* (2020).

Klein's analysis of Bong's film style elucidates the significance of reading Bong's social critique in his films in a historical continuity of South Korea's grappling with modernization, of which the US has been an integral part. Furthering Klein's analysis, I contend that in addition to style, Bong's social critique in *Parasite* should be placed in longer histories of the US-Korea relationship. Critics tend to see *Parasite* as a departure from Bong's previous films in terms of the shift of focus from explicit US-Korea government system of power to neoliberalism. Nam Lee, for instance, reads *Parasite* as a "new beginning" that illustrates "a social commentary and a warning about the possibility of the total catastrophe neoliberal capitalism might cause on a global scale" (139, 150). However, the economic disparity in *Parasite* can be traced to South Korea's rapid industrialization and how the US secured its economic interests through supporting South Korean military regimes since the 1950s.

In post-Japanese colonial years, South Korean economy depended on a private monopolistic capitalist class that relied on the US aid. In the 1950s, Park Chung-hee regime revived the economy through foreign loans. Against South Korean public's anti-Japan sentiment and the ongoing student movements, the regime boosted economy by pushing through the 1965 Korea-Japan agreement and dispatching troops to Vietnam. In return, the Park regime secured loans from the US as well as a "rapid capital accumulation in the field of light industry through the ensuing special procurement boom for the Vietnamese conflict" (Ahn 164). In the 1960s and 1970s, South Korea experienced rapid economic growth through economic development plans that embraced export-oriented economy, subordinating the country's economy to foreign loans from the US and Japan. Meanwhile, the large-scale import of US surplus agricultural products destroyed South Korea's rural economy, precipitating a significant factor of the 1980 Gwangju Uprising and the following

democratization movements. As Ahn Jean underscores, South Korea's high growth in the 1960s was based on "cheap labor and a low grain price policy, which brought about the impoverishment of the rural economy and deepened the relative poverty of the working class" (165).

The rapid industrialization in the 1970s also significantly changed South Korea's class structure, which saw the growth of the monopolistic capitalist class and the working class and the decrease in the farming class. Myung-Ji Yang observes that the deepened social inequality in the 1970s was driven by the state strategy of nurturing *chaebols* and maintaining cheap labor. While the income levels for the whole population seemed to increase, the state policy of unequal distribution widened the gulf between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the Park regime suppressed the oppositional movements by stigmatizing activists as communist radicals and North Korean threats. As Yang indicates, "By constantly mobilizing the threat of invasion from North Korea, the state capitalized upon the uneasiness of the population and made them feel powerless during a time of a crisis" (443). Such unequal economic distribution seeded anti-Americanism and neoliberalism in the 1980s. As Georgy Katsiaficas points out, during the 1980s the US supported liberalization of South Korean economy while constraining political liberalization to maintain economic stability for foreign investment.

The legacies of US interventions continued to shape neoliberalization and class restructuring in South Korea in the late 1980s and the following Asian financial crisis in the 1990s. With the fall of Soviet Union and weakening of democratization movements, post-Cold War South Korea witnessed the emergence of a "pro-US, pro-capitalist tendency packaged as if it were the only alternative" (Korea Alliance 50). With the launch of WTO in 1995, the Kim Young Sam administration relaxed financial regulations to attract foreign

loans. However, the sudden surge of transnational capital led to overheated economy and the 1997 financial crisis. The US blocked South Korea from obtaining loans from Japan and forced IMF intervention. IMF restructured South Korean industries catering free market, which resulted in mass lay-offs and increasing irregular workers and precarious work. Liberalization of market furthered with the Korea-US FTA in 2007. Despite South Koreans strongly resisted the FTA, the Noh Moo-hyn government pushed forward the passage "not only for economic reasons, but also in an attempt to take advantage of the US political–military strategy of blocking China" (Korean Alliance 53). The ongoing US military occupation played a significant role in the rushed passage of the FTA because of a "US-friendly ideology" and "belief in the supremacy of the US and resignation that it is inevitable for the sake of the South Korean–US alliance" (Korean Alliance 54).

Situated in the continuation of US military presence and South Korean democratization movements, neoliberalism in South Korea can be reviewed as an unfinished decolonization process hijacked by economic liberalization. In examining South Korea's turn into a neoliberal welfare state in the post-Asian financial crisis era, Jesook Song elucidates that a key context for the neoliberal turn is the transition to Kim Dae Jung presidency (1998-2003). As a key figure of 1987 democratization movements, Kim Dae Jung government was driven by "the necessity of establishing a capitalist state regime distinct from the authoritarian legacy of the developmental state" (3). The other key context is the coeval process of democratization after 1987. Song observes that as social movements shifted to civil movements in post-dictatorship era, activism turned to individualist values and positioning the middle class as the legitimate object of social activism. Song indicates that the post-1987 era is an "epistemological transition" to aspiration for liberal values (9). As Song explicates,

"Korean people who lived through the democratization movements strongly aspired to a liberal ideal of less state intervention and more individual freedom; thus the democratized era provided an opportunity to explore such freedom both within and outside social activism, as both consumers and entrepreneurs" (9-10). Song's account for South Korea's democratization and liberalization as coeval processes points out that neoliberalism in South Korea is part of the genealogy of US imperialism in Asia.

Placed in these contexts, the class conflicts in *Parasite* thus cannot be easily read as a new phenomenon of neoliberalism. Although *Parasite* does not render explicit the histories of US interventions, the representation of economic disparity cannot be understood without accounting for the complex US-Korea relations. *Parasite* foregrounds such historical traces by juxtaposing the Kims' semi-basement and the secret basement where the former housemaid Moon-gwang hides her husband. Such spatial parallel between the two basements cannot be easily read as shared economic struggles because Moon-gwang reveals that the basement is a secret bunker built in rich households "in case North Korea attacks, or if creditors break in" (*Parasite*). Moon-gwang further explains that the bunker is kept secret even to the Parks because the former house owner and architect Namgoong was "a bit embarrassed about this" (*Parasite*). This scene of sudden revelation is important in that it makes explicit the otherwise obscured ongoing Korean War. Moreover, such a historical reference to the militarized basis underlying the Parks' mansion indicates that the Parks' wealth is not simply based on transnational capital but also on a militarized economy heavily implicated in US military interventions in South Korea. Rather than a general class clash resulted from capitalism, the bunker reveals deeper histories of militarized economy implicated in US Cold War interventions in Asia. The implicit US military presence in the

film and the more explicit depiction of capitalism reflects how the Korean War is rendered as a forgotten war. Underlining that the Korean War is "a protean structure, at once generative and destructive," Christine Hong indicates that war is crucial to US empire-building and global capitalist hegemony ("Unending" 598). The Korean War, Hong underscores, has "fostered a formidable, crisis-generating, self-perpetuating, institutional architecture—the national security state, the military industrial complex, and the perpetual war economy, all cushioned within a self-serving regime of forgetting" ("Unending" 598).

It is worth noting that the bunker in Park's mansion is where the Kims and Moon-gwang couple meet because it gestures to how the Korean War restructures South Korea's postwar economy and class structure. As Moon-gwang begs for Mrs. Kim's mercy, Geun-sae recalls, "My Taiwanese Wangshui castella shop went bust. I was overwhelmed by debt" (*Parasite*). Geun-sae's memories reveal his shared experiences with losing the middle-class status with Mr. Park, whose fried chicken shop and Taiwanese castella shop failed within 6 months.[53] While the failed small business imply the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, revealing the shared memories in the bunker points to the entangled histories of the Korean War and postwar South Korean state's construction of the middle class. Tracking the downfall of South Korean middle class in the 20th century to the 1960s, Myungji Yang indicates that South Korean middle class is a key national project for Park Chung Hee regime after the Korean War. The middle class was part of the regime's project of remaking a national identity against "Westernization and foreign powers as well as communism" (40). As Yang points out, "Socially responsible and politically compliant, the middle class was an ideal partner for the authoritarian state, which wanted to promote rapid economic growth without disrupting

[53] For a discussion of the references to South Korea's social events in *Parasite*, see S. Nathan Park, "*Parasite* Has a Hidden Backstory of Middle-Class Failure and Chicken Joints" (2020).

social stability" (41). With the regime's promotion of heavy industries and expansion of chaebols in the 1970s, white-collared educated workers emerged as urban middle class representing "a self-sufficient economy, modernization of the fatherland, and national revival" (47). In uncovering the shared experiences of downward mobility in the bunker, the scene foregrounds the obscured afterlives of the Korean War.

In addition to illustrating the conditions of the making of South Korean middle class, the scene also positions Mr. Kim and Geun-sae's shared precarious middle-class status in the obscured historical linkage between the Korean War and neoliberalism in South Korea. It is worth noting that the Parks live in a mansion rather than an apartment. The mansion's hidden bunker foregrounds the conditions of the soaring housing price otherwise obscured by apartments. The emergence of apartments as a symbol of middle-class lifestyle is entwined with postwar state-chaebol complicity in the explosion of the real estate market since the 1960s. According to Yang, in the 1970s the state-sponsored house ownership programs significantly elevated nascent urban middle class's living standard. As the state implemented massive apartment complex construction projects targeting affluent families, chaebols profited from land speculation through obtaining confidential information from state officials. With state policies such as the 1977 lottery system favoring the middle and upper middle class and developers, affordable housing became unobtainable for the lower-income. Moreover, as the residents of apartments became mostly educated, middle-class families, apartments became a symbol of "'civilization' and modernity, an advance on old and dusty traditional neighborhoods" (Yang 86). Unlike apartments, which obscure the material conditions of South Korean middle class, the Parks' mansion reveals the erased reality of social inequality produced by US military interventions and postwar Korean state-chaebol

alliance.

In addition to the bunker, traces of the unending Korean War can be seen from the absent presence of North Korea in the film. As Hong points out, the Korean War is an "unending" structure that renders militarization into the quotidian while generating a knowledge project that forgets US Cold War interventions (597). For instance, when Ki-woo's father Ki-taek is interviewed during the test drive, Park Dong-ik is impressed with his familiarity with the roads without the need of GPS. Ki-taek proudly replies, "Anything below the 38th parallel" (*Parasite*). While Ki-taek's comment might be interpreted as nothing but a joke, what makes this joke work is the ongoing tension between North Korea and South Korea. Furthermore, Ki-taek's lack of knowledge about anything above the 38th parallel suggests how the Korean War is perpetuated an epistemological project that obscures US interventions in creating North Korea in the first place.

The presence of North Korea gestures to ongoing war and violence even though there is no military battle in the film. The ongoing wartime is reinforced later in the scene where Moon-gwang and her husband threaten to expose the Kims' secret to the Parks. Posing to send the Kims' video with a touch on the smartphone, Moon-gwang's husband remarks, "If we threaten to push it, those people can't do anything. It's like a North Korean rocket. A North Korean missile button!" (*Parasite*). Moon-gwang carries on her husband's comparison by imitating the famous North Korean news anchor Ri Chun-hee. She announces, "Therefore our Great Leader in this age of denuclearization, has commanded that the nation's last remaining nuclear warhead be driven down the throats of this wicked family!" (*Parasite*). While this scene is often read as hilarious or simply ignored in the selected reviews, it crucially reveals the seeming peace at the Parks' mansion is not simply based on class

hierarchy and working-class labor but also on a nuclearized tension between the North and the South. In addition to making visible the obscured wartime, the scene also elucidates how the Korean War transforms into a structure obstructing otherwise possible class alliance between the Kim and Moon-gwang families. Rather than recognizing their shared position under South Korean militarized economy, the two families' competition over surviving capitalism cannot generate a shared class consciousness. Instead, the scene poignantly represents how such potential class alliance is displaced and transformed into militarized tensions among South Korean working class. The violence between the two families thus provides a space to see how the Korean War perpetuates through "an inversion of cause and effect that enables its present-day consequences, including North Korea's steps in the past half-decade toward nuclear self-defense, to be decontextualized as 'provocations' that call out for potentially catastrophic preemptive violence." ("Unending" 600).

The following scenes further uncover such militarized tensions undergird the aesthetics of the mansion. Reprimanding the Kims for creating mess in "this home suffused with Mr. Namgoong's creative spirit," Moon-gwang bursts out "What do you know about art?" (*Parasite*). The scene then cuts to Moon-gwang's husband's reflection on the day when the couple basked in the sunbeams in the spacious living room while dancing and drinking tea. Moon-gwang's husband remarks, "At such moments we could feel his artistic touch" (*Parasite*). In solely focusing on the aesthetics of the house, the couple decontextualizes the house from the unsettling history of the bunker. Their identification with Mr. Namgoong, who was "embarrassed" about the bunker, suggests how the Korean War is buried by dishistoricized art (*Parasite*). Despising the Kims' ignorance of art, the couple transforms their appreciation of Namgoong into a form of cultural capital that ultimately forgets the

military violence on which the house was founded. Their aspiration for cultured middle-class lifestyle also resonates with Park Chung-hee regime's promotion of the middle class as a "political and cultural project" (Yang 60). As Yang notes, the project celebrated "modern, 'civilized' middle-class lifestyle" as "evidence of successful economic development and material progress" that ultimately justified the regime (60). The immediate fighting scene following Moon-gwang's flashback gestures to the underlying Cold War tensions that constantly threaten to subvert the seeming peace.

In addition to being converted into cultural capital, the Korean War is also displaced by a desire for capital and economic mobility. Juxtaposed with Moon-gwang's admiration of art is her husband's identification with Park Dong-ik. During his confrontation with Geun-sae, Ki-taek is shocked by his daily ritual of paying respect to Park Dong-ik by sending a Morse Code message with the light on the hallway. Geun-sae proudly tells Ki-taek that the encoded message is "Mr. Park, you feed me and house me. Respect!" (*Parasite*). Geun-sae's message, however, is never delivered to Mr. Park, who simply thinks the flickering light is broken. Unknown to Mr. Park, Geun-sae's labor in producing the military message is erased. In paying respect to Park Don-ik, who represents the figure of a successful capitalist, in a militarized language and gesture, Geun-sae's daily ritual is a conundrum for Ki-taek. However, when placed in the context of unending Korean War, Geun-sae's ritual elucidates the conversion of militarized language into capitalist modernity. The Korean War and US Cold War interventions in Asia are rendered implicit by East Asian nations such as South Korea's economic success in postwar era. As Hong points out, incorporated into a progressive economic narrative, Americans' "vaunted 'bonds forged in blood' with their South Korean ally are naturalized in a triumphalist account of South Korea's capitalist modernity, those on

the receiving end of US aggression, both north and south of the 38th parallel, see, by contrast, a 'single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of [their] feet'" ("Unending" 599-600). In making visible such militarized language underlying the Parks' wealth, this scene illustrates how militarization is rendered implicit by capitalism. Moreover, responding to Ki-taek's bewilderment, Geun-sae replies, "Someone of your age should know [Morse code]" (*Parasite*). This reference to the shared language of the Korean War generation significantly links the bunker and the Kims' semi-basement not simply through class hierarchy. Rather, it reveals that both the Kims and Moon-gwang couple share an economic position deeply embedded in militarized economy.

In addition to elucidating the obscured militarized economy, Guen-sae's daily worship also highlights another invisible presence of the US. Shouting "Respect" in English rather than in Korean, Guen-sae draws attention to the absent presence of the US throughout the film. Just as militarization is rendered invisible, the US is also rendered implicit by aspiration for economic mobility. One example of the absent presence of the US is the scene where the Kim siblings review their fake profiles before meeting Mrs. Park for interview. Before they ring the door bell, the siblings hum a tune with adapted lyrics: "Jessica, only child, Illinois Chicago, classmate Kim Jin-mo, he's your cousin" (*Parasite*). On one level, in adopting an English name and forged American credential to gain the Parks' trust, the Kim siblings show that the US is transformed into an object of aspiration. On another level, this scene also reveals how the Cold War deflects decolonization because the tune is a well-known Korean song called "Dokdo is Our Land." The 1982 song promotes Korean sovereignty over Dokdo, which is an island in the Sea of Japan. While South Korea controls the island, sovereignty over the island has been contested by Japan. The lyrics of the song claim Korean sovereignty

over the island by referring to Japanese colonial histories. However, such attention to Japanese colonialism is displaced by the Kim siblings' new lyrics. The replacement of Americanness with memories of Japanese colonialism gestures to the shift to US hegemony in the postwar era.

The US presence also transforms into a figure of modernity in the film. An indication of this is the controversial scenes of appropriation of Indigenous culture throughout the film, such as Da-song's obsession with the replica of a Native American headdress and teepee. The appropriation of Indigenous culture not only shows the Parks' obliviousness to the settler colonial histories underlying the products just like their obliviousness to the working-class labor that sustains their daily life. Furthermore, the repeated misuse of Indigenous culture works reinforces the vision of the US as a figure of progress. In response to her husband's concern about the quality of the teepee, Mrs. Park assures him that "We ordered from the US. It will be fine" (*Parasite*). Standing alone in the Parks' spacious backyard, the tepee shines like a colorful decoration in the dark (See Fig.10). While the tepee seems small and out of reach, it is framed by the screen and the floor-to-ceiling window as the focal point symbolizing the Parks' possession. Mrs. Park's comment further frames the tepee as a property illuminating American progress. Decontextualized from Indigenous culture, the tepee is recontextualized as a symbol of the Parks' wealth and cultural capital representing American modernity. In addition, the settler appropriation becomes a backdrop of the Park couple's erotic intimacy. Regarding Bong's use of the American Indian theme as a way to reveal the Parks' ignorance of the commodification of US settler colonial histories, Cherokee critic Shea Vassar notes, "Though clever in the execution, this element only works if the audience, from any cultural background including Korean or American, are educated on the

historical oppression and legal genocide that has occurred in the United States." Vassar thus suggests that while *Parasite* foregrounds traces of US hegemony, it is difficult for the audience to grapple with the US as a settler state.

Fig. 10

Indeed, as Vassar indicates, with the audience's lack of knowledge about US settler colonial histories and Indigenous histories, the recurring Indigenous theme may be simply read as a symbol of Americanness. In Bong's interviews, he discusses how the Indigenous commodity shows the Parks' ignorance of the complex histories behind the products. Bong remarks, "And so basically, she purchased all these Native American goods from Amazon, and it's kind of like how a lot of people wear those [Native American] T-shirts—it's like a piece of fashion. And the actual history of Native Americans is very complicated, but the mother and the boy don't care about the complexity at all" (Cea). In addition to the reduction of Native Americans' "very complicated and long, deep history," Bong further notes that the Native American theme cannot be "a commentary on what happened in the United States, but it's related in the sense that this family starts infiltrating the house and they already find a family living there" (Holub). In making Indigenous subjects an analogy to the family in the

bunker, Bong's comment problematically casts Indigenous peoples as a floating metaphor—an erasure Jodi Byrd terms as transit (xxi). Also, in placing the Kims as the settlers, Bong overlooks that the Parks also indirectly participate in US settler colonialism as they benefit from South Korean militarized economy conditioned by US Cold War interventions.

However, if we also account for the longer histories of the emergence of South Korean middle class, the representation of natives in *Parasite* may foreground the difficulty of grasping the at times implicit US presence in East Asia. As discussed earlier, apartments as a symbol of modern middle-class lifestyle is a historical outcome of US-backed regime's project of recovering from the Korean War. Apartments also became vehicles through which the residents distinguished themselves from the less privileged. Yang indicates that those excluded were "'natives" (wŏnjumin), those who had lived in the neighborhood before apartments were built" (88). Involved in low-waged occupations, the native residents were stigmatized as "poor, uneducated, and uncultured" (88). It is precisely such tendency to overlook the US as an absent presence that makes *Parasite* a productive text to rethink the complex interconnections between the US and Asia. Rather than representing explicit US military occupation in South Korea, *Parasite* illustrates neocolonial relation with Asia in postwar era. If the US, as Shigematsu and Camacho point out, "defined its national interests not along the borders of continental United States but in Asia and the Pacific," reading the Cold War's ruins in *Parasite* helps us to address otherwise unrecognized inter-Asian and transpacific linkages that constitute as well as challenge the boundaries of intersecting empires (xxv).

My reading of *Parasite* has tried to highlight the Cold War's ruins in the film, including literal ruins such as the bunker and more implicit ruins such as references to the Korean War

haunting the characters. My analysis so far has tried to make explicit the traces of geohistorical violence in *Parasite.* Yet, Yoneyama also notes that when critically illuminated, ruins are "repositories of debris that in the present offer wisdom associated with failed strategies, unrealized possibilities, and paths that could have but were never taken" (*Ruins* 210). In this framing, ruins are potential ways for envisioning an alternative future without repeating historical violence. It is this line of ruins I would like to read the final scenes of *Parasite*.

Parasite ends with Ki-woo's and Ki-taek's divergent envisioning of capitalism. A key turning point is Da-song's birthday party. The party turns into a gruesome mayhem as Geun-sae, seeking to avenge Moon-gwang, attacks the Kims. The scene shocks the guests while giving Da-song's another seizure. Meanwhile, witnessing her daughter's death, Chung-sook fatally stabbed Geun-sae with a barbecue skewer. Upon seeing the dying Geun-sae, Mr. Park reacts to his smell with disgust and orders Ki-taek to drive Da-song to the hospital. Mr. Park's revulsion at the dying Geun-sae's smell kills Ki-taek's dream for economic uplift. Mr. Park's revulsion alerts Ki-taek that no matter how well he plays a "bad Indian" with his employer, he will never be rid of the smell that "crosses the line" (*Parasite*). By stabbing Mr. Park, Ki-taek critically align with Geun-sae's class position as he refuses to pay respect to the capitalist. In contrast, Ki-woo clings on to the failed dream of becoming a successful entrepreneur as the film ends poignantly in the semi-basement. As Ju-Hyun Park indicates, this failed dream critically questions positioning capitalism as the only solution while calling attention to "the liberation of Korea flows through the liberation of all peoples from capitalism and colonialism."

Ki-taek's critical dis-identification with capitalism further challenges Cold War

militarized division. It is worth noting that Ki-woo's failed dream is interwoven with Ki-taek's letter to his son. While the letter is coded in Morse Code, this use of militarized language significantly departs from Geun-sae's respect for Mr. Park. Rather than adopting the militarized language to aspire economic mobility, Ki-taek seeks possible connection with his son in the future as he writes, "maybe someday you'll see it" (See Fig. 11). In this sense, the militarized language—ruins of the ongoing Korean War—becomes a way to build intimacy. This intimacy is significant not simply on a private level because the letter also enables communication between those living in the bunker and those living in the semi-basement. This communication and intimacy was not realized as we have seen previously how the two families residing in these two spaces enacting militarized tensions between North Korea and South Korea. Furthermore, in remembering Moon-gwang's name in the letter and offering her a proper burial instead of aspiring to take over the mansion, Ki-taek's letter generates a form of intimacy that is not limited to his family but also care for others that are rendered as war enemies. The militarized language used to produce the letter reminds us of how such intimacies are made possible by US transpacific militarization, thereby making explicit the otherwise obscured intimate histories entwining the US and Asia.[54] Reading such intimacies between subjects occupying seemingly unrelated positions and between seemingly distinct continents in *Parasite* thus may offer us a kind of what Kaplan calls "transnational historiographies and cartographies" that allow us to rethink US imperialism in Asia (211).

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[54] I borrow the notion of intimacies from Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015). Lowe uses the concept of intimacy as a "heuristic, and a means to observe the historical division of world processes into those that develop modern liberal subjects and modern spheres of social life, and those processes that are forgotten, cast as failed or irrelevant because they do not produce 'value' legible within modern classifications" (17-18).

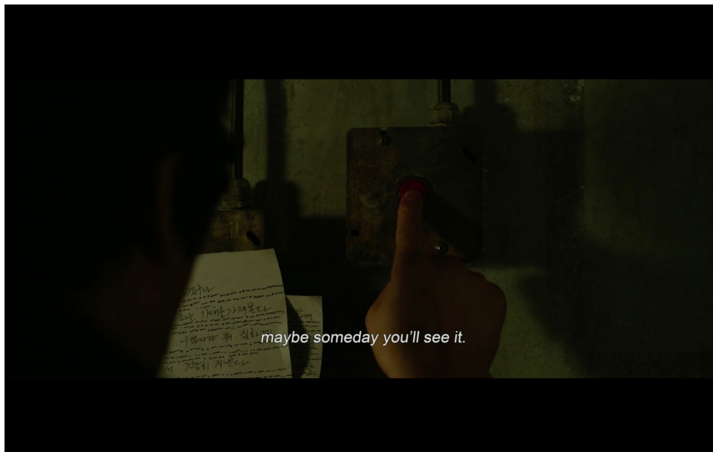

Fig. 11

Chapter Four

Displaced and Connected in Water: Reading lê thị diễm thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*

In Vietnamese, the word for *water* and the word for *a nation*, *a country*, and *a homeland* are one and the same: *nu'óc.*

—lê thi diếm thúy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*

On April 3, 1975, President Gerald R. Ford announced Operation Babylift for the mass evacuation of orphans from South Vietnam to the US for adoption. Ford's statement obscures and reframes US war in Vietnam as "a great human tragedy as untold numbers of Vietnamese flee the North Vietnamese onslaught" (The White House). In framing the war as a humanitarian crisis produced by North Vietnamese, the speech positions the US as a savior for Vietnamese refugees. The speech further erases US military interventions in Vietnam by transforming military vehicles into necessary humanitarian transportation as Ford declared that he had directed "all available naval ships to stand off Indochina to do whatever is necessary to assist" and that "C-5A planes and other aircraft, especially equipped to care for these orphans during the flight, be sent to Saigon" (The White House). By reframing US military as urgent humanitarian assistance, the speech reconstructs the Vietnam War as a good war while justifying US military presence. The speech reinforces the good war narrative by concluding that the orphans would be "flown to Travis Air Force Base and other bases on the West Coast and cared for there" (The White House). In repositioning the military bases as refuge for the orphans, the speech obscures the role of the US in displacing Vietnamese and producing orphans in the first place. The good war narrative is encapsulated in a widely circulated photo of Ford welcoming the orphan flight two days later at the San Francisco

Airport (See Fig. 1). In the picture, people's gaze focuses on Ford cradling a Vietnamese infant just off the board. By positioning Ford as a loving parent, the photo rewrites the failure of the Vietnam War as a good war through which the humanitarian US caring for the infantilized Vietnam. As Yen Le Espiritu's analysis of the photo indicates, "With the arrival of the Babylift children, America became the white loving parents welcoming the arrival of their brown charges; the transition from warring to humanitarian nation thus completed—all without a pause" (*Body* 43).

Fig. 1

In addition to positioning the US as a humanitarian rescuer, the speech and the photo also leave out US bases in Asia and the Pacific despite their critical role in supporting US war in Vietnam and making the operation possible. While Ford only mentioned Travis Air Force Base and other bases on the West Coast, the Vietnam War is part of the long history of US colonialism in Asia and the Pacific where the US constructs a transpacific militarized empire. As Catherine Lutz underlines, "the bases in East Asia acquired in the Spanish–American War and in World War II, such as Guam, Thailand, and the Philippines, became the primary sites from which the United States was able to wage war on Vietnam. Without them, the war would not have been fought as intensely as it was" (15). Examining how Vietnamese refugees

were transferred through US bases in Asia and the Pacific, Espiritu points out that the routes of Vietnamese refugees reveal the "hidden *colonial* and *militarized* nature of these evacuations" (*Body* 25). Espiritu argues that the routes through which the Vietnamese refugees were transferred from bases in the Philippines and Guam before reaching Camp Pendleton in California elucidate that converting US bases into "good *refuge*" is as central as the production of the good refugee to the US good war narrative of the Vietnam War (*Body* 25). Obscuring the military violence underpinning US bases, Ford's speech epitomizes what Espiritu terms as "militarized *refuge*," which refers to "the enormity of the military buildup in the Pacific that uniquely equipped U.S. bases there to handle the large-scale refugee rescue operation" (*Body* 29).

Following Espiritu's call for critical refugee studies that conceptualizes the refugee as "a site of social, political, and historical critiques that, when carefully traced, make transparent processes of colonization, war, and displacement" ("Introduction" 4), in this chapter I explore how lê thị diễm thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003) represents an alternative refugee narrative that disrupts recognizing the figure of refugee solely through the lens of settlement or displacement from the nation by foregrounding the otherwise hidden intertwined histories of US militarism in the Pacific and US war in Vietnam. By examining how lê reimagines Vietnamese refugee narrative through the trope of water rather than displacement from national territory, I contend that the novel pushes for a relational critique of the Vietnam War—one that accounts for US wars in Asia, US militarism and settler colonialism in the Pacific, and transpacific displacement of Vietnamese refugees. Borrowing Espiritu's call for *critical juxtaposing* (*Body* 47), I analyze how the novel challenges US good war narrative by juxtaposing Vietnamese diasporic characters' recurring memories of the war

with the forgetting of the Vietnam War and militarism in the Pacific in the US. By investigating how lê grounds the Vietnamese refugees' war memories in the body while decentering narrative of US atrocity, I contend that the novel defies the narrative of the refugee as either a grateful subject or a helpless victim. Finally, by foregrounding the difficulty of reading the novel's first-person narrative, I examine how lê problematizes the desire for authentic Vietnamese refugee accounts of the war.

Refugee Routes through Militarized Water

The Gangster We Are All Looking For focuses on a Vietnamese girl's narrative of her family's displacement from Vietnam and resettlement in San Diego. Interweaving memories of the war and the deceased in Vietnam with the family's struggles with racism, economic deprivation, and the forgetting of the war in the US, the novel refuses the developmental narrative of the bildungsroman genre by representing how the protagonist and her family's lives continues to be shaped, but not overdetermined, by the war. The novel begins with the protagonist and her father along with four Vietnamese men they met on the boat out of Vietnam. With the sponsorship of the Russell family, the head of which was a former US Navy man, they move to their son Mel's house but are later forced to leave because the protagonist broke the late Mr. Russell's glass collection. Throughout the novel, the protagonist's name is never revealed. We learn later in the story that her struggles with her name are connected with the death of her brother, who drowned in the ocean when the family was living in Vietnam. While the narrative traces the protagonist's childhood to her move to New York in her adulthood, lê does not offer a resolution to the war but instead represents the aftermath of the war through memories of water exceeding temporal and geographical

boundaries.

Water is a central theme disrupting the US good war narrative of the Vietnam War as well as reconnecting broken relations in the novel. From the beginning, lê unsettles territorial boundary of the nation with the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this chapter. By deploying the Vietnamese concept *nu'óc*, lê challenges the concept of the nation as an entity defined by territorial border. Reframing the nation via "water," "country," and "homeland" (lê), the novel interrupts readers' expectation for a refugee narrative that frames Vietnam as a nation remote from the US. In the novel, water is not simply a passage through which the Vietnamese refugees cross over but also a force challenging the geographical boundary between the US and Vietnam. In the opening chapter, the protagonist recalls the days before her mother arrives in the US: "Ma was standing on a beach in Vietnam while Ba and I were in California with four men who had escaped with us on the same boat" (lê 3). The beach as geographical division is unsettled later when the protagonist thinks that she can meet her mother at the beach in California. Responding to her father's explanation "Not the beach here. The beach in Vietnam," the protagonist asks, "What was the difference?" (lê 13). In conflating the beaches in Vietnam and California, the protagonist pushes us to reimagine Vietnam not simply as a country of origin of the refugees outside of the US but rather intertwined geographies connected by the displaced Vietnamese diasporas. By remapping the beach in Vietnam not as a place distant from "here" in California (lê 13), the passage illustrates that the war does not end with Vietnamese national territory but further interconnects two nations as one shore.

In addition to challenging the geographical boundaries of the Vietnam War, lê problematizes framing the war as an event of the past with Ma's memories. Recalling the

protagonist's birth, Ma narrates, "When I was born, she cried to know that it was war I was breathing in, and she could never shake it out of me. Ma says war makes it dangerous to breathe, though she knows you die if you don't. She says she could have thrown me against the wall, until I broke or coughed up this war that is killing us all . . . War has no beginning and no end. It crosses oceans like a splintered boat filled with people singing a sad song" (lê 87). In depicting the war as air "dangerous to breathe" and yet indispensable for staying alive (lê 87), Ma shows that war is an integral part of refugee lives that cannot be torn apart. By narrating the war as the protagonist's birth despite it is "killing us all" (lê 87), Ma refuses to narrate the war as a pathology and trauma that can be treated and recovered from. The war stays for life as long as the refugees breathe. In depicting war as "a splintered boat filled with people singing a sad song" crossing the Pacific Ocean endlessly (lê 87), Ma reimagines the war not through images of refugees fleeing from home but underlining that what forces people to cross oceans is the war. As Erin Suzuki points out, the scene reconfigures war as "an endless *condition* that continues to reverberate through individuals and families rather than a stage that can passed through or beyond" (*Ocean* 82). In so doing, Ma challenges the discourse of refugees as victims in need for humanitarian aid and whose precarity will end as soon as they reach US shore—discourse we see in Ford's speech and US media.

By reconfiguring the war through the depiction of water exceeding geographical and temporal boundary, we learn that the protagonist and her family's transpacific migration to San Diego is enabled by a retired Navy Mr. Russell's imagining of Vietnamese boat people as "the nameless, faceless bodies lying in small boats, floating on the open water" (lê 4). The passage further reveals that Mr. Russell's decision to sponsor the family is initiated not only by humanitarian imagining but also conflating Vietnamese refugees with the "small and kind"

people he met when he was stationed in the Pacific (lê 4). Mr. Russell's humanitarianism is intertwined with his imagining of the Pacific as he recalls that "the Vietnamese boat people merged with his memories of the Okinawans and the Samoans and even the Hawaiians" (lê 4). Mr. Russell's conflation of Vietnamese refugees with Pacific Islanders and Asians highlights that his benevolence is made possible by US militarism and imperialism in Asia and the Pacific. Interconnecting Mr. Russell's humanitarian imagining of helpless Vietnamese refugees floating on the water with US militarism in the Pacific, the passage indicates that the displacement of Vietnamese refugees is inseparable from displacement of people, seizure of lands, and settler colonialism in Okinawa, Samoa, and Hawaiʻi. In placing Vietnamese refugees' transpacific displacement alongside with US imperialism in the Pacific, the passage highlights the Pacific not simply as water where refugees float and cross but as militarized routes made possible by US imperial project in the nineteenth century.[55] Mr. Russell's racial conflation also points to how US settler colonialism in the Pacific is entwined with US war in Vietnam. Rather than connected by mere physical resemblance as Mr. Russell imagines, Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders are intertwined by material impact of US empire as Hawaiʻi and Okinawa played a central role in the Vietnam War as "surrogate tropics" for combat training as well as military bases stationing weapons and transitioning troops to Vietnam

[55] The violence of US imperialism is still ongoing in the Pacific. While in 1951 the U.S. naval station in Pago Pago officially closed, many Samoan military families were relocated to Hawaiʻi and American Samoans have been disproportionately represented in the US armed forces. In ""Whose Pacific? U.S. Security Interests in American Samoa from the Age of Empire to the Pacific Pivot" (2013), Holger Droessler underlines that "the longer history of economic dependency, environmental degradation, and military recruitment are still visible in American Samoa today" (63). In *The Pacific Insular Case of American Samoa: Land Rights and Law in Unincorporated US Territories* (2018), Line-Noue Memea Kruse underscores that US imperialism destroys the communal land system and Samoan culture with the US Navy introducing adverse land possession principles. The adverse land possession concept disentangles communally owned land from the āiga and village and made into individual possession simply by living there with or without permission. Kruse indicates that "US expansion into the Pacific was also a means of economic growth for nation-building empire projects, and an explicit benefit of adverse ownership was the development of land productivity and the acquisition of lands for commerce" (58).

(Gonzalez 151).[56] Indeed, when placed in the contexts of US militarism in the Pacific, Mr. Russell's imagined Vietnamese and Pacific Islanders' "faceless bodies" revealed to be material bodies laboring for and sacrificed by US war in Vietnam (lê 4). During the Vietnam War, the US exploited Okinawa's liminal status under US governance and stockpiled unprecedented arsenal of weapons and created many military accidents killing Okinawans. Starting in 1968, B-52s took off from Kaneda Air Base to bomb Southeast Asia.[57] The Japanese government also played an active role in supporting the US war in Vietnam in exchange for Okinawa's reversion to Japan despite the nation's constitutional prohibition to provide military assistance.[58] By foregrounding the militarized violence underlying Mr. Russell's humanitarian act, lê reframes the Vietnam War as "a *transpacific* war that inflicted collateral damage on the Vietnamese and also on indigenous and (formerly) colonized subjects in the circuits of US Empire" ("Critical Refugee"483).

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[56] In "Aloha, Vietnam: Race and Empire in Hawai'i's Vietnam War" (2015), Simeon Man points out that Hawai'i statehood in 1959 showcased American freedom and democracy in postcolonial era. The liberal inclusion of ethnic and Indigenous subjects in Hawai'i "not only obscured the history of US imperialism in the islands but also manifested in renewed forms of colonial state violence in Hawai'i and elsewhere in Asia" (1086). During the 1960s, militarization of Hawai'i further dispossessed lands from Native Hawaiians and while offering "jungle warfare" training at Schofield Barracks. The US army constructed Southeast Asian mock villages that "conjured the racialized enemy through spatial enactments and that taught soldiers to approach their whole surrounding as a target of violence" (Man 1097). As Simeon Man indicates, "the formations of race and empire in Hawai'i—as a site of cultural diplomacy and as a site of war making—reveal not only Hawai'i's obscured role in the Vietnam War but also the deep entanglements of racial liberalism and state violence in US imperial culture" (1087).

[57] Many Okinawans were employed by the US military to play enemy in mock Vietnamese villages. In "Vietnam: Okinawa's Forgotten War" (2015), Jon Mitchell points out that "Due to Okinawa's gray-zone status, base workers tasked with hazardous tasks were not safeguarded by American or Japanese labour regulations" (3). Mitchell notes that in Okinawa's capital Naha Port processed 75% of all supplies for the conflict. During the Vietnam War, Japanese government actively supported US War in Vietnam in exchange for the reversion of Okinawa. In 1965, Prime Minister Sato Eisaku declared "moral support" for the war and Japanese corporations provided base- building materials and supplies for U.S. troops (6). While the Japanese government promised Okinawans to reduce the number of US bases after the reversion, the promise was broken as the US could keep using the bases for free.

[58] In "Balancing Okinawa's return with American expectations: Japan and the Vietnam War 1965–75" (2010), James Llewelyn underlines that Sato Eisaku administration's "sustained large-scale financial assistance to Saigon and acquiescence on Tokyo's part for the Okinawa bases to be directly used for military objectives in Vietnam can also be viewed as explicit support" (337). Llewelyn also notes that Japan's strategy of supporting the US anticommunism through large-scale Japanese aid and investment in Southeast Asia "set the stage for a significant increase in Japan's political and economic influence in Southeast Asia following the US withdrawal from Vietnam" (338).

lê interrupts Mr. Russell's erasure of US presence in Asia and the Pacific by juxtaposing Mr. Russell's dream with the protagonist's narration of her migration from Vietnam to San Diego. Mr. Russell dreamed about the boats turning into seabirds and saw "a hand scoop the birds up from the water. It was not his hand and it was not the hand of God," where "[the birds] fly in only one direction and that was toward the point where in the dream he understood himself to be waiting, somewhere beyond the frame" (lê 4-5). Converted into an unknown hand saving the refugees, the war produced by US interventions in Vietnam is erased from the frame. The interventions that displaced the refugees in the first place are transformed into a hand that intervenes to rescue. Furthermore, in converting US military violence into an unknown hand, the dream erases Mr. Russell's memories of US militarism in the Pacific depicted in the passage right before the dream. Through transforming the boats into birds flying toward "where in the dream he understood himself to be waiting, somewhere beyond the frame," the dream reconfigures Vietnamese refugees as voluntary migrants flying toward Mr. Russell, who is positioned "somewhere beyond the frame" instead of a participant involved in US military interventions in the region (lê 5). Rendered invisible in the frame, US military presence in Asia and the Pacific becomes a "direction" naturally attracting and embracing the flock of bird-like boat people. (lê 5).

Nevertheless, the protagonist's narration of her refugee routes preceding Mr. Russell's dream interrupts the erasure of refugee subjects and US involvement. The protagonist begins with reframing water as an alternative bonding: "Ba and I were connected to the four uncles, not by blood but by water" (lê 3). In underlining water as a connection bonding displaced subjects as an alternative family, the protagonist centers on the people working to survive. The protagonist further challenges the imagining of empty water in Mr. Russell's dream as

she recalls:

> Along with other people from our town, we floated across the sea, first in the hold of the fishing boat, and then in the hold of a U.S. Navy ship. At the refugee camp in Singapore, we slept on beds side by side when our papers were processed and stamped, we packed our few possessions and left the camp together. We entered the revolving doors of airports and boarded plane after plane. We were lifted high over the Pacific Ocean . . . We were carried through unfamiliar brightly lit streets, and delivered to the sidewalk in front of a darkened house whose door we entered, after climbing five uneven steps together in what had become pouring rain. (lê 3-4)

In detailing each stopover on their way to the US, the protagonist reveals that the refugees are not simply boats floating on open water and miraculously transferred by an invisible hand. Rather, their transference involves US Navy and the processing camp in Singapore.[59] Moreover, the protagonist's memory reveals that the process of becoming refugees is not a route toward salvation but rather a process of dehumanization as the refugee camp transforms the refugees into papers to be "processed and stamped" (lê 4). The process of dehumanization reinforces when the refugees were "lifted high over the Pacific Ocean" (lê 4), following by a series of sentences describing the refugees as objects of actions. Arriving in the US, the refugees were "carried through unfamiliar brightly lit streets, and delivered to the sidewalk"

[59] In "Singapore and the Vietnam War" (2009), Ang Cheng Guan points out that Singapore leadership, especially the then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, had been "one of, if not the most vocal and well-known, 'subscriber' of the domino theory and supporter of the American presence in Vietnam" (354-55). As the Vietnam War overlapped with the first decade of Singapore independence, Singapore leadership supported US anticommunist interventions in Southeast Asia for fear of the expansion of Chinese communism. Noting a conversation with between Lee and Kissinger, Guan observes that Lee said "the US could not afford to be protectionist. Also, Washington would need to provide Thailand and Malaysia with counter-insurgency assistance" (383-84).

like packages instead of living beings (lê 4). Rather than retrieving their humanity through US humanitarian assistance, becoming refugees is a process of being deprived of agency and reduced to nameless cargos. Through the protagonist's narration, the US is represented as "a darkened house" instead of a safe refuge (lê 4). In mapping the routes of her migration, the protagonist underscores that the Vietnamese refugees are not seabirds voluntarily migrating toward "only one direction" as Mr. Russell's dream suggests but lives made into refugees channeling through US militarized routes in the Pacific (lê 5).

Rewriting Good Refugee Narrative

In addition to foregrounding the militarized condition and dehumanized process of US humanitarian project, lê further challenges US rewriting of the refugee as grateful beneficiary of freedom. Mimi Thi Nguyen underlines that US liberal empire operates not simply through explicit military violence but also through obscuring "the violence of liberalism's powers" with a discourse of reciprocity (25). Reframed as subject benefitting from US freedom, the refugee is "a target and also an instrument for the gift of freedom, as an object marked for rescue and refuge, and as a subject emerging from these claims to care" (Nguyen 24). Upon their arrival at Mr. Russel's son Mel's place, Ba instructs the others that Mel is a "good man" and that "we should always remember that he opened a door for us and that this was an important thing to remember" (lê 7, 8). In emphasizing a specific way to remember Mel, Ba seeks to contract their memories of migration to "those long nights floating on the ocean" from which Mel releases them and therefore "what could we do but thank him (lê 7, 8). However, in the following passage the protagonist questions such instruction as she reflects:

> There were things about us Mel never knew or remembered. He didn't remember

> that we hadn't come running through the door he opened but, rather, had walked, keeping close together and moving very slowly, as people often do when they have no idea what they're walking toward or what they're walking from. (lê 8)

In wondering whether Mel "never knew or remembered" (lê 8), the protagonist refuses to position Mel simply as a benefactor innocent of the refugees' past by suggesting the possibility of his willful not-remembering. Rather than running toward the door to liberation, the protagonist shifts to the refugees' perspective on the passage to the US as a journey toward uncertainty. By emphasizing their uncertainty about "what they're walking toward or what they're walking from" (lê 8), the protagonist refuses US rewriting of refugee passage as a linear process of becoming the subject of freedom in which refugees flee from communism or toward US rescue. Furthermore, the protagonist reveals that the discourse of grateful refugee is a violent denial of Vietnamese refugees' mourning. The protagonist recalls that when Mel and his mother were "holding on to each other and crying because Mr. Russell was gone," Ba "was sitting in the shadow of the palm trees on the front lawn of the house, staring at the moon like a lost dog, and also crying" (lê 8). Contrasting the Russells' and Ba's mourning, lê uncovers that becoming a grateful refugee forces refugees to forget their loss. As Nguyên-Vo Thu-Huong indicates, the forced forgetting of Vietnamese death in US narrative of the Vietnam War puts Vietnamese Americans "as refugees occupy the position of self-mourners because no one else mourns us" (170).

lê further illustrates the forced historical amnesia of Vietnamese refugees is accompanied with selective remembering. In the novel, photographs are presented as a technology of abreacting the subjects in front of cameras by emptying out their past. The protagonist remembers that Mrs. Russell "chose my Ba and me as her favorites" and takes

them for long drives up into the woods on Sunday afternoons to share her memories with Mr. Russel (lê 12). On their first trip, Mrs. Russell took a photo of Ba and the protagonist. Although the photo was taken there because it was a memorable site for Mrs. Russell, the protagonist reads the picture as decontextualizing Ba and her past by reducing them to shape: "We are looking at the camera, waiting for that flash that lets us know something has happened inside the body of the camera, something that makes it remember us, remember our faces, remember our clothes, remember the blurred shape of our hands captured in that second when we shivered, waiting" (lê 13). By turning to Ba and the protagonist's perspective, lê reveals that the camera selectively remembers solely the refugees' "blurred shape" while erasing how they come to where they are (lê 13). Deprived of their histories of displacement, Ba and the protagonist in the frame become souvenirs remembered solely in memory of the deceased Mr. Russell.

The violence of selective remembering is represented in another photograph of the boat on which the refugees escape. Taken by "someone standing on the deck of the ship that had picked us up" (lê 29), the picture reduces the refugees into nameless collectivity. The protagonist narrates, "We are among the people in the picture but I can't tell who is who because we are all so small" (lê 29). Against the unknown photographer's perspective, the protagonist imagines that the Americans on the ship were "laughing at us" and that is "why it took them so long to lower the ladder" (lê 29). She imagines that the Americans

> laughed so hard at the sight of us so small, they started to roll around the deck like spilled marbles and they had to help one another to their feet and recall their own names—Emmett, Mike, Ron—and where they were from—Oakland, California; Youngstown, Ohio; Shinston, West Virginia—before they could let us

> climb up and say our names—Lan, Cuong, Hoang—and where we were from—Phan Thiet, Binh Thuan. (lê 29)

While taking the photo enables the Americans to reduce the refugees to unrecognizable small images, the protagonist's imagining reveals that the violence of representation does not make the Americans subjects but rather transforming them into "spilled marbles" that need to reinscribe their American identity (lê 29). As Suzuki indicates, "it is the act of representation itself—the taking of the photograph—that creates a brief moment of intersubjectivity between the people on the boat and the people on the ship, providing the catalyst for this momentary unsettling (and subsequent resettlement) of 'American' subjecthood" (*Ocean* 84).

The representation of US remembering as forgetting culminates in the scene where the protagonist destroys Mr. and Mrs. Russell's beloved collection of glass animals with a glass disk containing a golden brown butterfly. Displayed in a glass cabinet, the glass animals are introduced to the refugees as valuables forbidding their access as Mrs. Russell "told Mel to tell Ba to tell the four uncles and me that the things inside were not for touching" (lê 23). Instead of translating the Russells' order, Ba simply tells the other, "Do you understand?" (lê 23). The protagonist recalls that even without Ba's translation they all "sensed that the things in the cabinet were valuable, not because they looked valuable to us but because they had been separated from the disorder of the rest of the room and the rest of the house" (lê 23). Without explanation of what makes the glass animals valuable or the need for translation, the glass animals embody an order to obey without cause. That is, the glass animals exemplify a command to acknowledge the value of the Russells' memories—even though not known to the refugees—and to remember these ahistorical things as the history without questioning. lê further shows that the glass animals are also a command to forget the refugees' past in the

scene where the protagonist tells the animals about the story behind the photograph of the boat. After sharing the story with the animals, the protagonist realizes:

> It didn't matter what I told them. The story could take place in the courtyard of our house in Vietnam or on the deck of the Navy ship that picked us up from the sea or in a hammock at the refugee camp in Singapore or in the belly of the airplane that carried us to California . . . it could be about how everything that happened to my Ba and the four uncles and me, happened "Suddenly," "Many years ago," and "Somewhere far away"—as in those fairy tales that the teacher read to the class every Friday. (lê 29-30)

In highlighting the futile retelling of her histories of displacement, the protagonist elucidates that the glass animals' lack of response to the refugees' past is not ignorance but refusal to remember heterogenous histories. Whatever happened to the refugees become "fairly tales" taking place in remote lands in distant past (lê 30). As the protagonist concludes, "They didn't ask questions. They didn't seem to want to know anything . . . They didn't remember me" (lê 30-31).

Instead of countering US forgetting by filling in the refugees' witness account of the Vietnam War, lê turns to interrogating the singular history of the glass animals. Along with the glass animals, the protagonist finds a glass disk containing a golden brown butterfly. Unlike the glass animals embodying the order to forget, the glass disk propels the protagonist to question how it is produced: "Though I turned the glass disk around and around, I could not find the place where the butterfly had flown in or where it could push its way out again" (lê 25). By posing the question of how the butterfly got in or out of the glass disk, the protagonist pushes us to ask what invisible hand that sealed the glass and naturalized it as a

foreclosed work. Concerned that the butterfly is trapped, the protagonist thinks she heard a rustling like "a whispered song" which she believes to be "the butterfly's way of speaking" (lê 25). Comparing the unresponsive glass animals with the butterfly crying for help, the protagonist decides that "it wasn't the butterfly but rather these glass animals that have no soul" (lê 31). Unlike the glass animals, the glass disk exposes the obscured process of making certain things valuable to be remembered. lê does not stop at representing the glass disk as the embodiment of critical memory but further interrogating the very constructedness of history. Determined to free the butterfly, the protagonist throws the disk on the wall but ends up smashing the glass animals, resulting in Mel asking them "to pack our things and get out" (lê 31). By shattering the glass animals with the glass disk, the scene exposes that both are reconstruction of the past rather than finished history. In questioning the naturalized frames making certain past valuable memory, lê thus carries out what Lisa Lowe terms a "history of the present," which is "not a historical reconstruction that explains or justifies our present, but a critical project that would both expose the constructedness of the past, and release the present from the dictates of that former construction" (*Intimacies* 136). By destroying the glass cabinet, the scene indicates that rather than filling in more refugee witness accounts of the war, we need to break away from the established methods of conceptualizing history.

The expulsion of the refugees by the Russells points to the hidden violence of US liberalism despite its claim for humanitarian inclusion. The violence of benevolence constantly surfaces in the protagonist's memories of her life in the US. For instance, during their stay at the Russells', the English Ba "[picked up] from the Americans during the war" does not enable the refugees to become equals with Americans. Employed as Mel's crew of house painters, the uncles are perplexed by why the walls are painted white, an unlucky color

in Vietnam. While Ba tries to translate Mel's answer "It's clean" (lê 10), the others still cannot understand. The protagonist reflects that despite Ba repeats the answer, his translation does not work because he does not have Mel's voice that "shines bright in your face like a flashlight aimed at your eyes when you're sleeping. It's a voice that doesn't explain, though it often says things in tones that make you wonder" (lê 10). In contrast, Ba's voice is "water moving through a reed pipe in the middle of a sad tune. And the sad voice is always asking and answering itself" (lê 10). In contrasting the voices, lê illustrates that learning English does not provide the refugees access to becoming American as the language does not make sense unless deployed by a subject of white supremacy. Ba's failure to translate Mel's message reveals that English is not for communication but a command for no questioning and only through mastering the command can one become American and subject of the language. Rather than approximating to American identity, Ba's knowledge about English marks him a permanent foreigner. Rather than delivering the command of white supremacy, Ba's voice evokes untranslatable diasporic memories as the protagonist narrates, "When I listen to it, I can see boats floating around in his head. Boats full of people trying to get somewhere" (lê 10). Not a voice delivering command, Ba's voice is water requiring listening to collective memories rather than comprehensible messages. In addition to depicting how white supremacy renders Ba's English incomprehensible, lê also contextualizes how histories of war and poverty deprive Ba's masculinity, rendering his Vietnamese equally incomprehensible. Growing up in the US, the protagonist remembers Ba becoming "prone to rages" and "sitting on the couch looking sad and broken" (lê 116, 117). Ba's domestic violence eventually results in two counselors' intervention. In response to their questioning, Ba "looked down at his hands" which the counselors understand to mean "he was taking

responsibility for his drunken rages" (lê 118). However, the protagonist interrupts the condescending interpretation by underlining that Ba "drew his palms together and apologized for all that his hands had not been able to do" and said "in Vietnamese, to anyone who could understand, there were things he had lost a grasp of" (lê 118). By refusing to portray Ba's gesture as acknowledgement of his violence, the protagonist highlights how Ba has become racialized and gendered as an incapacitated subject. As Espiritu points out, the scene "evinces a power struggle in which the feminist values of the American counselors are deemed universal while those of the powerless refugees are misrecognized—though not entirely silenced" ("Vietnamese" 94).

Memories of Ba turning into an incapacitated subject continues to haunt the protagonist, driving her to leave her parents. The grownup protagonist in the narrative present narrates her flight from home for fear of becoming like her father: "I would answer to names not my own and be ordered around like a child . . . Shame would crush me. I would turn away from the people I loved" (lê 116). The narrative present of the protagonist's runaway refuses the linear narrative of good refugees becoming US citizens. Instead, the protagonist's flight is interwoven with nightmares of Ba's departure and flashbacks of her inability to help Ba's struggles with trauma and resettlement in the US. She recalls that her runaway does not save her from Ba's helplessness. Receiving a call from Ba years after her runaway, the protagonist hear him asking for help in English and Vietnamese and yet she could "say nothing—in any language—to make him stop" (lê 122). However, the protagonist's following reflection contextualizes Ba's helplessness: "Between us now there hangs the familiar smoke of small rooms crowded with people larger than their situation. People who, feeling they have no recourse to change the circumstances of their lives, fold down, crumble into their own

shadows. This is what I saw my father do" (lê 122). In underlining how people like Ba are made helpless by their circumstances, the protagonist cautions against reading her flight as simply denial of Ba. She further contextualizes her flight in their displacement from Vietnam and becoming refugees: "I fly over the coastline of our town in Vietnam . . . We are waiting among the sleeping homeless for the Federal Building to open so we can apply for our 'papers' . . . I fly over Westinghouse Street and see the pink condominiums with their fenced-in swimming pools built after they kicked us out of our house and tore our block down" (lê 123). By situating Ba's helplessness in the Vietnam War and subjection in the US, the passage elucidates how Ba is made "small" by forced circumstances (lê 122). Furthermore, the protagonist illustrates how resettlement in the US does not free Ba but rather circumscribes him even during moments of pleasure. She recalls an episode where she witnesses Ba dancing at a party with "his hands down on either side of his hips and was moving them faster and faster, like the connecting rods of a locomotive getting ready to take off" (lê 123). Although the dance seems to liberate Ba from their dire circumstances, soon he "gulped air, and after a while it became the rhythmic hiccupping of someone who has been sobbing for hours" (lê 124). Looking through the window, the protagonist comments, "He looked small. I thought of the bones of birds" (lê 124). Depicting Ba as "bones of birds" (lê 124), lê illustrates how life in the US not only deprives Ba the freedom to move socially and physically but also renders him into relics displaying inability to fly.

lê further challenges the narrative of Americans rescuing Vietnamese refugees by exposing San Diego as a *militarized refuge* mutually constitutive of the production of refugees (*Body* 29). In the village of Linda Vista in San Diego, the protagonist and her family live in old Navy Housing bungalows built in the 1940s, which in the 1980s "house

Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees from the Vietnam War" (lê 88). Contextualizing their housing in US wars in Southeast Asia, the protagonist represents the refuge of their resettlement as inseparable from "the formative role that U.S. wars play in structuring the displacements, dispersions, and migrations of refugees to the United States and elsewhere" (*Body* 17). Moreover, in highlighting the presence of Cambodian and Laotian refugees, the protagonist indicates that the Vietnam War is a transnational war displacing people from varied Southeast Asian nations. As Viet Thanh Nguyen argues, framing the war in a binary frame between the US and Vietnam obscures "human losses, financial costs, and capital gains, as well as how the war also blazed through Cambodia and Laos, something both the Vietnamese and the Americans wish neither to acknowledge nor remember" (*Nothing* 7). The protagonist narrates that at school the role of the US in producing the exodus is erased by making the refugees racialized Other regardless of their different countries of origin. The protagonist remembers that the Navy Housing kids call the refugees Yang "because one year a bunch of Laotian kids with the last name Yang came to our school" (lê 89). In labeling all refugee kids as Yang, the Navy Housing kids forget that the US forged Laos as "the testing ground for counterinsurgency and nation-building programs that came of age in Vietnam, and many of the features that distinguished those later programs . . . first surfaced in Laos" (Jacobs 3).[60] Despite US deep military intervention in Laos, including the bombing campaign from 1964 to 1973, US presence in Laos has been obscured from US history and memory as "secret war" (Sisavath 103). Davorn Sisavath points out that tracing US-Laos relations has remained a challenging task as the declassified files are "heavily

[60] In *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (2012), Seth Jacobs notes that the Eisenhower and the following Kennedy administrations saw Laos as key to US anticommunist containment in Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Jacobs notes that Laos was "the only foreign country in the world where the United States paid 100 percent of the military budget" (4).

sanitized, and gaining access to classified materials is a difficult and time-consuming process" (104).[61] By foregrounding the obscured militarized histories of San Diego while highlighting the violence of renaming all refugee kids as Yang, the passage refuses to position the refugee as object of US rescue but as refugee who is simultaneously "a product of, bears witness to, and critiques imperialist and gendered racial violence" (*Ends* 6).

Ineradicable Bodies

lê interrupts the gendered representation of refugees as "small" and feminized bodies by depicting the refugee bodies in versatile shapes and a site for sexual exploration (lê 29). Yen Le Espiritu and Lan Duong point out that images of "third-world" suffering in Western media constitute "generic decontextualized horrors that elicit pity and sympathy, not discernment and assessment" and the images are highly gendered as spectacles of helpless women and children, whereby naturalizing women as victims of military violence (587). The gendered representation of refugee women serves to "infantilize and/or feminize refugees in relation to the new host society in which they find themselves" (Hyndman 453). In the novel, lê uses the protagonist's exploration of sexuality to challenge the representation of refugee women's bodies as spectacle of suffering. The protagonist begins exploring her body and sexual pleasure with a neighborhood boy in the kissing box built by the neighborhood kids in a summer. The scenes focus on depicting the protagonist's body interacting with the boy's body and detailing her body's reactions. The initial scene depicts the protagonist becoming aware

[61] In "The US Secret War in Laos: Constructing an Archive from Military Waste" (2019), Sisavath underlines that US interventions in Laos became covert through the control of media and concealing official records. Moreover, US had intentionally made its military interventions indirect as US assistance to Laos took "many forms, including replacing US troops with Hmong forces, placing covert aid programs under the exclusive control of the US ambassador, and using USAID as a facade for the military assistance advisory group" (105).

of her body's potentials for stimulating and receiving pleasure from other bodies. As the boy put his hand on her chest, the protagonist responds "Hey" but her voice does not "come out high like an alarm" as she expected but "came out low and quiet, with a lot of space around it" (lê 58). Gradually she rediscovers her body as she feels "the heat from his palm pass through my shirt" and further actively exploring the boy's body: "I closed my eyes and followed the goose bumps up his arm, my fingers slipping under his shirtsleeve to rest on his shoulder" (lê 58). By focusing on the protagonist's physical response, the passage shifts to the protagonist's narration of her body. Moreover, such narration refuses rendering her corporal experience into comprehensible words as the protagonist only articulates "Hey" in the scene (lê 58). The refusal of linguistic representation is furthered as the protagonist rejects visual representation of her body as she "closed [her] eyes" (lê 58). In so doing, readers are pushed to center on the protagonist physical experiences from her perspective rather as a consumer of images of refugee women's bodies.

In centering on the protagonist's exploration of her body and sexual pleasure, the passage interrupts the desire for representation of suffering feminized refugee bodies. Furthermore, by positioning the protagonist's body as a site for exploring sexual pleasure, lê underlines refugees as living bodies rather than dead bodies in Western media. The physical experience increases the protagonist's awareness of herself as a living being when she steps out of the box and "felt the sun warming my knees, my wrist, the side of my arm and my face" (lê 60). Instead of a spectacle of suffering, the protagonist body is reframed as a material method of remembering as she guides the boy's fingers across her face and imagines that "he was blind and learning, with his hand, what a face was. Here are lips, a nose, the bride of a nose, I imagined explaining to him" (lê 63). With her body, the protagonist teaches

the boy and readers how to remember her as a material living being rather than the "small heads, small arms" in the photos that reduce and forget refugee bodies (lê 29).

lê does not simply celebrate refugee bodies as bodies of pleasure. The protagonist's exploration of her body is grounded in her brother's drowned body in Vietnam, memory of which she "couldn't drive away" and which "lay just beyond reach, forming the shape of a distant shore" (lê 118). Memories of her brother return with water. We learn that a swimming pool is located in the courtyard of the building where the neighborhood kids often leaping off from the second floor. We also learn that Ba and Ma forbid the protagonist from playing near the pool for unexplained reasons even though Ma thinks "it wasn't the sea but it was nice to open the door and have some water" (lê 51). The pool is later filled with cement with a baby palm tree planted in the center after the landlord decides that the way the kids jumping into the water is "crazy" (lê 52). Ba and Ma evoke the multilayered associations with water as they argue. Upset by the drained pool, Ma asks Ba, "I open the door and what is there to see?" and insists she does not wat to see a "desert" (lê 54). Ma's demand is met with the family's silence as the protagonist narrates, "What was there to say?" (lê 54). Ba and Ma's argument reminds us the complex meanings of water to the Vietnamese refugees. On the one hand, as the epigraph at the beginning of the novel underscores, *nu'óc* is both nation and homeland in Vietnamese. Draining the pool for the Vietnamese refugees is thus a violent break from home. On the other hand, the family's silence on the significance of the pool to them points to the unspoken death of the brother. Water is what kills the protagonist's brother and a grave for the family to mourn and remember the body buried in Vietnam, away from where they resettle. Removing the pool denies the family's mourning and forces forgetting. However, the protagonist refuses the forced forgetting by remembering: "But what I

remembered most were the boys, flying. I remembered their bodies arcing through the air and plunging down. I remembered how their hands parted the water and how they disappeared, the last thing I would see were the pale soles of their feet" (lê 54-55). By turning to the boys' bodies, the protagonist highlights that memories overlapping with her brother's drowned body cannot be erased by the drained pool as her memories layer the pool and the bodies with more meanings. Like *nu'óc* stands for more than one meaning, via the family's memories the pool and the boys' bodies refer simultaneously to the family's life in the US and memories of death in Vietnam.

Memories of her brother does not stop haunting the protagonist even when the protagonist explores her body. In a scene where the protagonist challenges social surveillance on female body by taking her shirt off in one tower of the Jehovah's Witnesses castle and imagines how "if I had my way, I'd run around with my shirt off all the time and spend my days climbing trees and my nights sleeping in one of these towers" (lê 70-71). However, her imagination is stopped short when her friend remarks, "Upside down, you look like a boy. You look like the brother of . . ." (lê 71). With her name erased from the comment and her body identified as her brother's, the protagonist's exploration of her female body is interrupted by memories of her brother. While she tries to deny the existence of her brother, her denial simultaneously deprives her name and disavows her bodily existence. Denial of her brother's death further threatens to render the protagonist's body unrecognizable and her name unanswerable. The following scene depicts the protagonist on the way home when she suddenly feels her brother's body beside hers. The protagonist narrates, "I thought I felt my brother's breath upon me. This was not the warmth I'd felt earlier, but a chill now at the center of my spine" (lê 75). In contrast with the warmth she felt when she explores her body

and sexual pleasure, the brother's body alerts that the living refugee body is inseparable from memories of those who do not survive across the water. Furthermore, lê reminds that such memories cannot easily be articulated as Ma interrupts the protagonist's attempt to talk about her brother's ghostly presence with "Stop it" (lê 76). Silencing the memories does not enable forgetting but rather transforms memories of displacement into physical memory as the protagonist turns to her hands and "didn't recognize them" (lê 77). She describes, "The fingertips were wrinkled with cold, as if I'd been swimming for hours" (lê 77). Even though memories of her brother's death are not articulated in words, the protagonist's body becomes the material memories of the deceased. In carving collective memories of the dead and the displaced on the protagonist's body, lê reframes the refugee body as living memories without reducing it to a spectacle.

In addition to challenging the feminized refugee body, lê' foregrounds the material impact of US war in Vietnam by attending to the obscured dead bodies. Significantly, lê's representation also cautions against desire for witness account of the war by the Vietnamese refugees. Two scenes illustrate representation of bodies with critical distance. The first scene is the birth of the protagonist amidst the war. About to give birth, Ma remembers a story about a girl in a neighboring town killed during a napalm bombing. When found floating on the sea, the girl's body "glow, like a lantern" from the phosphorus from the napalm (lê 86). Rather than depicting the damaged body, Ma "built a canopy" for the girl in her mind and started crying, thinking of "these bodies stopped in mid-stride, on their way somewhere" (lê 86). By not detailing the body bombed by napalm and turning instead to an imaginary mourning, the passage alerts readers of the desire for witness account of damaged bodies of the war. Ma's mourning centers on Vietnamese dead while refusing the spectacle of public

commemoration. Moreover, in remembering the dead as "bodies stopped in mid-stride" (lê 86), Ma refuses to let the bodies disappear or rendered into bloodless numbers; rather, Ma's imagining underscores that the deceased are not simply dead bodies but lives and movements forced to be terminated in the midway.

The other scene representing refusal to erase bodies of the dead is the scene when Ba watches a news clip about a wildfire in Southern California and a flood in the middle of the country. The news clip shows a woman standing in a field of green grass pointing to the ground. The image haunts Ba and makes him sense that the woman was pointing to "bodies, unseen bodies, under the grass" (lê 152). Ba continues to reflect how the camera erases the bodies from the frame as he infers that the woman "directed the eye of the camera back to the grass, she kept crying because of what it could not see and what she could not stop seeing" (lê 152). Ba's reflection on the violence of media representation provokes his memories of "the bodies that floated through the rice paddies during the war" and wonders "All those badly buried bodies. What happened to such bodies?" (lê 157). By juxtaposing the erasure of bodies in the news of the disasters in the US with the erased Vietnamese bodies, lê gestures to how critical memories of the war in Vietnam may potentially shift one's way of viewing seemingly unrelated disasters. lê also cautions the critical positional differences between the erased bodies as Ba's wondering of the Vietnamese bodies points out that those bodies did not have the chance to be pointed to as the woman on the news does. Yet, such a space may offer initiate potential solidarity as Ba determines that he "would drive to wherever she was and offer her his help, his hands" (lê 157). In recognizing the shared vulnerability, the passage points to the potential for coalition built on refusal to forget Vietnamese refugee bodies.

Exceeding Refugee Narratives

While the war is represented as an enduring condition of the refugee characters' displacement and resettlement in the US, lê does not center on the war the overdetermined force. Rather, the war is depicted as an episode interweaving with the memories of survival. For instance, Ma's memories of Vietnam center on her love story with Ba and rebellion against patriarchal expectations of women. Despite taking place amidst the war, Ma's memories of early courtship with Ba begin with telling stories about "dreams about the end of war: foods she'd eat (a banquet table, mangoes piled to ceiling); songs she'd make up and sing, clapping her hands over her head and throwing her hair like a horse's mane; dances she'd dance, hopping from one foot to the other" (lê 80). In centering on Ma's imagining of life after the war, the passage defies confining refugee life in Vietnam solely to stories of the war. By imagining food and physical liberation, Ma performs practices of everyday survival that refuses making the war as the event marking the beginning and the end of her life stories. Such mundane resistance illustrates a form of "feminist refugee epistemology," which underlines "refugees' rich and complicated lives, the ways in which they enact their hopes, beliefs, and politics, even when their lives are militarized" (Espiritu and Duong 588). Furthermore, Ma's love story reconceptualizes the war not simply about destruction but also about breaking confinement of patriarchy. As the protagonist narrates, the encounter with Ba makes Ma no longer "the responsible favorite daughter or sister she was to her family . . . Ignoring the chores to be done at home, she rolled her pants up to her knees, stuck her bare feet in puddles, and learned to smoke a cigarette" (lê 80). Moreover, Ma began to attend to how the war changes the forest her father used to know as she wonders "what the forests were like before the American planes had come, flying low, raining something onto the trees that left

them bare and dying" (lê 81). Rather than focusing on the forest as aftermath of US bombing, Ma places the forest in her father's memories of the prewar days when "the smiling broadness of leaves, jungles thick in the tangle of rich soil" (lê 81). Furthermore, the forest becomes the place where Ma meets Ba in the dark and feels "his hand extending toward her, filling the space between them" (lê 81). In placing the forest in memories before and after US bombings and attending to pleasant memories of love, lê refuses reducing Vietnam and Vietnamese refugees to a signifier of war and death.

In addition to decentering the US from narratives of the war, lê also alerts readers of the desire for a comprehensive account of the war from Vietnamese perspective. While Ba has fought in the war, his life in Vietnam remains obscure and mediated by the protagonist's memories and imagining. From what she heard from Ma, Ba claims to be from a "semi-aristocratic northern family" (lê 83). The protagonist figures what Ba said "could have been a story" as there was "no one in the South to confirm the details of his life" (lê 83). The lack of confirmation of Ba's possible North Vietnamese identity points to the lack of North Vietnamese narratives of the war. Information about Ba's life remains as "mysterious and mundane" rumors and the only proof of his life before becoming the protagonist's father is a black-and-white photograph of him at sixteen, in which "what reveals him most is the will to give nothing away" (lê 103). The protagonist's imagination and memories make Ba a figure difficult for readers to read simply as witness of war or a potential North Vietnamese communist. Based on rumors of Ba's past, the protagonist imagines him to be a gangster "pointing a gun toward dark fields because it wasn't clear to me whom he would be shooting" (lê 103). The uncertainty of whom Ba is aiming at refuses to position him as North Vietnamese fighting against the US or South Vietnamese fighting against communism. For

the protagonist, memories of Ba are "always of his leaving" (lê 104). She recalls that Ba "was in the South Vietnamese army and was stationed either in the city or in the country but never near our coastal town" (lê 104). Mediated by the protagonist's memories, Ba becomes memories of absence rather than an access providing readers account of the war and neither is Ba depicted as pro-US South Vietnamese army. Moreover, lê points to the limits of remembering the US as the sole agent responsible for the atrocity by turning to the protagonist's memories of Ba after the war. At his son's death, Ba could not attend the funeral because he was held in the reeducation camp even though Ma appeals to the soldier "I know there was a war, but it is over now" (lê 136). The passage turns to the soldier, who narrates "A whole country has to be rebuilt. Does she expect everything to stop simply because she hadn't taken care to keep her own child from wandering too far into the water?" (lê 137). By highlighting postwar Vietnamese government's violence on Southern Vietnamese, lê points to how the patriarchal nationalism of Vietnamese state continues an "ethics of remembering one's own" predicated on "exclusion and forgetting of others" (*Nothing* 40).

lê further alerts readers' desire for an ethnic tale about Vietnamese refugee experiences by highlighting the difficulty of reading the first-persona narrative of the novel. The protagonist's first-person narrative does not give readers easy access to the family's trauma. For instance, in the chapter titled the same title of the novel, we first encounter traces of the word "gangster" in the protagonist's memories of the parents fights. Bereaved by the news of her parents' death, Ma tells Ba "not to touch her with his gangster hands" (lê 92). Furious, Ba punches the walls and yells, "Let me see the gangster!" (lê 93). The parents' fights do not give meaning to the term and such uncertainty furthers as the protagonist declares, "When I grow up I am going to be the gangster we are all looking for" (lê 93). By not revealing who

the "gangster" is, lê points to the difficulty of knowing the cause fracturing the family and of identifying someone accountable for their loss in Vietnam. In so doing, readers are cautioned against looking for the "gangster" as the title suggests and are directed to focus instead on how the loss conditions the domestic violence the refugee characters experience in the US. Furthermore, while depicting the trauma and violence the protagonist witnesses, the first-person narrative refuses to articulate their loss for the readers. In the same chapter, the protagonist recalls a sudden eviction forces the family to leave the apartment in Linda Vista in haste and Ma forgets to bring the only photograph she has of her parents. Returning to the demolished building the other day, the protagonist narrates, "There is not a trace of blood anywhere except here, in my throat, where I am telling you all this" (lê 99). In underlining that the violence of the scene comes from telling the story to "you" the supposed readers, the protagonist alerts the violence of expecting for first-hand account of refugees' trauma. Reading the protagonist's retelling is always already part of the violence.

The problematization of desire for an authentic refugee account emerges most strongly in the author's note attached at the end of the novel. In the note, lê recalls that her father incorrectly listed her name as Thúy—lê's older sister drowned at a refugee camp in Malaysia—on the paperwork when picked up by the US Navy. Keeping the name on her mother's insistence, lê describes she wore the name "like a borrowed garment, one in which my mother crowded two daughters, one dead and one living" (lê 160). Despite the similarity between lê's experience with the protagonist of the novel, lê cautions against reading the novel as an autobiography by underlining that she chose to publish under her full name all in lowercase, aware that "both Americans and Vietnamese may find fault with it" (lê 160). lê explains, "I had finally managed to break the name down, rebuild it and reclaim it as my

own" (lê 160). By highlighting her published name as an error in both languages, lê pushes readers to read the novel as a recreation that cannot be easily reduced to a representative account of Vietnamese refugee experiences. Through maintaining a critical distance of representation, lê leaves room for other differently situated narratives of displacement. As lê states in an interview, she did not want to write a memoir because "[displacement] in relation to [refugees who] come out of a war experience is present now. It's a huge human landscape. So many people are being moved through that landscape right now. I didn't want it to [focus] on me." (Johnson 23).

In this chapter, I have read how lê's novel offers a relational critique of the Vietnam War by foregrounding the obscured connections between US militarism in Asia and the Pacific. Through examining how the novel reimagines the displacement of Vietnamese refugees through the trope of water, I have shown that lê offers an alternative Vietnamese refugee narrative not centered on territorial belonging, thereby opening a space to account for intertwined experiences of US militarism and settler colonialism in Pacific Islands and other parts of Asia. In addition, I have shown that the novel counters the narrative of US humanitarian rescue of Vietnamese refugees by investigating how lê reveals the hidden violence of the US as a *militarized refuge* by problematizing photography of refugee subjects and highlighting refugee bodies as a site of sexual exploration and material memory of military violence (*Body* 29). Finally, I have shown that lê points out the violence of desiring for a witness account of the Vietnam War by foregrounding the difficulty of reading the novel's first-person narrative while refusing centering refugee war memories on US atrocity. By reimagining Vietnamese refugee narrative in the Pacific and refusing the genre of autobiography, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* illustrates that experience of

displacement is not exclusive to Vietnamese refugees. In so doing, lê gestures to a potential "politics of affinity" that takes into account "the resonances across these divergent histories and epistemologies" (*Ocean* 80).

Chapter Five

Asian America in Inter-Asian Frame: Reading Ku Yu-ling's *Our Stories* and *Return Home*

But I will say it's not just India that is pursuing greater engagement with East Asia and Southeast Asia . . . So if you look at India's Act East Policy, if you look at South Korea's New Southern Policy . . . if you look at Taiwan's new Southbound Policy, these partners in the region are all seeking to increase political, security, and economic ties, particularly with the ASEAN states. And that's in our interest.

—Alex N. Wong, "Briefing on The Indo-Pacific Strategy"

While Taiwan stands on the frontline of authoritarian expansion, our resilient economy and industrial supply chains remain a vital part of the regional ecosystem . . . The New Southbound Policy is at the center of Taiwan's own Indo-Pacific strategy. Through this policy, we are working to bolster our security and economic ties with partners across the region.

—Tsai Ing-wen, "President Tsai addresses opening of 2022 Yushan Forum"

In 2016, Taiwan witnessed a political change with Tsai Ing-wen's victory in the presidential election along with the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) controlling both the executive and legislative branches. Tsai's election created tensions in cross-Strait relations as China suspended cross-Strait exchanges in response to the new government's pro-independence position. To reduce Taiwan's economic dependence on China, the Tsai government introduced the New Southbound Policy with the aim to "facilitate regional prosperity through trade and investment partnerships, technological and medical cooperation, and educational and people-to-people exchanges, with countries in South and Southeast Asia, as well as Australia and New Zealand" (Office). The Southbound Policy targets eighteen

countries, with the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar, and India as the main targets due to the existing relations through trade and migrant workers. As Ping-Kuei Chen notes, although the Tsai government claimed that the policy aimed to diversify Taiwan's investment rather than excluding China, it was clear that the policy intended to divert Taiwan's economy and resources from China to Southeast Asia. Moreover, by stressing the policy's overlapped interests in free trade and "peaceful and secure regional order" with the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US (Glaser et al. 6), the Tsai government signals that the New Southbound Policy also intends to stabilize US-Taiwan relation through securing US economic and military interests in Asia and the Pacific. As Chen observes, by emphasizing unprovocative politics and people-to-people contacts, the policy works as a symbolic gesture showing the US that "Taiwan will create no surprise for the US, and its foreign policy is consistent with the US interests in Taiwan Strait" (835).

Although the Tsai government did not explicitly state that the policy operated substantially in the US' interests and emphasized instead the shared benefits between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries, the policy illustrates Taiwan's complicity with US imperialism by envisioning Southeast Asia as extensive market for Taiwan while actively maintaining Cold War containment of China. Such imperialist imagining of Southeast Asia builds on the previous Go South Policy during Lee Tung-hui and Chen Shui-bian administrations in the 1990s and 2000s.[62] As Kuan-Hsing Chen indicates, Taiwan's southward expansion signals a "Taiwanese imperial desire" that imposes neocolonial exploitation of Southeast Asia while maintaining US-Japan economic domination in Asia (18). While the Tsai government emphasizes that the New Southbound Policy differs from Go South Policy in terms of its

[62] For a comparison of Go South Policy and New Southbound Policy, see Tsun-tzu Kristy Hsu "A Review of Taiwan's Old and New Go South Policy: An Economic Perspective" (2017).

people-centered approach, it ignores the increase in Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan since the 1980s when the government turned to imported labor to resolve the shortage of cheap labor. In 1989, Taiwan began to import Southeast Asian migrant workers in response to corporate demands for cheap, low-skilled labor in the manufacturing sector. In 1992, Taiwan passed the Employment Service Act, which further introduced migrant workers in domestic work and caregiving industries. As of 2022, there were 728,081 Southeast Asian migrant workers working in manufacturing and service industries.[63] The workers are mainly from Vietnam (35%), Indonesia (34%), the Philippines (21%), and Thailand (9%).

Coming from countries that have experienced US wars and colonialism, Southeast Asian migrant workers' migration to Taiwan is deeply tied to uneven economic development conditioned by US Cold War interventions. Although Tsai distinguishes the New Southbound Policy from Go South Policy, both policies deploy the rhetoric of centering Taiwan's role in securing Asia Pacific against authoritarian China while ignoring how US hegemony confines inter-Asian relations to Cold War divisions. As Chien-Ting Lin points out, the US Cold War "restructured geopolitics in East Asia that fortified the national divisions of demarcated areas, and also reorganized the dominant understanding of the Cold War—a discourse that pits the purportedly oppositional knowledge production of democratic capitalism against social communism" (29). Situated in the afterlives of the Cold War in Asia, the erased link between Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan and US military interventions in the discourses of Taiwan's Southbound Policy points to the visible and invisible US presence in Asia.

This chapter explores the visible and invisible presence of the US in Asia by reading Ku

[63] Ministry of Labor, "Foreign Workers—The Number of Foreign Workers in Industry And Welfare" (產業與社福移工人數) (2022).

Yu-ling's creative nonfiction texts *Our Stories: Migration and Labour in Taiwan* (2008/2011) and *Return Home* (2014). Ku is a Taiwanese social activist and writer who has participated in the labor movements since the 1990s. She was the Executive Director of Taiwanese International Workers' Association and, at the time of writing, an assistant professor at Taipei National University of the Arts. Having witnessed Taiwan's lifting of martial law and the emergence of social movements, Ku describes writing as a social activist's duty to record the stories of those who were side-by-side with her in social movements.[64]

Published in 2008 in Mandarin and later translated into English in 2011 by Agnes Khoo, *Our Stories* is a three-part narrative in which Ku weaves together Filipino migrant workers' life stories, stories of Taiwanese blue-collar workers' migration from countryside to city, her memories of her parents' migration, and her experience of becoming a social activist in post-martial law Taiwan. The book has been well received by the Taiwanese public and has won several awards, including the Taipei Literature Award. The stories of the foreign workers' migration and the stories of Taiwanese workers' domestic and cross-strait movements, dating from the 1960s to the present, are interwoven with depictions of US presence in Taiwan. By illustrating US containment policies during the Cold War that transformed Taiwan and the Philippines into bases of US interventions in Asia, Ku's narrative shows that the stories of inter-Asian migrancy, cross-strait movements, and migration in Taiwan are interconnected with the Cold War in Asia. Significantly, the presence of the US in Asia is presented through figures' fragmentary understandings of the correlation between US imperialism, the Kuomintang (KMT) regime in Taiwan, and inter-Asian migrancy. Such fragmentary understandings are reinforced by the marginal figures—including migrant workers from other

[64] See Hsin-chieh Ho, "Social Activist Turned Author Shines Light on Migrant Laborers" (2005).

Southeast Asian countries, Chinese spouses, indigenous people, and sex workers—whose silence in the narrative prevents a simple reading of Ku's text as a transparent account of US imperialism.

Published in Mandarin in 2014, *Return Home* represents Vietnamese migrant workers' life stories as they return to Vietnam. The stories depict Vietnam's transition to a capitalist nation and the impact of increasing foreign investment from East Asian nations. Like Ku's first book, *Return Home* has gained recognition, winning the 2015 Book Prize at the Taipei International Book Exhibition. But unlike *Our Stories*, which foregrounds the US presence in Taiwan, *Return Home* does not highlight US interventions during the Cold War.[65] Instead, it portrays the post-Cold War generation's aspirations to middle class status and their conceptions of Taiwan as a figure of modernity. In addition to stories of Vietnamese workers' migration to Taiwan, Ku also depicts stories of movements to China, migrant workers becoming social activists in Vietnam, and injured workers becoming social workers at anti-trafficking NGOs in Vietnam. Such stories present a post- Cold War Vietnam that alter the common images of Vietnam as a site ravaged by US imperialism.

By examining how Ku interweaves Southeast migrant workers and Taiwanese workers' life stories by reckoning with US empire in Asia and its effects on inter-Asian relations, I argue that *Our Stories* and *Return Home* can be critical texts for Asian American studies to reexamine the field's national ontology. In "The Trans-Pacific Migrant and Area Studies"

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[65] US interventions in Vietnam from the 1950s to 1975 had caused internal and external Vietnamese migration. East Asian countries such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan—which hosted (and, in the latter two cases, still host) military bases for US operations—were also involved in the Vietnam War and had economically benefitted from the war. The East Asian nations' economic interests continued after the war as they returned to Vietnam in the 1980s through foreign investment. Since the late 1980s, Vietnam began to export labor and East Asian countries became the major receiving countries of Vietnamese migrant workers in the 1990s.

(2012), Lisa Lowe reconceives the post-1965 transpacific Asian migrants as a figure that "disrupts disciplinary practices for the study of 'Asia,' 'America,' and even the 'Asian American' that emerged in US universities since the 1970s." (71). As Lowe indicates, "To the extent that this new object exceeds the contours of the earlier paradigms, it may force a shift in the methods and objects of Asian Studies, American Studies, and Asian American Studies, all of which furnished specific knowledges for the US university and thus contributed to a US nationalist ontology" (71). Lowe thus cautions against the Americanization of Asian American studies, urging scholars to not solely attend to racial formation within the US but to "with an understanding of the multiple contexts of colonialism and its various extensions within the uneven development of neocolonial capitalism, in order to inquire into the significance of the Asian migrant within local situations and material conditions" (69). Building on Lowe's critique, I argue that Ku's depiction of inter-Asian migration situated in the shifts of US presence in postwar Taiwan, the Philippines, and Vietnam enables a relational historical understanding of Asia's postwar development without recentering US empire.

Inter-Asian Imaginings and Alternative Times in *Our Stories*

Our Stories is set in the Philippines and Taiwan's interconnected histories that are obscured by a US-centric understanding of the Cold War. Philippine labor migration to Taiwan can be traced to the country's colonial experiences and US empire in Asia. To understand how the Philippines became a "labor brokerage state" (Rodriguez x), one has to attend to US colonial legacies in the nation. Following its annexation of the Philippines in 1898, the US secured its colonial rule by co-opting the local landowners, who were also the economic elites during Spanish colonial period (1521-1898). This elite class became an oligarchy that "took

advantage of its independent base of power, and came to exercise a powerful—yet particularistic—control over elements of the state apparatus through a spoils system that was already well entrenched at the national level early in the [twentieth] century" (de Dios et al. 46). Benefiting from US colonialism, the oligarchy has had lasting effects on the Philippines even after the nation's independence in 1946. The aftermath of the Philippine-American War (1899-1902) undermined the nation's economy and drove its population abroad in search of jobs. According to Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, during American colonial rule, the US implemented several programs, such as the *pensionado* program, which promoted the American educational system and job training that fulfilled the demand for labor in the US. Such attempts to Americanize the Philippine population continued after the colonial period through programs like the US Exchange Visitor Program, which was established in 1948 and "aimed at serving U.S. Cold War ideological aims by providing participants from abroad with the opportunity to work and study in U.S. institutions while also receiving a monthly stipend" (7). Through such programs a mass of Filipinos migrated to the US and laid the basis for the contemporary labor export industry in the Philippines.

Philippine labor migration is embedded in the interests of US colonialisms and the successive Philippine regimes. According to Nicole Constable, Filipino migration can be chronologized into three periods. The first period (1906-1934) witnessed Filipino migration to plantations in Hawai'i and agriculture on the US mainland. From 1946 to the late 1960s, a mass of Filipinos migrated to the US as skilled professionals or as "members of the U.S. armed forces or relatives of earlier immigrants" (32). In the 1970s, President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law and promoted a labor export policy that expanded Filipino

migration worldwide.[66] Backed by the US, the Marcos government adopted an export-oriented economic program and advocated free trade, both of which served the US' interests and positioned the Philippines as "a bulwark against communism in the region" (Rodriguez 11). Yet, the economy continued to deteriorate in the 1980s, driving the Marcos government to depend on IMF loans, whose neoliberal programs further undermined the Philippine economy. Rather than solving the problem of unemployment, the Marcos administration "sought to capitalize on existing out-migration while also expanding it given new forms of labor demand globally because remittances migrants sent back to the Philippines proved to be economically beneficial" (Rodriguez 12). Rooted in US interventions in Asia and actively promoted by the Philippine state, the migrant labor system has become "an important means through which the Philippine state contained the social dislocations that neoliberal economic development policies engender" (Rodriguez 16).

Not unlike the Philippines, Taiwan's modernization and economic programs are deeply intertwined with US strategic interests during the Cold War. During the US aid period (1951-1965), the US supported the KMT regime on Taiwan through economic and military funding so as to secure its Cold War containment policies in Asia. With US support, the KMT government was able to attain political legitimacy in Taiwan despite resistance from the Taiwanese population, as seen from the bloody suppression of the February 28th Incident in 1947. The KMT government imposed Chinese nationalism through several programs, which included enforcing Mandarin Chinese as the official language despite the fact that Taiwanese

[66] Regarding the third period, Rodriguez argues that this mass migration is a lasting consequence of US colonialism and its subsequent neocolonialism, as the US sustained its control over the Philippines through military bases and provisions in the Philippine constitution.

and Japanese were the primary languages spoken in Taiwan at the time.[67] With the threat of communist invasion and recovering the mainland as justification, Chiang Kai-shek declared martial law (1949-1987), during which political activities were forbidden and media were censored.[68] In addition to suppressing Taiwanese uprisings, the KMT dictatorship also excluded Taiwanese from positions in the government. Obstructed from upward mobility through official positions and haunted by memories of bloody suppressions, the Taiwanese population refrained from political participation and concentrated on doing business—a channeled desire that improved Taiwan's economy without threatening the KMT dictatorship.[69] In short, rather than being a particular case of Asian authoritarianism, the development of KMT rule of Taiwan is deeply connected with US interventions and interests in Asia.

By supporting the KMT dictatorship, the US consolidated its hegemony in Asia while economically benefitting from intervening in Taiwan's industrial policies. In the 1950s, the KMT implemented land reforms, which liquidated the holdings of landowners and made farmers the source of cheap labor for the subsequent industrialization.[70] As Hill Gates

[67] In "Ethnicity and Social Class" (1981), Hill Gates points out that the official language policy was "a prime determinant in creating a society in which class and ethnic status coincide by claiming superiority for a tongue not native to the majority of the population" (265).

[68] For an overview of Taiwan's martial law, see Richard C. Kagan, "Martial Law in Taiwan" (1982).

[69] In "Taiwan's Political Transition and Social Movements" (1989), Jeng-hwan Wang indicates that US support secured the KMT's international position and justified the regime's authoritarian rule in Taiwan. Wang writes, "US support enabled the KMT to represent China on an international level and imposed authoritarian rule on a domestic level (US political and military aid as mentioned above). The KMT was thus able to suppress dissidents and exclude local factions from the central government. With US support for its international representation as 'China,' the KMT was able to legitimate its policies of political exclusion in Taiwan" (89-90). Translation mine. The original text reads: 美國的支持，不只解除其生存危機，並能對外代表中國，對內採威權統治（美國在政策與軍事上的支持，正如上述），將不合作的勢力剷除，並將地方勢力收編於地方的政治與經濟層次，而排擠於中央層次之外。在外有美國支持，又能代表"中國"的情況下，國民黨政府仍能合理化它對臺灣社會的政治排擠（political exclusion）與政治作為的正當性。」(89-90)

[70] Regarding Taiwan's land reforms, Gates observes that they were impelled by the 1949 immigrants from the mainland and "pressure from the United States" (*Chinese* 50). Nick Cullather also indicates that American criticism of Taiwan's lack of liberalization urged the KMT state to implement the "Land to the Tiller" program. Cullather adds that the reform also functioned as the KMT state's "power grab" (17).

observes, “The land reform secured Nationalist rule in Taiwan both by undercutting the power of landlords and by ensuring support from the much larger group of new owner-operators” (*Chinese* 51). Through the Agency for International Development (AID) and its joint institutions such as the Council on US Aid, US officials exerted pressure on the KMT state to adopt an import-substitution industrialization strategy and develop light industry. In the Cold War’s scenario, Taiwan’s improved investment climate served as a symbol “evolved from freedom’s embattled garrison to living proof of the superiority of a noncommunist route to relatively egalitarian prosperity” (Gold 124).

In the 1960s, Taiwan adopted an export-oriented strategy and established the first export processing zones in Asia. During this period, Taiwan was characterized as an economic miracle due to its fast-growing economy. While the US promoted Taiwan’s success as a universal outcome of a free market economy, it rigorously supported Taiwan’s state-oriented policies for immediate economic goals instead of waiting for Taiwan’s capitalist development.[71] With its cheap and educated labor, who were forbidden to strike during martial law, Taiwan entered the global division of labor by attracting foreign investment mainly from Japan and the US. Taiwan’s low labor costs pumped Japan’s postwar economy as Japanese low-price products “flooded American markets, sending American manufacturers scampering abroad in search of production sites with costs so low that they could compete with the Japanese in the U.S. market” (Gold 79). As Thomas B. Gold notes, Taiwan became “a repository for industrial sectors no longer viable for the United States or Japan” (81). The

[71] In “Fuel for the Good Dragon: The United States and Industrial Policy in Taiwan, 1950-1965” (1996), Nick Cullather points out, “Aid officials saw the Nationalists’ preference for statist solutions not as a cultural characteristic but as a reasonable response to political and economic circumstances: the absence of entrepreneurs, the needs of the military, the shortage of export revenue. Instead of waiting for the cascades of capitalist development to reach Taiwan, the aid mission made its own waves” (24-25)

development programs promoted by the US thereby turned Taiwan into a source of cheap labor and sustained Japan's neocolonial ties with Taiwan.[72] Equally importantly, Taiwan's economy was boosted by American wars in Asia. As Gold observes, "American purchase of agricultural and industrial commodities, use of military facilities and depots for repair of equipment, designation of Taiwan as a destination for rest and recreation, contract work for and in Vietnam, etc., pumped vast amounts of foreign currency into the Taiwan economy. (86-87).

Taiwan's economic boom secured the legitimacy of the KMT regime and gave rise to a class of Taiwanese economic elites. However, the emergence of a Taiwanese bourgeoisie did not challenge the state's oppression of the working class because of their common interests with the government. Class thus became a significant dividing line of Taiwanese society and aspirations for economic growth outweighed the desire for political reformation, at least at the time.[73] Regarding the shift in dividing lines in Taiwan, Gates notes that often overlooked factors were "U.S. financial, military, and industrial relations in Taiwan" because the relations were "complicated and often secretive ("Ethnicity and Class" 272). In the 1970s and 1980s, with the eventual lifting of martial law, the KMT administration faced increasing resistance from social movements. However, the overall class-based political exclusion

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[72] In terms of US economic gains from Taiwan's industrialization, Peter Chen-main Wang notes, "Because of growing labor costs in their domestic markets, American and Japanese enterprises went overseas to seek less expensive labor" (331).

[73] Gold indicates that Taiwan in the 1960s experienced "the bifurcation of the economy from the polity" (90). He adds that the KMT regime "increasingly based its legitimacy on its ability to promote economic growth and, succeeding at it, created a commonality of interests with the new capitalist class, which tacitly agreed not to translate economic muscle into political activity" (90). Gates also argues that class rather than ethnicity became the main division of Taiwanese society during this period. Significantly, she reminds us that one of the reasons for this change is "Taiwan's peculiar relationship with the United States" ("Ethnicity and Class" 271-72).

remained unchallenged as the KMT allied with Taiwanese capitalists, who did not represent working-class interests.[74]

Instead of improving labor conditions, Taiwan legalized importation of foreign workers in 1989 in response to the rising labor costs. In 1992, the government passed the Employment Service Law, which regulates foreign workers and their recruitment. The introduction of foreign labor, however, was not simply for economic needs but also related to Taiwan's political aims.[75] Facing a crisis of political isolation as an increasing number of nations terminated diplomatic relations with the KMT regime on Taiwan in the 1970s, Taiwan adopted a form of economic diplomacy to secure its international position. Targeting ASEAN member states such as the Philippines, Taiwan's selective introduction of foreign labor sought to substitute economic ties for official diplomacy. Driven by an economy ravaged by US colonialism and neocolonialism, Filipino workers became one of Taiwan's major sources of cheap labor.

It is in within the contexts of Taiwan and the Philippines' shared yet nonidentical historical connections with the US that Ku's *Our Stories* interweaves the life stories of Filipino migrant workers and the Taiwanese. Such overlapping histories are foregrounded in Ku's description of Zhongshan North Road. Through Shu-hua (the main Filipina character Meriam's Taiwanese mother-in-law) and her story of migration from Taiwan's countryside to

[74] In "The State, Capital, and Taiwan's Political Transition" (1993), Jeng-hwan Wang argues that in the post-martial law era the state and the capitalists formed a neo-authoritarian regime. See 151-53.
[75] In *Global Cinderellas* (2006), Pei-chia Lan notes that Taiwan's legalization of foreign labor was "foreign labor diplomacy" and "a turning point in border control—total exclusion became limited and regulated inclusion" (39). Putting forward a similar view, Yen-Fen Tseng (2004) indicates that Taiwan has used Southeast Asian migrant workers as a means of diplomacy. She further contends that Taiwan's policies toward migrant workers express a form of "economic nationalism" (17).

Taipei for better-paid work, Ku's narrative of Zhongshan North Road interweaves the histories of US interventions in Asia:

> In the following ten years [in the 1970s], the Vietnam War rendered Taiwan like the Philippines, as key military bases for the invading American army. Here, the US army got its much-needed back-up services, such as the refueling and re-servicing of their aircrafts and weaponry, not to mention that Taiwan also quickly became a paradise for American GI's rest and recreation. Sex tourism and consumerism flourished with American dollars.
>
> Zhongshan North Road became even more decadent, seductive and cosmopolitan. Shuangcheng Street was full of American-style bars and restaurants. Sexy and petite bar hostesses with fashionable hairdos got from the New Capital Salon of curls and perms could be seen in the arms of gigantic American soldiers, who had just temporarily escaped the hostile and dangerous Vietnamese tropical rainforests to Taiwan for rest and recuperation. (*Our Stories* 26).

In Shu-hua's story, Zhongshan North Road embodies Taipei's alluring modernity and is a place full of her memories of dating her husband Jiu-xiong. By inserting traces of US imperialism underlying the new forms of prosperity in Shu-hua's story, Ku renders the road as a time-space where Taiwan and the Philippines' common histories converge.

By interweaving histories of Zhongshan North Road with Shu-hua's story, Ku foregrounds the less explicit effects of US presence, which not only induced Asian migration

to the US but also boosted the seductive prosperity of Asian sites such as Taipei, attracting working-class subjects such as Shu-hua to the city. As Amie Parry has pointed out:

> The aura of this road . . . is created by the same histories that determined that these subjects would not be emigrants nor would they become Asian Americans, yet their own migrations and displacements along with the larger movements that shaped the localities of Taipei such as Zhongshan North Road are overdetermined by the some of the same forces that brought many immigrants from Asia to the US in the last half of the twentieth century. ("Inter-Asian Migratory Roads" 179- 80)

Importantly, the reference to the Philippines' shared histories with Taiwan during the Cold War challenges a US-centric understanding of US interventions in Asia. Rather than conceiving the Cold War in Asia as a series of wars between the US and separate Asian nations, Ku's narrative uncovers how Asian sites such as Taiwan and the Philippines, while not directly ravaged by the American war in Vietnam, were involved in and benefited from a transpacific division of labor that supported US imperialism. Reconceived in this way, Taiwan and the Philippines become each other's potential reference points to reckon with the otherwise obscured US presence in Asia.

As Parry suggests, Ku's rendering gestures to an alternative conceptualization of Asian America, which does not solely refer to the histories of Asian immigrants to the US but further indicates that US imperialism is a critical historical force intertwined with movements within Asia. Ku's narrative, however, does not only historicize the mesmerizing Zhongshan North Road but also juxtaposes the road with the development of Junxing Street—an

industrial zone in what is now called New Taipei City, once full of Taiwanese workers from the countryside and later replaced by foreign workers like Meriam in the 1990s:

> Year after year, during the "Little Dragons" era (when Taiwan was hailed as one of the four economic miracles in Asia), some of those who lived and worked in Junxing Street did manage to upgrade themselves and moved into the newly-built surrounding neighbourhoods . . . Industrialization gave way to the up and coming service and financial sectors that were then prospering. The latter began to congregate around the city centre and along the main road nearby, pushing the Junxing Street neighbourhood further into the margins, as it became entirely an industrial zone. (*Our Stories* 5-6)

Parallel with the description of the "mesmerising aura" of Zhongshan North Road in the 1960s and 1970s (*Our Stories* 23), Junxing Street shared the profits of Taiwan's economic boom, which was in part made possible by the ravaging of other Asian sites. More importantly, the parallel of Taiwanese workers' migration to Junxing Street and the appearance of foreign workers, who are described as "a new breed of city migrants" (*Our Stories* 6), highlights their shared experiences as migrants in the city. As Parry observes, what makes Ku's rendering of such shared experiences striking is "its power to use multiple narratives of movement and labor to unsettle assumptions about what constitutes each of these terms in the first place, terms like foreign, Taiwanese, migrant and domestic" ("Inter-Asian Migratory Roads" 183). Connected to a larger context of the Cold War and Taiwan's multi-layered colonial histories, labor migration within Taiwan and the foreign workers' inter-Asian movements appear to be more intertwined than distinct.

In addition to foregrounding shared labor migration histories between Taiwanese and Philippine migrant workers, Ku also indicates how Philippine Indigenous migrants reveal the settler colonial violence in Taiwan and the Philippines. In the second part "Song of Wanderers," Ku introduces Vina, a Filipina worker belonging to the Ifugao Indigenous community in Luzon by contextualizing her migration to Taiwan in the settler colonial histories of the Philippines. Although Vina wishes to go to college, the poverty of her family, exacerbated by having to provide for nine children forces Vina to become a migrant worker in Taiwan. Ku underlines that the poverty of Vina's village is a consequence of structural oppression of the Philippine settler state:

> They were poor when Ferdinand Marcos was in power, they were still poor when Cory Aquino came to power, they remained poor when Ramos replaced Cory and was himself replaced by Estrada. The ruling elite have changed hands several times but this did not change the government's policy of confiscating the land of the indigenous people and exploiting them; the blatant robbery of the people legitimised by political power has remained regardless of party differences . . . The so-called political democracy in the Philippines has rarely benefitted the poor. (*Our Stories* 136-37)

By placing the village's poverty in the consistent exploitation of Indigenous people and lands by the successive administrations, Ku illustrates that the destitution forcing Vina's migration is not only caused by Spanish and US colonization but also by the Philippine settler colonial state. Situating Vina's migration in the longer history of settler colonialism, Ku shows that the violence and exploitation that Indigenous Filipinas like Vina experience is part of settler

colonialism as "a structure, not an event," in Patrick Wolfe's words (71). Under the intersected colonialisms by Western colonizers and the Philippine settler state, Vina's life story questions the postcolonial democracy and sovereignty of the Philippines.[76] As Yến Lê Espiritu and J. A. Ruanto-Ramirez point out, "Making visible the Philippines' status as a settler colonial nation illumines Indigenous histories, cultures, and losses that have often been collapsed into a unified Philippine 'postcolonial' national identity" (130).

Significantly, Ku does not depict Vina simply as a victim of the Philippine settler state. Rather, Ku further places Vina's political activism in an inter-Asian frame of the Philippines and Taiwan's shared experience of martial law and Indigenous movements in the Philippines. In tracing Vina's organization of protest in Taiwan against the Arroyo government's killings of political dissidents, Ku relates some key historical events shaping Vina's life in the Philippines such as the Marcos regime and the assassination of Aquino, with her own memories of watching the news in Taiwan during the martial law era. Ku recalls watching the news of Aquino's assassination and the following protests:

> I was only a secondary school student then and Taiwan was also under martial law, like the Philippines. I did not understand the meaning and significance of a public demonstration. I could not understand why the silent mourning of the public funeral of our own dictator, General Chiang Kai Shek, was so different from the funeral of Aquino in the Philippines. (*Our Stories* 173-74)

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[76] In "Frontier polities and imaginaries: the reproduction of settler colonial space in the Southern Philippines" (2017), Christopher John Chanco examines the evolution of southwestern Mindanao as a frontier space and stresses the importance of analyzing how postcolonial state space such as the Philippines perpetuates settler colonialism through sovereignty. Chanco points out, "The ultimate goal of American authorities was always the formation of a single Philippine nation-state, that is, the incorporation of all other nations into a settler colonial state space" (123).

Ku's memory of her confusion at the protests in the Philippines indicates how the repression of social movements by the US-backed KMT regime obstructs Taiwanese from seeing that they share the experience of US-backed dictatorship with the Philippines. Ku further reflects on the lack of knowledge about such inter-Asian historical linkages:

> The Philippines and Taiwan share many things in common: we are both located in Asia, both have experienced the Second World War and have been recipients of American aid after the war, both have had US military bases on our soil at different times and for different lengths of time. Even so, we remain unfamiliar with each other . . . We both look only towards the USA and do not see each other. (*Our Stories* 174).

By foregrounding how US hegemony obstructs Taiwan and the Philippines from grasping their shared positions enabling US military interventions in Asia, Ku highlights that US Cold War division is a crucial force producing her difficulty with comprehending the protests in the Philippines at the time. Through rendering Asian nations such as Taiwan and the Philippines into US military bases, US military empire sustains its control of Asia and the Pacific by limiting inter-Asian relations to bilateral relations serving US strategic interests. Ku thus elucidates how the US is rendered into an invisible lens through which Taiwan comprehends international events without reflecting on its own role in sustaining US hegemony as well as its shared subordinate position with neighboring Asian nations.

In addition to exposing US hegemony, Ku further shows how Vina's experiences of Indigenous movements in the Cordillera Region inspire her activism in Taiwan. Ku reminds the reader that Aquino is not the only politician assassinated, as the Philippine state has long

been repressing Indigenous movements. Ku traces Vina's politicization to the Indigenous movement against the building of the Chico River Hydroelectric Dam in 1974 and the establishment of the Cordillera Day in memory of Macliing Dulag, the chief of the Cordillera people, who in 1980 "refused to be bribed by the government and was promptly assassinated, before Aquino" (*Our Stories* 175).[77] Ku narrates that Vina became politicized after attending the annual gathering on Cordillera Day at the age of thirteen. Vina recalls that her father warned her about the danger of participating in social movements: "She knew her father had a strong sense of social justice and that he was aware the indigenous peoples of the Philippines have long been exploited and oppressed . . . Her father had no choice but to join the government-initiated para-military unit when he was not farming . . . This divide-and-rule tactic of the government had succeeded in planting distrust among the people and created very serious rifts within the indigenous communities" (*Our Stories* 176). Despite the oppression, Ku underlines that Vina's inter-Asian migration furthers her activism as the organization of migrant workers in Taiwan encourages her to organize a public funeral service in Taiwan for those killed by the Arroyo government: "Vina and her compatriots remained very concerned about the political upheavals that are ongoing in their country . . . Her Taiwanese sojourn has also sensitized her to prejudices, discrimination and racism in the

[77] The poverty of the Cordillera region is a result of enduring colonial violence against Indigenous people. In "The Cordillera Experience" (2001), Joan Carling traces the plunder of Indigenous resources to US colonial industries and commercial agriculture that destroyed environment and food security as well as creating gendered labor inequality. The postcolonial Philippine government further exploited the Cordillera region in the name of national development to "hide the motive of the ruling elite and foreign capitalists to have access and gain from the plunder of the indigenous peoples resources" (Carling). In the 1980s and 1990s, Aquino government committed massive human rights violations in suppressing Cordillera movement against the Chico dams project. The Total War Policy (1990-1992) intensified military operations in Cordillera region, targeting rebels. In "Extreme Poverty and Survival: Cordillera Indigenous Peoples as Migration Workers" (2007), Flora Belinan indicates that poverty pushes Indigenous people of Cordillera to seek jobs in urban centers or become overseas Filipino workers. Belinan underlines that poverty of the Cordillera region has specific history of national oppression on Indigenous people. Belinan argues that the historical repression results in "a process of ethnocide, with a tendency towards the rapid disintegration of indigenous culture and a weakening of the tight social fabric of the indigenous communities" (33).

Taiwanese society . . . Living and working as a migrant worker has opened up a whole new world for her" (*Our Stories* 176). Through contextualizing Vina's activism in settler colonialism in the Philippines and exploitation and racism in Taiwan, Ku indicates that inter-Asian migrants like Vina reveal Taiwan and the Philippines as settler racist states while not overlooking the US as a critical force supporting the violence of both nations.

Vina's experiences of intersected forms of violence also offer an important transnational critique of settler colonialism in Taiwan. In depicting the impact of the dam on the Cordillera people, Ku describes: "For this particular dam project for example, the ancestral land of the indigenous people would be flooded and the Cordillera people would be forced to migrate into the cities or resettlement areas where they would have to get used to living in concrete and cement buildings from then on" (*Our Stories* 174). Importantly, Ku underlines that settler colonial violence is not unique to the Philippines. In the first part "We/Us," readers learn that the lift martial law enabled social movements in Taiwan but the structural violence against the marginalized continued:

> Resistances and turmoil shook Taiwanese society. From time to time, undercurrents emerged and surged ashore unexpectedly: Mountain tribes became known as 'indigenous peoples.' From then on, we were all told to use only politically correct language . . . Nineteen year-old Tang Ying-shen from the Tsou tribe murdered his employer and family. He was executed by firing squad straightaway. Twenty years later, the same kind of exploitation was inflicted upon migrant workers. Like Tang, a migrant caregiver whose passport was confiscated by her employer, was forced to

> work round the clock and was not given even a day of rest. She too, finally killed her employer . . . and then martial law was lifted in Taiwan. (*Our Stories* 75).

In highlighting the shared structural exploitation Tang and the migrant worker experience, Ku elucidates that the violence Southeast Asian migrant workers face conversely interrogates Taiwan's "settler-colonial unconscious" (Hirano et al. 225). Executed in 1987, Tang committed murder because of the long-working hour at the laundry and unreasonable salary reductions. Although Tang expressed his wish to quit, the employer confiscated his ID in the name of paying his brokerage fee.[78] Tang's migration from the tribe to the city is rooted in post-WWII dispossession of Indigenous people. In the 1960s and 1970s, the decline of agriculture and the expansion of manufacturing sector destroyed the Indigenous economy with market economy.[79] Indebted and forced to sell their lands, Indigenous people were displaced and became low-paid urban labor. By linking exploitation of migrant workers with Taiwan's settler colonialism, Ku on the one hand indicates that the multiculturalism promoted by post-martial law Taiwan government does not benefit Indigenous people but rather serves as "part of an effective strategy of localization that allowed the KMT to stay in power even after the transition to multiparty democracy" (Friedman 80). In so doing, Ku reveals that settler colonialism continues in Taiwan's postcolonial nation-building. As Arif Dirlik underlines, Taiwan is a "land colonialisms made" (1). On the other hand, in juxtaposing Tang with Southeast migrant workers, Ku also elucidates that Taiwan's ongoing settler colonialism evolves and imposes violence on non-Indigenous subjects. Putting

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[78] For a detailed report of Tang's case, see Hung-Chih Kuan, Unfilial Son Tang Ing-shen." (不肖兒湯英伸) (1986).

[79] See Tomonori Sugimoto, "Urban Settler Colonialism: Policing and Displacing Indigeneity in Taipei, Taiwan." (2019) and Heng-Chan Ku, "Indigenous Youth's Scream and Frustration in the 1970s" (年代原住民青年的吶喊與頓挫) (2019).

Taiwan's settler colonialism in an inter-Asian frame, Ku points to a way to address the violence shared by migrant settlers and Indigenous people.

While the stories in Ku's text are connected through US presence in Asia, the stories do not generate a clear understanding of US imperialism. For instance, although Shu-hua was present in Taiwan during the Cold War, her stories do not provide a clear account of the effects of US imperialism on Asia. Instead, her stories represent the difficulty of knowing Taiwan's historical linkages with other Asian sites:

> Shu-hua, like many Taiwanese of her generation, who lived precisely at this historical juncture of the Cold War, only knew they should work doubly hard for their livelihood, save as much as they could earn, so as to leave poverty behind them. Few among them realized of course, that the Philippines, which shared a similar fate to Taiwan as an American military outpost in the Pacific, was similarly locked within the global politics of Capitalism versus Communism. (*Our Stories* 27)

The lack of an effective reckoning with US presence in Asia is crucial because it refrains from rendering the subjects of the stories as native informants who can uncover the histories of Taiwan and the Philippines under the Cold War. Equally important is that the passage quoted above does not compare Taiwan's and the Philippines' views on the Cold War for a better understanding of US imperialism. Rather, it emphasizes Taiwan's and the Philippines' at times overlooked shared fate. As Parry argues, "[T]he tracing of US imperialism is not carried out so much in order to better understand Taiwan's historical relation to the US but rather to acknowledge a point of commonality between Taiwan and the Philippines, offering

an important revision to an East-West comparative project, even a critical one" ("Inter-Asian Migratory Roads" 183). By complicating an East-West comparison of the Cold War, Ku's narrative presents an alternative way to conceive Asia—one not divided into disparate nations but interconnected by colonial and imperial histories.

Similarly, while the life stories narrated in *Our Stories* contain memories of the KMT's authoritarian policies (which were justified by the Cold War containment policies), the subjects do not articulate full knowledge about what they have experienced. For example, Ku's Taiwanese mother, who has experienced Taiwan's transition from Japanese colonial rule to the KMT, remembers those days as fragmentary moments:

> All those epic historical changes seemed rather insignificant to my mother; they were relegated as hearsays in her narration of her childhood. She would talk about them in bits and pieces like after-thoughts, "When the Japanese were defeated and had to leave Taiwan, I heard that some of the more daring folks in our village burgled their homes, as a way of getting back at the colonisers." Or she would recount the haunting episode of a Mainlander teacher, who used to buy chickens from her, mysteriously taken away by the military police in the middle of the night and never seen again. This occurred a few years after the KMT landed in Taiwan. (*Our Stories* 69)

Although Ku's mother had lived through the Japanese colonial era and the subsequent KMT regime, her story does not offer full knowledge about the historical events of those periods. Her fragmentary memories do not serve as an accurate account of Taiwan's colonial histories or the effects of US anticommunist campaigns in Asia. Rather, her indirect information

gained from "hearsays" and fragmentary reflection leaves space for the impossibility of restoring the past (*Our Stories* 69). In short, Ku's mother's story provides an alternative form of oral history which acknowledges the limits of grasping and representing the history of the Cold War in Asia. By leaving such space for the unknowable, Ku's narrative intervenes in what Jodi Kim calls the Cold War as a "knowledge project" (8)—a point I have elaborated in the introduction.

Reception of *Our Stories*

The intervention of *Our Stories* continues to activate further response to the text. It is worth noting that the English version of *Our Stories* contains an unusual appendix in which the translator Agnes Khoo reflects on her process of translating and reading. In the short essay "Translator's Reflection," Khoo mentions that the readers she had in mind during her translation were the migrant workers in the stories rather than western readers. Khoo remembers that during her process of translation, she was motivated by one of the main characters, Meriam, who told her that "she was really looking forward to reading Yu-ling's book firsthand in English" (*Our Stories* 335). Khoo's awareness of the migrant readers complicates the English version of *Our Stories* because it suggests that the translation aims not so much to offer international readers a better understanding about migrant workers in Taiwan as to allow the migrant workers to share their experiences. The desire for sharing is paramount in the preface to the English version written by Meriam, who addresses prospective Filipino readers: "Even you feel home sick of your own family but you need to be patient because you want to earn some money to send back to support them . . . We will

experience more trials and difficulties but because of our dreams, we need to struggle in our journey in life" (*Our Stories* vii-viii). In Meriam's rendering, *Our Stories* becomes a medium to reach and encourage her fellow Filipino migrant workers. Meriam's transition from "you" to "we" marks a moment when she is no longer a model of a "successful migrant worker" as she describes herself but rather a node in a network of shared experiences of migration and labor (*Our Stories* vii-viii). Equally importantly, *Our Stories* incites various imaginings of potential readerships. The various imaginings are illustrated by the four prefaces in the English version, written by people occupying different social positions, including migrant workers, Taiwanese workers, social activists, and scholars. By addressing different groups of readers, these prefaces envision potential social coalitions.

In addition, Khoo's reflection in the appendix reveals that her translation process is not so much a transparent presentation of the original text as a constant process of relating and examining her personal experiences in conjunction with the life stories represented in the text. For example, she reflects, "I am very much a migrant myself, always migrating for work . . . Like all the characters in Yu-ling's book, I have to cross state borders, transcend barriers, transgress social and cultural boundaries, uproot and re-root myself all the time, in order to live my life the way I want" (*Our Stories* 336). Significantly, Khoo's identification with the characters as a migrant maintains a critical distance. As she recounts Maria's stories (the main Filipina character in the last part of the book), she writes:

> Translating her stories was admittedly the most challenging part of the process . . . There are many parallels that I can draw between Maria's life and mine. However, I am also acutely aware that we are different because "Life is so unfair." It is

> difficult to admit to myself that I have it easier than others not because I am innately better but simply because I am by accident born into a different family, country, place and a different historical period. (*Our Stories* 336)

Khoo's reflection shows that her translation is not based on universal history or migrant experience but rather mediated by her personal experiences and interpretations. In this sense, Khoo's translation can be seen as an intervention that challenges a humanist assumption of translation as universal equivalences between different cultures. More significantly, in eliciting readers' narration of their lives such as Khoo's reflection and the prefaces, *Our Stories* interrupts, if only briefly, the Cold War epistemological project, which presents a single explanation of bipolar competition and focuses solely on the US' bilateral relations with specific Asian nations.

The reception of the Mandarin Chinese edition of *Our Stories* points to the difficulty of knowing US hegemony in Asia as the readers share a lack of understanding of Taiwan's relation to the US. To begin with, the judges of the Taipei Literature Award, which *Our Stories* won, tended to view the book as a work about migrant workers' issues. One judge praised Ku's dedication to social movements and was impressed by her rich knowledge about migrant workers.[80] Another judge viewed *Our Stories* as a means to speak for foreign workers.[81] In this view, *Our Stories* is exclusively framed as a text about migrant workers'

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[80] Hsiao-hung Chang (張小虹) comments, "The author has been dedicated to social movements for decades. She deeply understands foreign workers' issues and is willing to record her understanding in words. These all make us look forward to this text" (*Collection of Works of 2006 Taipei Literature Award* 277). Translation mine. The original text reads:「作者幾十年來投身於工運，關於外勞的議題了解深入，卻願意以文字記錄的方式呈現，非常令人期待。」

[81] Du Yang (楊渡) remarks, "By speaking for the foreign workers through literature, Ku's work truly touches people's feelings" (*Collection of Works of 2006 Taipei Literature Award* 277). Translation mine. The original text reads:「透過顧玉玲的筆與文學作品為外勞發聲，撰寫的文章將可以真正進入感情的世界。」

stories. This rendering of *Our Stories* as a story of the other is further reinforced by the agenda of the Taipei Literature Award, which is the Taipei government's attempt to "better promote literature as a tool to enrich the life of every citizen while at the same time recording history and lifestyle of Taipei" (Taipei City Department of Cultural Affairs). The recognition granted by the award, then, incorporates *Our Stories* into a Taiwan-centric framework that contains imaginings beyond the nation-state.

Other readers of the Mandarin Chinese edition have tended to adopt a humanist approach and read *Our Stories* as a call for including migrant workers in Taiwanese society as part of a coherent unity. For instance, in "Mirroring: 'They' are 'We'," I-tai Ho states that *Our Stories* erases the boundary between we and others by historicizing two stages of ethnic integration in Taiwan. Ho contends that just as the boundary between Taiwanese and Mainlanders has dissolved, the differences between Taiwanese and Southeast Asian workers will disappear. Ho concludes that *Our Stories* shows that the boundary between we and others constantly shifts and therefore the ideal way to treat others is to "cease distinguishing 'us' from 'them' by discovering others' humanity and treat them like a family" (Ho).[82] In Ho's reading, the "we" in *Our Stories* is a homogenous unity of human beings and the history Ku depicts is Taiwan's gradual process toward a putatively new stage of ethnic integration.

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[82] Ho concludes, "As I read the book, I realized the foreigners' helplessness and their humanity. Also, I have learned that the best way to abandon our sense of superiority over others is to return to humanism as Ku does in *Our Stories*. Through this textual analysis, I realize that the boundary between we and others is constantly remapped. Also, the ideal way to treat others is to cease distinguishing 'us' from 'them' by discovering others' humanity and treat them like a family" (Ho). Translation mine. The original text reads:「我在閱讀這本書時，從最初的楚河漢界─劃清彼此關係，到後來感受到他們身為異鄉人的無助，以及彼此都是人，而不該有的優越感，這些問題都值得我們深思，但是要看清這些問題、解決這些問題還是得如作者，重新回到人本，從心去發現、從心去改變，透過這篇文本分析，對於『我們』和『他們』的不斷重新畫定疆界，但是回歸人本才發現彼此都是一家人，不該區分『我們』和『他們』。」

Although the Mandarin Chinese readers who have responded to *Our Stories* thus do not show an understanding of US presence in Asia or of inter-Asian histories, they share a desire to imagine beyond the self and relate their own life stories with the migrant subjects in the book. For example, unlike Ho, who sees the "we" in *Our Stories* as local Taiwanese, Chiao-mei Lin closely analyzes Ku's use of the first person plural pronoun and argues that it has multiple referents. Lin identifies that in the book "we" can refer to the foreign workers, the migrants to and within Taiwan, TIWA, Ku herself, and combinations of all these referents. She concludes that the title *Our Stories* refers to the process of readers reflecting on and relating their various experiences, mediated by Ku's experience, with the subjects of the stories.[83] Lin's analysis suggests that rather than simply asking for the readers' identification with the characters, *Our Stories* activates their constant reflection on their own experiences in relation to the experiences of the subjects represented in the text. In this sense, *Our Stories* does not solely contain Ku's narratives but moves beyond the pages of this text through the active engagement of readers.

Lin's note on Ku's mediation reminds the readers that they cannot identify with the migrant subjects by eradicating their differences. Instead, readers need to seek similarities, through Ku's or their own experiences, to enact Ku's narratives. Reading, in this sense, is a process of translating the self and other's differences through negotiation. *Our Stories* puts the reading self in translation between the self and the other. Several readers express this

[83] Lin concludes, "Ku is the medium between the subjects of the stories and readers. Her mediation allows readers to reflect on and relate their experiences to the book. As they read, the readers can connect with the subjects, through their common experiences, and form a 'we.' This is how I interpret Ku's title" (Lin). Translation mine. The original text reads:「作者顧玉玲作為書中群體和讀者間的媒介， 讓讀者在閱讀本書的同時，因自身的反映進入不同群體的生命經驗，不僅拉近讀者和書 中群體的距離，讀者也因此和書中的群體有了深刻的連結，甚至不會再將彼此劃分而認為是一體的『我們』，而這也是筆者解讀顧玉玲將此書名為『我們』的緣由。 」

experience of the self in translation. For example, in his preface for the Mandarin Chinese text, acclaimed Taiwanese film director Hou Hsiao-hsien remarks, "Without Yu-ling's excellent book, will I ever cry for 'us'? No. What Yu-ling has accomplished is to translate 'Us' for 'Them,' so that they know. . ." (*Our Stories* 8).[84] In Hou's remark, "Us" becomes a pronoun with no stable referent (*Our Stories* 8). The first "Us" can refer to the migrant subjects as well as the book title, as the Mandarin Chinese title *Wuomen* can both mean "we" and "us" (*Our Stories* 8). The second "Us," however, is rather ambiguous because Hou's speaking position shifts considerably (*Our Stories* 8). Rather than speaking as an "I" who reads the subjects of Ku's representation, Hou here distances himself from "Them"—supposedly Taiwanese readers in this context (*Our Stories* 8). Yet, neither does he blend in the second "Us" because in this context the term refers to the migrant subjects (*Our Stories* 8). Hou's reading self, therefore, is in between "Us" and "Them" (*Our Stories* 8). In reading *Our Stories,* Hou's self undergoes a process of translation during which he imagines from a point of view beside his own and relates to the other without reducing differences in between. In Nuo Tang's review, appended in the Mandarin Chinese version, Tang further notes that literature can function as a form of "translation" (*Our Stories* 340). He indicates that such translational effect happens to readers as well as Ku herself. He comments:

> Writing is a task of multiple demands. It requires multiple, rather than a single, perspectives beyond the individual self. It also requires various language skills and knowledge, as well as writing skills, so as to enable people outside to approach the

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[84] Translation mine. The original text reads:「如果沒有玉玲這本好看的書，我會對『我們』流淚嗎，不會的。玉玲所做的，是一種翻譯工程，把我們翻譯給他們知道。」

> writing, to place it in their life experiences, and to think about it through their envisioning of the world. (*Our Stories* 341)[85]

Parallel with readers' reading selves translating their experiences into an ethical form of identification, Ku's writing self is also in translation between "us" and "them." The Mandarin Chinese text, then, is itself in translation with readers' and Ku's experiences and imaginings beyond the self.

Moreover, this active reading enables the readers to make their own stories and imagine beyond themselves. For instance, one reader recalls his Minnan father's and Hakka mother's stories of migration and compares their stories with the Chinese workers he met at his mother's workplace—his first experience with foreign others.[86] Another reader tries to imagine herself from a migrant worker's point of view and wonders, "What if I were born in a Southeast Asian nation? What if Taiwan were like the Southeast Asian nations we look down upon? What if I were like the characters, who have to work as foreign labor despite their high education? What if we [the author and her husband] have no choice but to fly to separate lands for our kids? What would become of us? " ("An Excellent Book").[87] I would like to read such imaginings beyond oneself as a critical means of identification, one that does not seek to reduce the differences of others but rather attempt to see commonality and relations. In the book video of *Our Stories*, Ku also expresses an expectation of such critical

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[85] Translation mine. The original text reads:「書寫的披荊斬棘工作便是要求更多了，它需要複數而非單數、超越個體經驗的視角，需要各式各樣的語言和知識配備，也許還需要種種的書寫技藝，讓外頭世界的人知道怎麼接近它，怎麼放入自己生命經驗中、放入自己世界圖像裡的想它。」

[86] See "Reading *Our Stories*" (2012).

[87] Translation mine. The original text reads:「如果誕生在東南亞國度的是我；如果台灣就是那個我們看不上眼的國家；如果我就是像書中多個主角一樣，即便受了高等教育，也得出國當勞工的人；如果我們為了養孩子，不得不選擇勞燕分飛，那我們會變成怎樣？」

identification: "If this book can have some effects on this society, I hope it works like a mirror that enables us to see each other . . . During the process of writing, I was very conscious of the existence of readers . . . I want to know whether reading enables different readers to see their experiences and life histories reflected in the book so they can share a sense of 'us' with the foreign others" ("2008 China Times").[88]

Such critical form of identification is arguably carried out in the reception of the Mandarin Chinese version of Ku's text. One notable sign of this is a quotation from *Our Stories* that often appears in the Mandarin Chinese reception:

> We are a mirror.
>
> We are here in order to see each other and to show each other, so you may look upon us, so you may look at yourself, so that the other looks in our looking. (qtd. in *Our Stories* 15; Subcomandante Marcos 158)

This is a quotation from Subcomandante Marcos—leader and spokesman of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)—which Ku uses as the epigraph of the first part of *Our Stories*.[89] In this passage, "we" does not function as a mirror reflecting the self but as a transformation process. Readers of this passage cannot easily identify with "we," "you," or "the other" as the pronouns might all refer to them (qtd. in *Our Stories* 15; Subcomandante Marcos 158). The fact that this passage is frequently quoted in the Mandarin Chinese

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[88] Translation mine. The original text reads:「這本書如果對這個社會有一點作用的話，我希望它像照鏡子一樣， 讓我們看見彼此。… 我一路上在書寫我非常非常意識到讀者在哪裡 . . . 我關注到會不會因為閱讀而映照了不同讀者身上的經驗跟生命的歷史，而因為自己被照見了，而對這些外人，對這些他人，有了親近的『我們』的感受。」

[89] In the Mandarin Chinese edition, each part and chapter is preceded by an epigraph. The epigraphs are quotations from various works. The English edition, however, does not keep the epigraphs.

reception indicates an active reading that involves readers' imaginings beyond the nation and the self.[90] Also importantly, the quotation from the leader of the indigenous movement against Mexico's neoliberal state might further push such imaginings toward global coalitions.

In addition, such imaginings might generate further reflections on inter-Asian and transpacific linkages. For instance, in TIWA's forum on *Our Stories*, a reader remembers that his father had worked in Africa and Saudi Arabia as part of Taiwan's agricultural missions.[91] Another reader recalls that his grandfather had worked in Brunei as a migrant worker.[92] While the memories do not present full knowledge about the larger historical contexts or their connections with US presence in Asia, such fragments of recollection gesture to possible reflections on Afro-Asian and inter-Asian histories. These acts of refocusing on Taiwan's linkages with neighboring as well as distant African and Asian sites and imaginings beyond oneself therefore might be viewed as interventions in the Cold War's knowledge project.

Making Alternative Times

In addition to foregrounding connected inter-Asian histories, Ku also details the ways Filipina workers' lives are made worthy only as labor producing economic interests. In "Life-Times in Fate Playing" (2012), Neferti Tadiar observes that the post-Fordist era has

[90] See Ho (2009); Lin (2010); Fu (2008); "Reading *Our Stories* at the End of 2008"; and Chou (2009).
[91] See "*Our Stories* Message Board" (2008). Agricultural missions are a form of Taiwan's diplomacy. In 1959, the first mission was financially supported by the US and the destination was Vietnam. In the 1960s, through Operation Vanguard (also financed by the US), agricultural missions expanded to Africa.
[92] See "*Our Stories* Message Board" (2008).

witnessed a shift in capitalism, a shift that generates a new mode of accumulation. Tadiar notes that within this new mode of capitalism:

> Practices of knowledge making, intellectual work, communication, social cooperation, imagination, care, affect, performance, aesthetic and cognitive acts, and biological reproduction and the life sciences, which hitherto took place in the sphere of life outside labor proper, have become integrated into capitalist processes of accumulation such that labor ceases to be a special, separate practice distinct from other human activities. (785)

In Tadiar's view, by turning human activities that were not considered as labor into a form of capital accumulation, the shift in capitalism generates a new political economy of life within which "the time of labor is indistinguishable from the time of living; there is no longer any difference between labor and life" (786). Tadiar argues that this new political economy of life operates through two kinds of life, both integrated into a process of capital accumulation but rendered into drastically different value. The first kind of life is "*life worth living*, that is, life with the capacity to yield value as living labor" (789). Borrowing Santiago López Petit's view, Tadiar notes that the subject of this kind of life is conceived as a citizen who embodies "the most absolute employability" and "upholds life as property, as investment, and indeed, as a form of being capital" (790). In short, this conceptualization of life converts life into a form of capital whose value accumulates over time. The second kind of life is "*life worth expending*, that is, life with the capacity to yield value as disposable existence" (789). Taking migrant workers as examples, Tadiar contends that "life worth expending" comprises a global surplus population, whose labor produces value but is subsumed into the value of "life worth

living" (789). As hidden labor incorporated into "life worth living" (789), "life worth expending" is "neither investable nor accumulable . . . but rather subject to a process of exponential decay, a process in which waste rather than value accumulates" (789, 788). In other words, the two kinds of life are intertwined but "life worth expending" is rendered invisible and converted into the value of "life worth living" (789).

To attend to the hidden labor of the disposable lives, Tadiar proposes the concept of "life-times," which examines "the overlooked productivity of social practices of life making that seem to lie outside contemporary modes of exploitation of life as living labor" (791). Approaching life making as a site of resistance, Tadiar underlines the significance of social practices, such as community making, that do not simply aim for capital accumulation. Tadiar argues that although such "life-times" are still embedded in capitalism (791), their aims exceed profit-making and therefore can be viewed as a potential site of resistance. In the context of Filipina migrant workers, Tadiar calls such site of resistance "fate playing, the life-times of people serve as ante and bet for the chance possibility of another fate in exchange for a better fortune" (795). In desiring for a better future for themselves and others, Filipina workers' fate playing "instantiates a realm of action in which life is porous, shareable across persons, transmissible across distances of space and time, renewable, and multipliable, even as it remains finite and subject to constriction, division, depletion, closure, or an untimely or untoward end" (796). In other words, while embedded in capitalism, "fate playing" highlights that life consists of times other than labor time and that such times are significant in the sense that they make humans social beings rather than profit-accumulating individuals (795).[93]

[93] In *Remaindered Life* (2022), Tadiar elaborates on the concept of life-times by historicizing the global capitalist present as "the aftermath and continuing effects of unfinished movements of decolonization against an

Tadiar's concept of "life-times" as both "*life as waste*" and potential sites of resistance is useful in reading *Our Stories* ("Fate" 791, 789), where Ku's narratives represent life rendered as waste as well as moments of resistance. For instance, the third part of *Our Stories* depicts moments of runaway Filipina workers' lives rendered as waste in detention centers. Uncertain and indefinite waiting for the process of deportation is a recurring theme in the Filipina worker Maria's story. The authorial figure describes Maria's wait in detail:

> Maria had already gotten her new passport but she was still waiting for the money to pay for her airfare. She had to wait for two weeks for her turn to make that permitted three-minute phone call. And all she could do was to keep asking her family back home for help. "Please send the money quickly", "send the money soon", "send the money now!" was all that she could say. Since she had no access to information at all about her case, she hardly knew what was happening and what else she needed to do. She was troubled by too many uncertainties, suspicions and self-inflicted worries. (*Our Stories* 309)

The description of Maria's wait in the detention center shows how her time is rendered as waste. Kept in the detention center waiting for the uncertain day of release, Maria is unable to work and earn wages needed to pay for her airfare. In other words, waiting in the detention center converts Maria's labor time—for which she exchanges her time with her family in the

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extant imperial relation of dispossession that serves up enabling milieus for the labor-capital relation" (x). Tadiar describes the global capitalist present as "the war to be human" and contends that colonial and imperial violence evolve into "a revanchist war and global enterprise that reinstalls the tenets of colonial sex-gender and race orders as codes for the organization and continuous parsing of life-times between value and waste in what appears to be a new global political economy of life" (x). Tadiar indicates that potential insurgency lies in the living experiences of surviving and social-making beyond instrumental use of imperial capitalism. Regarding such insurgency, Tadiar formulates the concept *remaindered life-times* that captures "the uses, experience, actions, and effects of reproductive life-times made and lived that are *not* absorbed into the processes of production and maintenance of the life-form of value nor into the processes of generating value from waste" (71).

Philippines—into disposable time which generates no value for her needs. Paradoxically, Maria's time is not only rendered into worthless "life as waste" but also as a profitable "life worth expending," whose value lies in its being wasted time for the labor subject but valuable for the capitalist state ("Fate" 789). For Maria, her days in the detention center are wasted time. For Taiwanese and the Philippine capitalist states, however, Maria's wasted time is potentially profitable as it generates various kinds of profit from the airfare, the fee for new passport, as well as the fine for the overstay. In addition, her wasted time costs nothing for the functioning of the detention center. As the narrator notes, "The temporary detention centre has no government subsidy, so all the inmates have to pay for their own food. Those without would have to starve" (*Our Stories* 302). In this way, the value of Maria's time is fully extracted and channeled into forms of capital that sustain the very bureaucratic processes that waste her life. In other words, the capitalist states profit not only from Maria's labor time while she works but also from her wasted time in the detention center.

By delineating Maria's time waiting, Ku's narrative forces the readers to experience the prolonged wait without certain ends as they read Maria's story. In addition, the passage above shows that Maria's life becomes enveloped in a contracted and fragmented present. The "permitted three-minute call" not only costs two weeks of Maria's time but also confines her envisioning of her life to urgent needs in the present (*Our Stories* 309). Maria's call to her family cannot take the form of a conversation about her future plans or memories. Instead, their dialogue is limited to the present crisis indicated by sentences such as "Please send the money quickly," "Send the money soon," and "Send the money now!" (*Our Stories* 309). Furthermore, living becomes the making of temporary plans rather than long-term imaginings. For example, Maria refrained from buying a new bottle of shampoo: "as if by

buying a new one, she was admitting defeat and resignation, that she would really grow old and die there" (*Our Stories* 311). Unable to plan for the future or share memories, Maria's life in the detention center becomes a span of time deprived of memorable pasts or a future to look forward to. In other words, Maria's "life-times" are converted into a permanent state of waiting in the present ("Fate" 791).

Maria's permanent state of being in the present is coupled with the labor market's demands on migrant workers' most profitable spans of life. As the narrator stresses, "Age has always been a huge obstacle for overseas migrant workers. The same goes for the male workers whose cut-off age in the construction industry was also forty whilst for middle-aged women workers, they would have to forgo factory work for domestic work or care work" (*Our Stories* 159). Migrant workers' lives are thus contracted to a limited span of time during which they have to convert every moment of living into labor time so as to generate as much capital as possible. Within this limited span of time, plans for life become a matter of short-term preparation for the near future. Furthermore, as Tadiar points out, "life-times"—the times to build social relations through activities other than working—are considered to be wasted time as they do not generate economic gains ("Fate" 791). In other words, this temporal framework isolates migrant workers from social communities and turns every temporal aspect of their lives into time for accumulating capital. Like the temporal politics in the detention center, the temporality of the labor market molds migrant workers into "absolutely redundant life, with its status as sheer surplus time, the time of life as expenditure." ("Disposability" 33). Life, in this rendering, becomes slots of time spent on overcoming present urgencies without a certain future to anticipate or a past to reflect on.

Ku's narrative reenacts how Maria's life is divided into fragmented slots of time. But instead of focusing on Maria's life story, the third part of *Our Stories* juxtaposes each episode of her story with Ling Hu-chong's story, with the paralyzed Taiwanese employer's story providing a perspective on migrant domestic workers' labor of care. This juxtaposition of stories shows that the employer-domestic worker relationship is interdependent rather than oppositional. More importantly, the intersecting stories divide Maria's story into episodes with intervals that require readers to wait for what happens next in Maria's life. However, the divided narratives of Maria's life story do not simply represent Maria's fragmented and wasted time waiting or her endless time working. Instead, the narrative intervals prolong the readers' time reading and thereby arguably intervene in the temporal politics of capitalism, which prioritizes progression and renders human beings as disposable labor for immediate consumption. Moreover, the intervals require the readers to keep remembering each episode of Maria's life in order to move forward with their reading. In doing so, the readers are not simply reading for what happens to Maria in the present episode but gleaning memories that endure throughout the narrative. In this way, Maria's life story is no longer a permanent state of the present but a life that makes history.

The narrative further multiplies the temporal aspects of Maria's life by ending the chapter on Maria's detention with a moment of reminiscence. Maria fondly recalls her days on Zhongshan North Road and the narrative flashes her memories:

> The time when she was waiting out her pregnancy, the delivery of her baby boy and the two months she had taking care of him. Edgar was often with them then; at least they had some good times as a family together. It was a warm, memorable and

> beautiful time! . . . Once again, Maria looked like a little girl who had just made a wish, murmuring to herself, "I miss Zhongshan, it is my home in Taiwan." (*Our Stories* 314).

By mixing Maria's first person murmur with a third person narrative of her days on Zhongshan, the concluding passage blurs the distinction between Maria's recollections and readers' memories of the previous parts of Maria's story. This blurred boundaries between Maria's memories and readers' memories of her life episodes is crucial because it allows Maria's story to be shared instead of being an isolated anecdote feeding the readers' desires to know about migrant workers. By simultaneously representing Maria's memories of Zhongshan North Road—the main setting recurring throughout the book—from the first and third person points of view, Ku's narrative invokes readers' recollections of the stories they have read so far. In so doing, the narrative creates a space for Maria's "life- times" and allows imaginings of times beyond those dedicated to generating profits ("Fate" 791). As the lines between the readers' memories and Maria's recollections become blurred, the title *Our Stories* can no longer solely refer to migrant workers' stories as both the readers and Maria are remembering Maria's life. The narrative of Maria's memories slows down the readers' progress of reading and invites them to share a moment of reflecting on pasts they may not have experienced but have participated in through reading the stories. This moment of sharing captures a crucial moment of "life- times" ("Fate" 791), which are otherwise incorporated into a neoliberal temporality that turns every moment of life into times measured by—and only significant as—economic value.

The representation of inter-Asian migrations in *Our Stories* thus helps us conceive US presence in Asia in different ways. By highlighting US presence in Asia as a critical force that conditions the life stories of migrations, *Our Stories* helps us to re-envision a form of Asian American critique that enables us to reconsider Asia as departure points to examine US imperialism rather than simply as a putative origin of forms of Asian migration to the US. Such an inter-Asian frame unsettles a dominant understanding of the Cold War—an understanding that is predicated on an East-West comparison. At the same time, the figures' lack of knowledge about US interventions represent the difficulties of comprehending US presence in Asia. Furthermore, the readers' tendencies to reflect on and relate their experiences of migration with the migrant figures represented in the text may enable further inter-Asian imaginings— and may point toward critical ways to identify with the other in scattered sites beyond Asia, too. Finally, Ku's narratives envision an alternative politics of time that intervenes in a neoliberal conceptualization of life as disposable labor time.

Beyond US Presence: The Limits of Representation in *Return Home*

Return Home departs from mainstream discussions of postwar Vietnam by highlighting the limits of centering critiques on US empire. In the text, Ku depicts a scene in which she visits the Vietnam Military History Museum in Hanoi with Đặng Vấn Hải (named 鄧文海 in Ku's text)—a Vietnamese man who had previously worked in Taiwan. Đặng Vấn Hải is surprised at Ku's interest in the museum, which he considers a place "young people are least interested in" (147). Delineating the commercialization of war memories and how the museum represents French colonialism and the Vietnam War in a nationalist frame, the authorial figure

comments at length:

> Vietnam is a young nation and so is its population, with an average age of twenty-five. The last war ended less than thirty years ago. The past was not yet distant but changes in the present were too rapid. People were busy taking care of themselves and seeking wealth. Đặng Vấn Hải was born after the war and grew up during a time in which Vietnam opened its market. Collectivism had long gone. What he witnessed was corruption and a dog-eat-dog world. Vietnam normalized its relations with its former rivals and even became a member of the WTO, joining international production and competition for consumption. Đặng Vấn Hải's rebellion broke away from Vietnam's histories of revolution because of his experiences of class oppression abroad. He also learned about social justice from labor organizations in Taiwan. However, after returning to Vietnam, he was subject to government surveillance and suppression. All these things drove him further apart from the past ideals promoted by the current authorities.
>
> We got caught in the rush hour on our way back. Roads were congested and full of exhaust. Lands in the suburbs were expropriated and forests were cut down. New highways and business buildings stood in the mud. On the sides of industrial roads stood numerous huge billboards, most of which promoted achievements of the nation; men from various occupations merrily stood along with women and children, looking to the future. The backgrounds were either electronic gadgets and related industries or financial buildings. Occasionally one could see a smiling Ho Chih Minh looking down. (*Return*

Home 148)

This scene vividly shows that Vietnam's transition to a market-oriented economy engenders new contexts in which the nation's pasts are remembered and forgotten. Ku's representation indicates that while national institutions such as the museum exhibit colonial and imperial pasts and seek to render such materials into a coherent nationalist narrative, this version of the past fails to interpellate members of the Vietnamese postwar generation such as Đặng Vấn Hải. Yet, such a failure of interpellation does not suggest a complete transformation from a socialist state to a neoliberal state, as Đặng Vấn Hải's experience of surveillance and suppression by the Vietnamese government shows a more conventional form of state power. The coexistence of surveillance and coercion complicates some analyses of neoliberalism that focus on "a continual enterprise of self-improvement through the application of a rational knowledge and technique" (Rose 93). While war memories and economic reforms in Vietnam are not unfamiliar topics, Ku's narrative's turn to how Đặng Vấn Hải reexamines Vietnam via his experiences of inter-Asian migration departs from existing works on Vietnam.[94]

[94] Existing discussions of postwar Vietnam can be roughly divided into if not reduced to three broad themes: war memories, refugees, and Asian subimperialism. Vietnam's war memories have drawn much scholarly attention. For analyses of the politics of memory and commutation of the Vietnam War, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai's introduction to *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (2001) and Christina Schwenkel's *American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (2009). For critiques of the heteropatriarchal nationalism of postwar Vietnam and US and Vietnam's nationalist framings of war memories, see Lan P. Duong's *Treacherous Subjects: Gender, Culture, and Trans-Vietnamese Feminism* (2012) and Viet Thanh Nguyen's *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016). Critics of critical refugee studies have examined how US liberalism obscures US military violence through framing Vietnamese refugees as debtors of US freedom and investigated Vietnamese refugees in US transpacific military interventions and setter colonialism. See Mimi Thi Nguyen's *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (2012) and Yen Le Espiritu's *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (2014). In *Lovecidal: Walking with the Disappeared* (2016), Trinh T. Minh-ha situates Vietnam in broader contexts of contemporary US imperialism including the War on Terror (2001-). Borrowing Bernard Newman's view, Trinh observes that "Vietnam was an open wound—both a protracted colonial war and a major international conflict, whose specters bide their time to loom up again in current world crises" (131). In addition to US imperialism, critics have also attended to intersecting Asian subimperialism, focusing on South Korea's participation in the Vietnam War. For studies of South Korean subimperialism in Vietnam in relation to the Korean War, see Charles K. Armstrong's "America's Korea, Korea's Vietnam" (2001) and Jin-kyung Lee's *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (2010).

While critics have in various ways complicated critiques of US interventions in Vietnam, their analyses cannot fully explain the contemporary Vietnam that is represented in *Return Home*. By depicting social changes in Vietnam via Đặng Vấn Hải's reference to his experiences of inter-Asian migration rather than via US imperialism in Vietnam, the passage from *Return Home* I have quoted earlier gestures to an alternative analytical framework beyond a narrow focus on US empire. Such inter-Asian referencing could help us to extend Viet Thanh Nguyen's observation on how contemporary Vietnam compels "scholars of Vietnamese American studies to move beyond the nationalist conventions of Asian American studies in order to comparatively study the diaspora, the homeland, and the traffic in between of peoples, cultures, ideas, and capital" ("Viet Nam" 373-74). By placing contemporary Vietnam in inter-Asian contexts, Ku offers a way to investigate postwar Vietnam without centering the Vietnam War.

In setting *Return Home* in postwar Vietnam's embrace of capitalism via Vietnamese migrant workers inter-Asian experiences, Ku points to Taiwan and Vietnam's similar patterns of postwar economic development. According to Mai Thi Thu, Vietnamese migrant workers are a "phenomenon continuing from [a] colonial past" (104). Mai underscores that Vietnamese migrant workers are not so much an outcome of postwar economic reforms as a phenomenon dating from French colonialism (1858-1954). Under French colonial rule, Mai observes, Vietnam was developed into "a supplementary economy of the French industrial revolution" (104). Rather than benefiting the locals, French industrialization in Vietnam undermined Vietnam's social system and expropriated land from farmers. Economically broken down, Vietnamese villages became "a rich resource of cheap labor force and food" (104). Mai points out three forms of migration during French colonialism: "a migration flow

of laborer[s] from [the] agriculture sector to newly established industrial productions, or to industrial plantations"; "Vietnamese as preferred workers and local officials by French administration, spread[ing] all over the French Indochina and [taking] offices or [work] at the expense of local people—especially Lao and Khmer"; and Vietnamese migrants abroad including "not only political refugees, but also students pursuing better education in France, Japan or [the] Soviet Union or [as] soldiers who served in the French army during the two World Wars" (105).

In the postcolonial period, facing multiple crises such as the US embargo, an increase in population, and a devastated economy, Vietnam in 1986 implemented economic reforms referred to as *Doi Moi*—which aimed to "improve lagging productivity, to raise living standards, and to curb rapid inflation" (Freeman 178). Following these reforms, foreign direct investment was introduced, with East Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan—countries that benefited from the Vietnam War—becoming major investors in Vietnam.[95] To relieve unemployment, the Vietnamese government initiated a labor export policy, sending Vietnamese labor to East Asia in the 1990s.[96] Significantly, Mai argues that during the period of economic transition, internal Vietnamese migration from rural areas to urban areas (where New Economic Zones gather) and international migration to East Asian countries such as Taiwan were mutually constituted migrations. Mai underscores that "the connection between large increases in foreign investment of East Asian [countries] to Vietnam has [had] a great contribution to the large scale of emigration to the region" (37).

[95] For analyses of East Asian nations benefitting from the Vietnam War, see Keunho Park and Hiroko Kawasakiya Clayton, "The Vietnam War and the 'Miracle of East Asia'" (2003); Jin-kyung Lee, *Service Economies: Militarism, Sex Work, and Migrant Labor in South Korea* (2010); and Kwang Yeong Shin, "The Political Economy of Economic Growth in East Asia: South Korea and Taiwan" (1998).
[96] For Vietnam's policies of labor export, see Dang Nguyen Anh, *Labour Migration from Viet Nam: Issues of Policy and Practice* (2008).

Equally importantly, Mai reminds us that Vietnamese economic migration started before the end of the Cold War, when Vietnamese labor was sent to the Soviet Bloc and Eastern Europe to help pay for Vietnam's debts (39).

Taiwan began importing Vietnamese labor in 1999 but Taiwan's and Vietnam's interconnected histories can be traced to an earlier period. According to Jie Chen, during the Vietnam War, Taiwan was eager to provide South Vietnam "its own precious—and perhaps bitter—lessons and expertise in anti-Communist affairs" by sending military advisors and military materials to Saigon (60). After years without contact due to South Vietnam's fall into communism, Taiwan restored relations with Vietnam in the late 1980s—a time when Taiwan witnessed rising labor costs and international isolation. Under Lee Teng-hui's promotion of pragmatic diplomacy, Taiwan signed several bilateral agreements with Vietnam and established a Taipei Economic Office in Vietnam in the 1990s. Chen indicates that Taiwanese investment in postwar Vietnam was pioneered by KMT businesses, which financed some of the largest investment projects such as the construction of the Tan Thuan Export Processing Zone in Vietnam during the 1990s. Chen notes, "Hanoi had a keen interest in copying Taiwan's Kaohsiung Export Processing Zone (EPZ). Taipei did not let down this belated student of the 'Taiwan model'" (132).[97] Taiwan's economic relations with Vietnam also bolstered transnational marriages and Vietnamese migrant labor to Taiwan.[98] Taiwan's

[97] In *Parallax Visions: Making Sense of American-East Asian Relations at the End of the Century* (1999), Bruce Cumings provides a succinct account of the different historical experiences of colonialism in Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Cumings underlines that "postwar economic successes in northeast Asia have roots going back well before the Rostovian period of 'taking-off' in the early 1960s" (88). Cumings indicates that northeast Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are "semisovereign states" enmeshed in a US-dominant "hegemonic web" (94). Vietnam, Cumings notes, resisted the hegemonic web but "it now wants to discipline itself thus to follow in the wake of the NICs [newly industrializing countries]. Better that it had invited the Japanese to colonize it" (94).

[98] For an examination of capitalism and Vietnamese brides in Taiwan, see Hsiao-chuan Hsia, "Transnational Marriage and Internationalization of Capital—The Case of the 'Foreign Bride' Phenomenon" (2000). For an analysis of the problems of Vietnam's labor export system and Taiwan's guest worker policy, see Hong-zen

ties with Vietnam were furthered with the implementation of the Southward Policy in 1993, which aimed to "reduce the island's politically risky yet increasing economic dependency on mainland China by diverting Taiwanese investment away from China to Southeast Asia" (111). Importantly, through the Southward Policy, Taiwan attempted to model Japan's relocation of labor-intensive industries to developing countries such as Taiwan in the 1960s and to establish Taiwan as a center of the Asia-Pacific region.[99] In 2015, Tsai Ing-wen, who became president of Taiwan in 2016, called for a New Southbound Policy—one which stresses not only investment but also cultural exchange with South and Southeast Asia. Despite these new emphases, Tsai Ing-wen's New Southbound Policy broadly perpetuates earlier views of Southeast Asia as a place to boost the Taiwanese economy.[100]

It is within the context of Taiwan's and Vietnam's shared yet distinct patterns of development that Ku sets *Return Home*. Ku's description of how newly rich Vietnamese Phúc Xương (named 福昌 in Ku's text) views Taiwan shows the limits of a critique based on US empire alone:

> Phúc Xương is knowledgeable and articulate. At our first meeting, he did not hesitate to show his rich learning. He asked questions and answered them without waiting for my response: Do you support the DPP? They are alright but not good enough for presidency. Chen Shui-bian is in jail, isn't he? He

Wang and Daniele Belanger, "Transnational Labor Migration System between Vietnam and Taiwan: In Whose Interests?" (2007); and "Exploitative Recruitment Processes and Working Conditions of Vietnamese Migrant Workers in Taiwan" (2011).

99 For an analysis of the Southward Policy in terms of Taiwanese subimperialism, see Kuan Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method* (17-20). In *Southward Policy and the Future of Taiwan's Economy* (1995), a collection of essays presented at a 1994 conference on Southward Policy, the contributors propose to build Taiwan into a center of the Asia-Pacific. On the website of Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Center (established as part of the strategies of the 1993 Southward Policy), the home page states, "It's the right time to build Taiwan into an Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Center" (*Taiwan Asia-Pacific Regional Operations Center*).

100 See "President Tsai's Remarks at Taiwan-ASEAN Dialogue" (2016); and *New Southbound Policy References* (2016).

> deserves it for following the KMT's bad example. Which party do you think the US supports? The Americans must have bet on both parties to make Taiwan obedient. So did China, it wants to control Taiwan just like the US does! Vietnam has seen through their tricks way early. We used to unite with China to fight the US and collaborated with the Soviet Union to fight China. This is the way to become independent. You Taiwanese are too weak!
>
> Suddenly Phúc Xương changed the topic to a Taiwanese TV series, which was just translated into Vietnamese. He already had a set of DVDs at home. Phúc Xương said, "These are legal copies." Phúc Xương talked with the pride of the newly rich. He can talk about fashion and he followed international politics. It made sense to show off. (*Return Home* 25-26)

While Phúc Xương criticizes Taiwan's evident lack of awareness of US interventions, his emphasis on Vietnamese sovereignty places US and Chinese imperialisms as a past Vietnam has overcome. In doing so, Phúc Xương suggests that, in terms of national independence and resistance against imperialism, Vietnam is more advanced than Taiwan. Although the Vietnam War—which, as Viet Thanh Nguyen notes, is better known as the American War in Vietnam (*Nothing* 6)—enables Phúc Xương to confidently identify US presence in Asia, his view on Vietnam's sovereignty as proof of freedom from US hegemony obstructs him from seeing that Vietnam's independence and Taiwan's ambiguous sovereignty are both entangled with US interventions in Asia.[101] Such a focus on sovereignty understood narrowly

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[101] In *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (2016), Viet Thanh Nguyen indicates the American War is a name that is as inadequate as the Vietnam War because it encourages Vietnamese to conceive themselves as victims. Nguyen writes, "As victims, they are conveniently stricken with amnesia about what they did to one another and how they extended their war westwards into Cambodia and Laos, countries that a unified Vietnam would strive to influence, dominate, and even invade in the postwar era" (6).

forecloses discussions that might otherwise be made possible by Phúc Xương's comparative view on Taiwan and Vietnam—an alternative comparison Kuan-Hsing Chen terms "inter-referencing" that might interrupt the Cold War's knowledge project (223). Phúc Xương's turn to a Taiwanese TV series as a way to demonstrate his taste further complicates existing forms of Asian American critique insofar as Taiwan, instead of the west, becomes a figure of modernity in this specific context. In transiting from a critique of US interventions in Taiwanese politics to a view on current trends in Taiwan as a marker of his modernity, Phúc Xương's comment as it is represented in Ku's text reveals how the alluring effects of modernity erase histories—such as the ways Taiwan benefited economically from the Vietnam War and its postwar rendering of Vietnam into a source of cheap labor—that condition Taiwan's progress and modernity.

In addition to representing bourgeois consumption normalized as modernity in Vietnam, *Return Home* also represents how the division of democracy and communism during the Cold War renders inter-Asian imaginings into a comparison of freedom. For instance, Nguyễn Thị Vấn (named 阮氏問 in Ku's text), a Vietnamese migrant worker, remembers an episode she encountered in Taiwan:

> During the presidential election (2008), the news was full of Chen Shui-bian's corruption scandals and condemnations of his money laundering amounting to NT$70 million. Still, some Tainan locals passionately defended Chen: "A-bian accepted the bribery not for himself but for Taiwan's independence. The KMT walked away from much serious corruption in the past. They are equally corrupted."
>
> "A-bian asked the entrepreneurs to send boxes of cash to his place. Such

> a terrible sight! If he just followed what the KMT did, what's the point of party alternation?" Some people disagreed and the voices went louder.
>
> Sensing that the atmosphere was getting intense, Nguyễn Thị Vấn cut in: "In Vietnam we only have one party. Even though the government takes bribes for everything, we have no other options." The divided KMT and DPP supporters burst into laughter, as if they found an unrelated pressure relief. They remarked, "How corrupt Vietnam is."
>
> As if Taiwan was clean again. The atmosphere was relaxed while laughter and chatting returned. (*Return Home* 55-56)

Unlike the earlier passage I cited—which depicts how the Taiwanese modernity Phúc Xương embraces is delinked from his critique of US imperialism—this passage shows that the difficulties the Taiwanese figures represented in Ku's texts have in grasping inter-Asian imaginings lie in their attempts to position Taiwan as a progressive country in terms of democratization. While the Tainan locals discern that Taiwanese democracy has failed to reform the structural corruption of the state, their valorization of Taiwan's independence displaces the problem from Taiwan's bureaucracy—a problem that remained unchanged following the lifting of martial law.[102] Such obsession with national sovereignty, as Jon D. Solomon argues, fails to examine Taiwanese sovereignty as "something that is included . . . within the *theater of operations* open to the sovereign police—U.S., Chinese, or otherwise" (245).

[102] For a discussion of Chen Shui-bian's scandal and Taiwan's political system, see Chao-yung Hsueh, "Power and Corruption in Taiwan" (2007).

In focusing on national sovereignty and Vietnam's lack of democracy, the Taiwanese figures referred to above fail to see how Taiwan's sovereignty, as Solomon has argued, is implicated in a desire for decolonization and intersecting imperialisms.[103] Such a failure to identify the colonial histories that condition a desire for Taiwan's sovereignty also makes it difficult for the Taiwanese figures represented in Ku's text to relate their imaginings of Vietnam's lack of democracy with the different colonial experiences of Taiwan and Vietnam. Although Nguyễn Thị Vấn's interruption provides a reference point that might enable these Taiwanese figures to see that Taiwanese authoritarianism continues regardless of direct elections, such an alternative comparison is converted into a comparison of Taiwan's democracy and Vietnam's putative lack of freedom. Such Cold War divisions also obstruct these Taiwanese figures from reckoning with the distinct yet related effects of US interventions in Taiwan and in Vietnam. By juxtaposing the views of these Taiwanese figures and of Nguyễn Thị Vấn, Ku's text reveals that a narrow focus on Taiwan's sovereignty obscures the continuation of Cold War legacies that continue to divide Taiwan and Vietnam into democratic and authoritarian camps.

Neoliberalism in an Inter-Asian Frame

By juxtaposing the Taiwanese and Vietnamese characters' imaginings of Taiwan and Vietnam in the passages quoted above, Ku's *Return Home* productively represents failed inter-Asian

[103] For analysis of the entanglements between Taiwan's sovereignty and US military empire, see Wendy Cheng and Chih-Ming Wang, "Introduction: Against Empire: Taiwan, American Studies, and the Archipelagic" (2021), Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "The Centrality of Islands and Taiwan as Method" (2021), Funie Hsu, Brian Hioe, and Wen Liu, "Collective Statement on Taiwan Independence: Building Global Solidarity and Rejecting US Military Empire" (2017), and Wen Liu, "From Independence to Interdependence: Taiwan Independence as Critique, Strategy, and Method toward Decoloniality" (2021).

comparisons of the two sites, whose historical linkages are obscured by aspirations to normative forms of national sovereignty and modernity. However, through the authorial figure's observations about economic development in Taiwan and in Vietnam during her visits to Vietnam, Ku's text also elucidates Taiwan's similar patterns of development that may be otherwise naturalized as modernization. During a visit to the industrial zones in Bac Ninh, the authorial figure comments:

> Vietnam imitated the export processing zones of the four Asian Dragons by using cheap land, low-cost labor, and a taxation avoidance agreement to attract foreign investors. The Vietnamese economy improved rapidly, with an annual 8 percent growth in GDP. Vietnam was thereby integrated into the global division of labor. The country became a source of raw materials and a site of processing zones for international capital. In recent years, as the cost of labor in China has increased and the standards of environmental impact assessment became higher, some Taiwanese business redirected their investment to Vietnam.
>
> I skimmed through some reports of *Economic Daily News* online. In 2007, Taiwanese tycoon Terry Gou visited Vietnam and remarked, "Vietnam's investment climate is much better than I imagined!" Gou decided to establish Hon Hai's third largest industrial site in Vietnam. The industrial site followed Hon Hai's policy of repressing the cost of labor in Taiwan and China. Today the factories were completed. (*Return Home* 82-83)

By indicating that Vietnam shares a similar program of economic development with the so-called four Asian Dragons, the authorial figure foregrounds the historicity of the so-called

East Asian economic miracle in places such as Taiwan. Rather than suggesting that such places are naturally more progressive than Vietnam, the passage suggests that the four Asian Dragons used to be in a similar position with Vietnam in the global economy. Moreover, by linking Vietnam's industrialization with Hon Hai CEO Terry Gou taking advantage of Vietnam's cheap land and labor—features that Taiwan used to attract American and Japanese investment in the 1960s—the narrative reveals overlapping moments that are naturalized as Vietnam's lag behind Taiwan. More importantly, in pointing out that Hon Hai profits from Vietnam by reproducing its policy of repressing the cost of labor in Taiwan and China, the narrative connects these three otherwise seemingly unrelated Asian sites. Such inter-Asian referencing is crucial because on the one hand it reveals the transnational repression of the working class otherwise obscured by the Cold War divisions discussed above; on the other hand, an inter-Asian frame elucidates Taiwan's subimperial expansion to Asian sites whose historical linkages with Taiwan are erased by a reading focused on modernization alone. In relating Taiwan, China, and Vietnam—three Asian sites divided by the Cold War and narratives of development—the narrator's reflection arguably intervenes in the Cold War knowledge project.

The authorial figure's rendering of Vietnam also complicates critiques of authoritarianism and neoliberalism in Taiwan and in Vietnam. A scene where the authorial figure and the Vietnamese figures A Minh (named 阿明 in Ku's text) and Phùng Xuân Thắng (named 馮春勝 in Ku's text) witness Vietnamese police taking bribes on the street illustrates the significance of such a comparative perspective:

> "Taiwanese police won't do this kind of thing," said Phùng Xuân Thắng, who had actual experience in Taiwan. He did not forget the time when he tried to

> bribe a police officer with NT$30,000 but got refused. Despite this refusal, he insisted, "Even though I got caught, I think that's what police should be like."
>
> I could not help remembering that a neighbor used to visit my parents to complain. He went to a police university because his family was poor. After he graduated and entered the profession, he was constantly troubled by the pressure of a culture of bribery from his colleagues. Bribes came from various sources, including vendors, pubs, gangsters, and factories. Police officers up to police chiefs and down to rookie officers profited from bribes, as if the money was their monthly perk. Due to this culture of bribery, the neighbor was restless . . . I wonder where he is today. Has he got used to bribery? Has he quit his job? Has he been acquiescing to the situation? According to Transparency International's 2013 corruption perceptions index, Taiwan's index of misusing public power for private benefit was 36 percent, ranking number two in Asia. The number was higher than Vietnam's by 6 percent! (*Return Home* 317-18)

While Phùng Xuân Thắng's comment places Taiwan as a model of governance compared with Vietnam, the authorial figure's memory interrupts such comparison by showing how corruption in Taiwan has transformed into a culture. In doing so, the narrative questions a comparative frame that dichotomizes Vietnam and Taiwan into a corrupt socialist state and an incorruptible democratic state. Such an alternative comparison enables a reconsideration of Taiwan's post-marital law political transition. As Ming-Chang Tsai argues, in the 1990s "Taiwan's authoritarian developmental state attempted a democratic transition by incorporating the same powerful distributional coalitions that actually caused its own demise but also incurred government fiscal expansion" (361). Rather than simply a shift toward

democracy, Tsai observes, Taiwan's democratization was a shift toward a "patronage system that was created by incorporating business interests into the representative parliament" (369). By juxtaposing Phùng Xuân Thắng's critique of the police in Vietnam and the authorial figure's reflection on the culture of bribery in Taiwan, the passage elucidates transformations of Taiwan's authoritarianism that are obscured by accounts focusing on democratization and economic liberalization alone.

The passage thus elucidates Taiwanese and Vietnamese states' shared contradictions in adjusting state control to economic liberalization despite the putative difference of democratic and socialist states. In *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* (2012), Thu-Huong Nguyen-vo cautions against approaching neoliberalism as a new form of governance that disciplines subjects solely through freedom of choice. Nguyen-vo argues that postwar Vietnam's hybrid structure of free choice and coercion provides an opportunity to examine "the contradictory practices and pronouncements that sometimes promote global exchanges and at other times toe a conservative, inward-looking 'traditional' cultural and political line, one that does not particularly correspond to the proletarian revolutionary discourse of socialist days" (xix). Rather than viewing Vietnam's seemingly contradictory forms of governance as a particular case of socialism, Nguyen-vo proposes to approach such contradiction as "*a paradoxical product of how this government deals with the neoliberal freedoms of a new transnational market economy*" (xix). Adopting a modified Foucauldian approach that attends to differentiated modes of power, Nguyen-vo notes:

> [I]f it is evident from this analysis of Vietnam that we are subjected to different degrees of repression depending on whether we can fill the different ranks of

> consumers or low-waged labor in the globalized economy, then perhaps we must revisit the question of how we come to imagine our social world and our respective places in it, in other words, the question of ideology. (255)

Importantly, Nguyen-vo indicates that such an examination of the combination of choice and repression on certain populations is not limited to nations—including Vietnam—newly integrated into the global economy. Rather than viewing Western nations such as the US and the UK as neoliberal prototypes that govern through freedom of choice, Nguyen-vo argues that such "heartland[s] of neoliberalism must also combine neoliberalism and neoconservatism with multiple modes of power operating simultaneously to produce an unequal population differentiated by gradations in status that would best serve the needs of market production and consumption in order to maintain the position of [these nations] within the global economy" (xxviii). Expanding an examination of such combinations of freedom and suppression to Western sites, Nguyen-vo argues, would "guard against a cold war or orientalist congratulatory conclusion about how we have freedom and others do not" (257).

In calling for a reflection on seemingly contradictory forms of governance in Western sites in her study of postwar Vietnam, Nguyen-vo thus highlights the significance of overcoming the Cold War division of democracy and authoritarianism. Nguyen-vo's approach can be furthered by returning to Ku's representation of the repression Vietnamese migrant workers experience in Taiwan—a critical site whose differentiated repression on certain segments of its population is obscured by a Cold War conceptualization of democracy. For instance, rather than simply depicting Vietnamese police abusing state power, Ku's narrative of the Yilan Detention Center shows Taiwanese state violence on migrants:

> The Yilan Detention Center used to be Jinglu, which detained undocumented immigrants from mainland China. Many unreasonable rules remained: Detainees were paired up and slept feet to feet. They were forbidden to flush the toilet during nighttime. During daytime, detainees had nothing to do except for walking in the narrow cells. They could only sit or stand. However bored they were, they were prohibited from lying down except during naptime at noon. (*Return Home* 361)

The passage indicates the entanglement of Cold War legacies of anticommunism with Taiwanese state power to control national borders. The detainees are not members of the general public but "foreigners who cannot clearly articulate their situation" (361-62). Such a focus on a specific segment of the population that comprises the detainees in the Yilan site shows an uneven distribution of state power—a power that regulates and confines foreign bodies. By highlighting the mixture of military management and neoliberal rendering of detainees' time into waste, such as the time spent waiting for deportation procedures (361-62), Ku's narrative illustrates neoliberalism as an uneven project that displays different forms in locales with varied histories and exerts differentiated forms of violence on varied populations.

Limits of Representation

Return Home represents not only moments of repression but also moments of resistance. In narrating how Đàm Ngọc Tuyết (named 譚玉雪 in Ku's text) becomes a runaway migrant worker in Taiwan, the narrative delineates how the care center where she works functions like a "production line" that allows no rest for the workers (333). The narrative then turns

from a third-person narrative to Đàm Ngọc Tuyết's storytelling. Remembering those days, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết comments, "If I could do it again, I wouldn't have run away. . . I would have reported the boss" (333). In reflecting on and commenting what she would have done differently, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết's storytelling interrupts the care center's neoliberal time management that allows no time for memory and attempts to render her every moment into time of labor. Moreover, by imagining what she might have done, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết becomes a narrating subject who considers an alternative ending for her narrated self. In narrating a different way to deal with her situation, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết's storytelling indicates that runaway migrants are produced by structurally problematic working conditions that could have been improved.[104] By narrating her past through conditional tenses, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết recreates a different story, but this story is also grounded in a past that cannot be altered. Neither a flashback nor a critique of structural repression, Đàm Ngọc Tuyết's imagining of an alternative choice exceeds Ku's representation yet remains grounded in existing constraints that condition her imagining. In Đàm Ngọc Tuyết the storyteller of her own stories, the imagining of a different ending could be read as a form of creative writing and uncontained by Ku's narratives.

Similar moments that foreground the limits of Ku's representation appear in A Tĩnh's (named 阿靜 in Ku's text) story. A Tĩnh becomes disabled due to a car accident in Taiwan. Describing her life after she returned to Vietnam, A Tĩnh repeatedly uses the word *wulaio* (the Mandarin Chinese term for bored or boring). Regarding A Tĩnh's word choice, the authorial

[104] For studies of the human rights issue of Southeast Asian migrant workers in Taiwan and the exploitative brokerage system, see Grace Hui-chuan Wu "(De)humanizing Labor: Southeast Asian Migrant Narratives in Taiwan" (2020), Pei-chia Lan "Legal Servitude and Free Illegality: Control and Exit of Migrant Workers" (2006), and You-lian Sun "Exploitation in migration: An analysis of migrant workers' rights in Taiwan" (2013).

figure comments:

> [A Tĩnh's] frequent use of the word *wuliao* was in fact quite complicated. The term was perhaps closer to a state of unbearable frustration—so intense as if it was about to explode—rather than boredom. She knew the Mandarin Chinese word for frustration but she expressed her frustration as *wuliao*. The word *wu* felt empty. There was nothing, nothing to work on, nothing to lean on. It was exactly how her body directly felt. (*Return Home* 226-27)

By giving a new meaning to *wuliao*, A Tĩnh uses the term to translates her experiences of migration which leave permanent marks on her body. Interlocked with A Tĩnh's disabled body and frustration, the term *wuliao* cannot fully connote what A Tĩnh has been through as its meaning is inseparable from "how her body directly feels" (227). The term thereby points to an ongoing emotional and physical state that cannot be fully translated. Such failure of translation complicates Ku's representation because the word *wuliao* shows that Ku's narratives are mediated by multiple layers of translation and interpretation. The Mandarin Chinese word *wuliao* does not enable the authorial figure to fully grasp A Tĩnh's use of the word as the authorial figure relies on her own interpretation to probe what the word might mean. The term *wuliao* thus arguably denotes an inexpressible silence that alerts readers of the multiple mediations in Ku's text.

Ku's text delineates A Tĩnh's disability in detail. In a scene where A Tĩnh shows the authorial figure around her house, the narrative describes

> A Tĩnh walked skillfully, feeling her way with the nail on the threshold and heading to the stairs. I figured she did not find her way through sight; on the contrary, sight gave her wrong signals. She was like a blind person, finding her

> way by touching the walls. Her body tilted and swayed like someone who was drunk. Her legs stepped with different width but at least she was heading in the right direction. She introduced the house and each room as she walked. Every corner had some objects placed to help her find her way without falling. (*Return Home* 224)

Rather than simply mentioning A Tĩnh's disability, this detailed description forces readers to confront the materiality of A Tĩnh's body. It is important that the description remains focused on how A Tĩnh's disabled body navigates her surroundings because such description avoids rendering A Tĩnh's disability into what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder call "[n]arrative prosthesis (or the dependency of literary narratives upon disability)," which "forwards the notion that all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to reign in excess" (53). Mitchell and Snyder argue that "[t]he narration of the disabled body allows a textual body to *mean* through its long-standing historical representation as an overdetermined symbolic surface; the disabled body also offers narrative the illusion of grounding abstract knowledge within a bodily materiality" (64). By delineating the limitations of A Tĩnh's body, Ku's description retains A Tĩnh's disabled body's "discomforting presence" (Mitchell and Snyder 8).

While *Return Home* depicts postwar Vietnamese aspirations to a middle-class lifestyle with the returned migrant workers' desire for owning houses, Ku's text attends to alternative views on houses that do not strictly follow a capitalist logic. For instance, A Tĩnh's house is described not as an asset but as "an achievement she paid for years of her life and her body" (223). As A Tĩnh shows the authorial figure around the house, the narrative attends to the thinking behind the design and arrangement of the furniture:

> The renovated house had an asymmetrical structure, not following the usual way of construction. The house looked like its construction went in tandem with a thinking process, piecing different parts without planning in advance . . . This is A Tĩnh and her family's house. The clothes rack on the hallway and the box in that corner were indexes especially set for her. Every object was a significant thing that enabled her fingers and palms to feel the way. She could find her way to the balcony and hang out the laundry. She could mop the floor of her son's room or worship the ancestor at the shrine. At last A Tĩnh could move on her own in a house she was familiar with instead of being a useless person. (*Return Home* 224)

By highlighting that the house is built on "years of [A Tĩnh's] life and her body" (223), the narrative points toward the unquantifiable aspect of the house, whose worth cannot be reduced to economic value or social status. Rather than being a polished modern house, the pieced parts of A Tĩnh's house show traces of labor that cannot easily be interpreted as an expression of a middle-class dream or as an aspiration to modernity. In describing each element as "indexes" for A Tĩnh and mapping the house from the perspective of A Tĩnh's disabled body (224), the passage indicates that the house is not so much an asset for exchange as an object inalienable from and adapting to the limitations of A Tĩnh's body—which in turn remains embedded in but not restricted to inter-Asian histories and migration.

In this chapter, I have investigated how Ku's representations of inter-Asian migrancy in *Our Stories* and *Return Home* elucidate Cold War formations in Asia, thereby challenging us to rethink the boundaries of Asian American critique. By interconnecting Philippine labor migration with movements of people within and across Taiwan, *Our Stories* foregrounds the

effects of US presence in Asia that is obscured by a US-centric understanding of the Cold War. By examining how Ku's narratives highlight US Cold War interventions in Asia as a critical force underpinning inter-Asian migrations, my discussion of *Our Stories* explores the possibilities of furthering investigations of Asian America by deploying Asian American critique and inter-Asian critique as important "historical resources" for each other (Lin 32). In contrast, *Return Home* depicts a postwar Vietnam that aspires to modernity and economic development rather than highlighting US interventions in Asia during the Cold War. By focusing Ku's representation of a relatively implicit US presence in postwar Vietnam, I show that inter-Asian comparisons enabled by reading Ku's text elucidate how the Cold War renders US presence in different Asian sites into disparate events whose interconnections cannot be uncovered by narrowly focusing on US imperialism.

Chapter Six

Reading Transpacific Entanglements in *A Tale for the Time Being* and *Dogs at the Perimeter*

In this chapter I read Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013) and Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* (2011) to analyze how these Asian Canadian/American texts interconnect narratives of subjects implicated in historical violence during and after WWII in seemingly unrelated sites. How do the two Asian Canadian/American texts bear witness to atrocity imposed on subjects in seemingly remote sites? How does reading representations of lives infected by US imperial violence in transpacific sites including Canada, the Pacific, and Asia challenge the ways we formulate critiques of US empire? Attending to how the two novels represent the difficulty of knowing the historical violence in varied sites, I argue that the two novels elucidate that US empire is entangled with interconnected networks sustained by varied imperial allies. I also argue that by leaving room to unknowable experiences of violence Ozeki and Thien offer a way to read historical atrocity experienced by Othered subjects without reproducing violence.

A Tale for the Time Being: Transpacific Entangled Memories

Ruth Ozeki's 2013 Man Booker-shortlisted novel *A Tale for the Time Being* illustrates attempts to read stories of the Other through a character named Ruth—a writer living on Cortes Island in British Columbia, where she finds a freezer bag washed ashore containing a diary along with letters written in Japanese and another diary written in French, presumed to be debris from the tsunami on March 11, 2011. The novel interweaves two narratives: one features Ruth trying to make sense of a diary presumably written by a Japanese returnee

named Nao; the other focuses on Nao's narratives of her life in California and Japan. Nao's diary reveals the brutal bullying she experiences in Japan and her Buddhist nun great-grandmother Jiko's memories of WWII. In attempting to make sense of Nao's diary, Ruth aggressively researches online and attains help to translate the references to Japanese culture and historical events. It is revealed that the diary written in French and the letters belong to Nao's great uncle Haruki #1, who died as a kamikaze soldier. As Ruth reads through Nao's diary, what she gets is not a clearer understanding of Japan or Nao but rather the links between the historical events in Japan and the histories of Canada and the US. Through Ruth's difficulty in making sense of Nao's narratives, Ozeki's novel asks what it means to contextualize the stories of the Other as well as to think about historical violence in transpacific contexts.

In this section, I examine how Ozeki interweaves Nao's and Ruth's narratives through representing WWII, War on Terror, and postwar militarism and nuclearization in Asia and the Pacific in relational contexts. By investigating the novel's juxtaposition of the memories of WWII, the aftermath of March 11, 2011, and the War on Terror with Ruth's reflection on Canada's colonial histories, I argue that *A Tale for the Time Being* foregrounds the limits of US' and Japan's nationalist framing of WWII. Furthermore, I contend that by setting Canada as Ruth's departure point to interlink US and Japanese imperial violence, the novel points to how US imperialism is supported by various imperial allies such as Canada. Finally, by analyzing Ruth's failure to make sense of Nao's diary, I argue that Ozeki cautions against the readers' desire for authentic accounts of Oriental Other.

Critics have discussed how Ozeki's text complicates the paradigms of Asian American

studies by offering transpacific readings that challenge analyses centered on nation-states and human subjects. For instance, in "On Not Knowing: *A Tale for the Time Being* and the Politics of Imagining Lives After March 11" (2015), Guy Beauregard foregrounds the transpacific linkages among sites such as the US, Canada, and Japan represented in Ozeki's text. Underscoring the stakes involved in imagining figures—including Indigenous Coast Salish peoples—that gesture to imperial and colonial histories in Ozeki's narratives, Beauregard argues that Ozeki's text offers a form of politics of imagining that enables readers to imagine lives of others in otherwise scattered and seemingly disconnected sites, encouraging critics to develop forms of Asian Canadian critique to address subjects that are rendered difficult to know in historical accounts. Addressing the limits of deploying nation-states and individuals as primary analytical categories in Asian American studies, Michelle N. Huang examines the novel through what she terms "ecologies of entanglement," an approach that "focuses on the emergence of subjects and objects as effects of epistemological cuts, which shifts the 'object of study' from objects in themselves onto the phenomena that create and bind them" (98). By reading the great Pacific garbage patch in Ozeki's text as interconnected Asian and American relations, Huang argues that such a reading method challenges us to conceive Asian American racial formation without the explicit presence of national boundaries and racialized subjects as well as extending ethical concerns to seemingly unrelated individual human and nonhuman lives.

Critics have also pointed out that the novel illustrates transpacific encounters and forgotten WWII histories. Focusing on Ozeki's representation of the Pacific Ocean and the Internet, Erin Suzuki argues that the novel questions settler colonial racialization of Asianness as alienating abstractions of capital and the reduction of the Pacific as a space for

capital accumulation. By illustrating conflicting perspectives and entangling Ruth's and Nao's stories rather than simply recuperating forgotten histories, the novel produces "ethics of relation" that reimagines "an Asian North American identity . . . that gets aligned not with the abstract circuits of capital but with the materiality of media and the act of mediation" (*Ocean*192). Claire Gullander-Drolet attends to the gaps of translation in the novel and contends that *A Tale for the Time Being* offers a form of empathic reading by reimagining transnational alliances without erasing discrete differences. Gullander-Drolet points out that through the act of translation, the novel refuses naturalizing communion between Japanese Americans and Japanese with a romanticized Japanese identity. In positioning kamikaze soldiers alongside the terrorist attacks on September 11th, the novel provokes US global entanglements while "[leaving] space for acknowledging the possibility of common ground between historical adversaries without condoning or identifying with the perpetrators of historical trauma" (Gullander-Drolet 306).

The critics thus call for reading *A Tale for the Time Being* not simply in a comparative framework but as entangled histories of North America, Asia, and the Pacific. My reading focuses more closely on Ozeki's representation of the continuation of WWII in less attended and seemingly distinct sites such as Canada and Okinawa connected by the Pacific. By attending to Ozeki's representation of the afterlives of WWII through Nao and Ruth's entangled narratives, I read the novel as a form of transpacific critique that reveals the limits of focusing solely on US empire. Critics attending to the entanglements of colonization, imperialisms, and militarization in Asia and the Pacific indicate that transpacific as an analytic decenters the US as the sole agent and reconfigures Asian American racial formations in relation to historical violence in Asia and the Pacific. Focusing on how

transpacific contexts challenge the boundaries of history, memory, and Asian American literature, Erin Suzuki points out that a transpacific frame elucidates "the ways that different Asian, Pacific Island, and American cultures and communities mutually shape one another as they circulate throughout the region" ("Transpacific" 352). Lisa Yoneyama underlines that one of the key interventions of the transpacific analytic offers is elucidating the entanglements between Japanese colonialism and US supremacy in post-WWII era otherwise obscured by a sole focus on the US empire. For Yoneyama, transpacific as analytic is particularly effective in revealing how US postwar ascendency is predicated on turning Japan into a client state. Significantly, Yoneyama reminds us that the transpacific analytic needs to attend to specific geohistorical contexts so as to avoid erasing the Pacific of Indigenous epistemologies and resistances and "how the new and old geohistorical entanglements involve the intensifying antibase struggles in the islands of Okinawa, Jeju, and other highly militarized locations in America's client-states" ("Toward" 479). Highlighting the interconnections between US hegemony in Asia and the Pacific and Asian settlement in the US, the transpacific analytic reveals that *Asian American* is both racial formation within the US and "a means to resolve the contradictions of the U.S. racial capitalism and its imperial military project" ("Transpacific Entanglements" 186).

A Tale for the Time Being illustrates a form of transpacific imagining that highlights Canada's entanglement with US empire by juxtaposing Nao's narrative with Ruth's response. In her diary, Nao narrates the violent bullying she experiences at school and imagines Canada as a safe refuge from violence. Recollecting her father Haruki #2's wish for her to apply to schools in Canada, Nao remembers that he says that Canada is "like America only with health care and no guns, and you can live up to your potential there and not have to worry about

what society thinks or about getting sick or getting shot" (Ozeki 42). Compared with the discrimination Nao experiences in Japan as a foreign transfer student, Canada is regarded as a safe haven and being safe is "the difference between Canada and America" (Ozeki 44). However, Ruth's narrative complicates Nao's imagining as Ruth refers to Canada's racist and colonial histories not contained in Nao's diary. In Ruth's narrative, Canada is represented not simply as a safe refuge exempt from racism. For instance, Ruth insists on calling the homestead where she found Nao's diary "Jap Ranch" to remind people of the histories of Japanese internment in Canada (Ozeki 32). Owned by elderly Germans now, the homestead "belonged to a Japanese family, who were forced to sell when they were interned during the war" (Ozeki 32). Ruth's reference to Japanese internment in Canada contradicts Nao's romanticization of Canada in the sense that it shows that Canada is not exempt from racist violence. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that Ruth's reference also obscures the specific histories of Japanese internment in Canada, whose forced relocation, dispossession, and deportation of Japanese Canadians during and after WWII were much harsher than Japanese internment in the US.[105] Ruth's narrative thus cannot be read as an alternative to Nao's imagining of Canada. Rather Ruth and Nao's shared lack of engagement with Canada's specific accountability points to the limits of the text in representing Canada's historical atrocity. The limits of Ozeki's representation signal the difficulty of grappling with Canada's colonial and racist foundation, which is obscured by its official multiculturalism—a point I

[105] In "Internment of Japanese in Canada" (2017), Greg Robinson points out that Japanese internment in Canada traces to long history of anti-Asian racism since the turn of twentieth century when Japanese began arriving in Canada. Since 1942, Japanese Canadians were expulsed from Canada's West Coast, stripped of property. Around 12,000 Japanese Canadians were exiled to remote areas in British Columbia. Japanese Canadians experienced harsher treatment during mass confinement compared with Japanese Americans. Robinson notes that whereas the US provided basic food, clothing, and education in the camps, Canadians officials "provided no food or clothing, and no schooling above the elementary level" (Robinson). After WWII, Canadian government forced almost 4,000 Japanese Canadians to accept deportation. The Japanese Canadians who remained in Canada were not allowed to return to the West Coast until 1949.

will return to in the following discussion.

Through juxtaposing Nao's diary with Ruth's reading, Ozeki's novel provides a space to account for Canada's entanglements with US imperialism. Reading Nao's diary pushes Ruth to relate the violence Nao experiences in Japan with Canada's violent histories. Enraged with Nao's story of bullying, Ruth's partner Oliver connects Nao's experience with global "bully culture" produced by "[p]oliticans, corporations, the banks, the military" (121). Oliver further refers to Guantanamo and remarks, "Look at Abu Ghraib. America is bad, but Canada's no better. People just going with the program, too scared to speak up. Look at the Tar Sands. Just like Tepco" (121). In positioning US war crimes and violation of human rights during the War on Terror with Tar Sands and Tokyo Electric Power Company, Oliver's reference points to Canada's imperial complicity with the US and environmental violence.[106] Oliver's comment also alerts readers of the otherwise obscured Canadian collusion in US imperial expansion through the War on Terror, drawing attention to how the US achieves global domination through various nations' assistance. Sunera Thobani underlines that Canada has actively participated in the US invasions of Afghanistan by serving as part of the US-led operation "Enduring Freedom" and not as part of a NATO mission. As an integral part of occupation forces, Canada assisted the US asserting its "*national* sovereignty as a *globalized* sovereignty in its imperial ambitions" (*Exalted* 220).[107] Importantly, in contrast with the US' more

[106] For the human and ecological costs of the Tar Sands, see Tony Weis, Toban Black, Stephen D'arcy, And Joshua Kahn Russell, "Introduction: Drawing a Line in the Tar Sands" (2014). In "Petro-Capitalism and the Tar Sands" (2014), Angela V. Carter points out that Tar Sands is entangled in broader global fossil fuel dependence supported by political economic systems. Carter also notes that Canadian government actively promoted policies facilitating offshore exploration and drilling in other frontiers. The Harper government weakened environmental policy, "making Canada the first country to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol in late 2011" (29).
[107] The participation with the invasion in turn reshaped Canadian national imaginary as a more militaristic presence and defender of freedom internationally. Thobani notes that Canada's alliance with the US is bonded with a "racial imperial solidarity" (*Exalted* 234).

militarized and masculine image, Canada's self-representation as an international peacemaker was deployed to "sanitize the image of U.S. power" (*Exalted* 234). As Thobani underlines, "By using its middle power status and its international stature as a more 'compassionate' nation, the Canadian nation-state is supporting this expansion of the American Empire and helping hunt down, incarcerate, and destroy the Muslim enemy as and where defined by the United States" (*Exalted* 221).[108] In relating Tar Sands with Tepco and US War on Terror, Oliver points to a way to read Nao's narrative not simply as violence specific to Japan but a way to reflect on violence in Canada. Nevertheless, like Ruth's references to Canada's historical atrocity, while Oliver's comment cautions against idealizing Canada, Oliver's critique of Canada is limited as it does not specify Canada's accountability for the Tar Sands.

Ruth's and Oliver's reflection on Canada thus alerts readers to not simply reading Nao's bullying stories as a story of a Japanese Other in need for Western readers' rescue. Instead, readers such as Ruth and Oliver are challenged to conduct an empathic reading by critically examining Canada's complicity with Othered subjects' suffering. In so doing, Ruth and Oliver's response questions the characterization of Canada as a multicultural refuge distinct from US imperialism. After WWII, Canada reconceived its national identity through distinguishing Canadian citizenship from British subjecthood with the 1946 Canadian Citizenship Bill and further developed official policies of multiculturalism to respond to "potentially dangerous conflicts in the cultural politics of Canadian nationalism, including the threat of Quebec separatism, demands for recognition by immigrants and other minorities,

[108] In "Neoliberal Multiculturalism and Western Exceptionalism: The Cultural Politics of the West" (2018), Thobani points out that in the post-911 period, Canada imposed gendered and racialized coding of the Islam Other by distinguishing anti-veil women as "good" Muslims and making racial profiling a politically acceptable technique of governance.

and the need for immigrants to fuel prosperity" since the 1960s (Mackey 83). Eva Mackey observes that the inclusion of Native peoples was emphasized as Canada reconstructed itself as a benevolent state by trying to transform Native peoples into "political clientele" in need of state assistance (75). With the Trudeau government announcing official multiculturalism in 1971, the "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" policy defines ethnic groups as depoliticized difference while still positioning Anglophone and Francophone Canadians as the center of national culture. Significantly, by inventing a distinct Canadian national identity, Canadian multiculturalism is part of Canada's strategies of nation-building that enables Canada to distinguish from "the United States and Europe, and thus not (directly) implicated in their (more visible) colonial and imperialist histories" (*Exalted* 153). As Thobani indicates, Canadian multiculturalism enables Canadian national identity to be "presented as more fluid, open-ended, and embracing, unlike the American and European homogenized, uni-dimensional identities" (*Exalted* 153). By interweaving Ruth and Oliver's responses, the novel offers readers a more critical way to engage with the representations of Canada in the narratives. For example, after reading the references to Canada's violent history, readers may rethink the story of the origin of Ruth and Oliver's beloved restaurant Arigato Sushi at Campbell River. Owned by Akira Inoue and his wife Kimi, who immigrated from Fukushima to British Columbia, the restaurant's name Arigao is chosen by the couple as "an expression of their gratitude to Canada for giving them a nice lifestyle, and in exchange, they worked hard to refine the palettes of their Campbell River neighbors" (Ozeki 233). Akira and Kimi's gratitude for Canada may be recast in the histories of how Canadian multiculturalism has been critical to obscuring Canada as a settler state and to "the *reconstitution* of whiteness in its distinct (and historically new) version as a culturally 'tolerant' cosmopolitan whiteness"

(*Exalted* 148).[109]

While Ozeki's text offers a transnational critique of Canada's historical atrocity, the text encounters its limitations in engaging with Canada's settler colonial present. Ozeki points to Canada's settler colonial history by positioning Cortes Island in the aftermath of March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Assuming Jiko's temple is somewhere on Miyagi's coastline, Ruth's research on Fukushima pushes her to reflect on the shared settler colonial histories between the islands. Located next to Miyagi and home to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station, Fukushima is represented as "Happy Island" (Ozeki 141). We learn that Fukushima was part of the ancestral lands of the Emishi until they were "defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army in the eighth century" (Ozeki 141). Placed in Japanese settler colonialism before March 11, the passage reveals that the nuclear disaster Fukushima residents experienced is part of the long histories of Japanese settler seizure of Indigenous lands that rendered the lives of people in rural Japan disposable. Ozeki further juxtaposes Fukushima with Cortes Island by turning immediately to Ruth's present as Ruth narrates that Cortes Island was "named for a famous Spanish conquistador, who overthrew the Aztec empire" (Ozeki 141). Ruth notes that one of the island's nicknames is "the Island of the Dead" whose meanings are contested (Ozeki 142). Some people contend that the name referred to the intertribal wars, or "the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population" (Ozeki 142). Others argue that the island had always been a "tribal burial land" (Ozeki 142). The debate on the island's name gestures to the 1782

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[109] It is worth noting that Canadian claims to sovereignty and nationality are founded on colonial violence on Indigenous peoples since the 19th century. According to Thobani, the foundation and settlement of Canada is part of the histories of European colonization of Americas. Tracing Canadian legal histories, Thobani points out that Canadian legal system is a "regime of racial power. The law upheld the rights of nationals over those of Aboriginal peoples time and time again, and in this process, it extended its own legitimacy as the sole 'authorizing authority' within the settler colony" (*Exalted* 54).

smallpox epidemic, which Cole Harris describes as a devastating process of "profound depopulation" for Coast Salish peoples (26). Harris points out that the violent histories of what is now British Columbia counter "the long-held conviction that Europeans brought enlightenment and civilization to savage peoples" and therefore not what modern British Columbians or other recent North Americans want to hear" (29). However, Ozeki's rerouting through Japanese settler colonialism presents a problematic framing that obscures Canada's settler colonial present. Although later in the novel Ruth mentions Indigenous peoples' present existence as she briefly notes "the lights from the Klahoose reservation twinkled on the far side of the cove" (Ozeki 225), the framing of Indigenous peoples as distant lights places settler colonialism in the past. The text's brief reference to Indigenous present existence signals the limitations of Ozeki's representation. Nevertheless, the limitations also arguably index the limits of Ozeki's text to represent contemporary resistant Indigenous figures for readers to comprehend settler colonialism in Canada. As Guy Beauregard underlines, Ruth's reference to the lights from the Klahoose reservation "hardly stand as an adequate marker of Indigenous agency in Canada understood as a settler colonial state, signalling once again the limits of which lives various readers of this text can presume to know" ("On Not Knowing" 105).

Although Ozeki's juxtaposition of Cortes Island and Fukushima is limited in terms of engaging with Canada's settler colonial present, the juxtaposition provides a reference point that avoids US nationalist approach to Canada's histories of racism and settler colonialism. Rather than a "remote island" (Ozeki 11), Cortes Island is entangled with lives exposed to nuclear leaking and settler colonial violence in Japan. The juxtaposition is especially crucial as it does not turn to the US as the reference point for racism. Examining the risks of reading

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* simply as an Asian American text, Marie Lo cautions that such reading "potentially universalizes Asian American paradigms and concerns as applicable to other Asian groups outside the United States and replicates the logic of American hegemony, a colonizing move that normalizes American experience and knowledge as the template of intelligibility" (326). By turning to Fukushima, Ozeki provides a way for the Japanese American figure Ruth to empathize with Nao not simply through claiming the right as "a person of Japanese ancestry" but through the difficult histories both Canada and Japan erase (Ozeki 32).

Ozeki's text further challenges US-centric comparative framework by representing WWII through conflicting memories in varied sites. During Nao's stay with Jiko in Miyagi, Nao reflects on how Japan and the US narrate WWII differently. Nao observes that in Japan WWII is known as "the war" whereas when she was in Sunnyvale the war "meant the Gulf War, and a lot of my friends at school didn't even know about World War II because it happened so long ago and there were so many wars in between" (Ozeki 178). Nao notes that Japanese call WWII the Greater East Asian War and believe that "America forced Japan to go to war in self-defense, and all that stuff they did in China was none of America's business to begin with" (Ozeki 179). In contrast, Americans think "Japan invaded China in order to steal their oil and natural resources, and America had to jump in and stop them" (Ozeki 178-79). Nao also comments that US bombing in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is considered by most "pretty harsh" (Ozeki 179). By revealing the US' claim to China's natural resources and nuclear bombing in Japan, Nao's reflection on the conflicting theories challenges the US narrative of WWII as a good war. In addition, rather than simply posing Japan as the victim of US imperialism, Nao's reflection also questions Japan's self-defense narrative by

highlighting Japanese colonialism in China. By foregrounding Japan and the US' shared colonial desire for China, Ozeki's representation of conflicting memories alerts that the US is not innocent of colonialism it accuses Japan of and also that the nuclear bombing does not exempt Japan from its war crimes in Asia. As Takashi Fujitani underlines, rather than two "incommensurable political formations" (8), during WWII the US and Japan were mutually competitive colonial empires that "shifted decisively toward the strategy of disavowing racism and including despised populations within their national communities" (7).

In addition to problematizing the US and Japan's nationalist narratives of WWII, Nao and Ruth's interwoven narratives reframe WWII as the unresolved present. Two scenes illustrating guilt for WWII in seemingly unrelated sites and time point to the war's ongoing effects. The first scene follows the scene of Ruth's intense search for images of the aftermath of March 11. We encounter Callie, a marine biologist and environmental activist who makes a living through giving lectures about whales on cruise liners travelling between the Inland Passage and Alaska. Callie offers to help Ruth examine the barnacles attached to the freezer bag containing Nao's diary. We learn that at one of Callie's lectures, an elderly man was unimpressed by the view of humpbacks. Yet, at the end the cruise he donated a check of half a million dollars to support Callie's marine mammal protection agency. Callie later learned that the man was a bomber pilot stationed at an air base in the Aleutians. The pilots flew out every day searching for Japanese targets. If they could not find any enemy vessel, they would "discharge their bombs into the sea" (Ozeki 117). The man recalled, "From the cockpit of the plane, they could see the large shadows of whales, moving below the surface of the water. From so high up, the whales looked small. They used them for target practice" (Ozeki 117). In addition to US military's environmental violence, the passage also calls attention to the US

and Japan's forced relocation of Aleut people to Hokkaido and Alaska during WWII.[110] By representing the evacuation of Indigenous people and non-human, Ozeki evokes the overlapping militarized violence in the present.

The other scene presents an email from Dr. Leistiko, a professor of psychology. Suspecting that one of Dr. Leistiko's interviewee is Haruki#2, Ruth contacted him for further information. From the email, we learn that Haruki#2 was preoccupied by shame for designing an interface that would be deployed by US military to carry out a destructive bombing session. Haruki #2 relates the shame to how WWII history is taught as shame in Japan. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Haruki#2 recalls, is "an easy case because we Japanese people were the victims of it" (Ozeki 308). In contrast, Japanese learn that they "must feel great shame to the world" for the genocide of Chinese people (Ozeki 308). Haruki#2 observes that some Japanese politicians tried to "change our children's history textbooks so that these genocides and tortures are not taught to the next generation. By changing our history and our memory, they try to erase all our shame" (Ozeki 308). We also learn earlier from Nao's diary that the shame endured even after the family moved to Japan, driving Haruki#2 to commit suicide when he saw the news of September 11 and US bombing in

[110] In 1942, Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor in Alaska. In turn, the US government forced the evacuation of the Pribilof and Aleutian Islands and relocated Aleut people to internment camps in Southeast Alaska. In "Aleut Epitaph at Funter Bay: Human Rights and Constitutional Rights Violations at U.S. Internment Camps" (2013), Alicia M. Hilton underlines that the poor condition of the camps killed nearly one tenth of the evacuees. When the survivors returned to the islands, they found their homes burned and looted by American soldiers. Hilton further notes that the internment camps US operate in Iraq and other overseas locations share "disturbing similarities between WWII internment camps and current military policies for internment and resettlement operations" (3). Russell W. Estlack underscores that the forced removal was racism against Indigenous people as anyone of one-eighth Indian blood were removed. Estlack indicates that the Unangan suffered particularly great impact. Eslack notes, "The irreparable loss of much of their traditional culture and the tragic decline of their ordeal was a direct result of their removal from the Aleutians and the Pribilofs and the harsh treatment inflicted on them by a wartime government" (6). In "The Aleut Evacuation: A Great Injustice" (1998), Christopher Cueva, points out that the 1988 public law made restitution to the 450 survivors $12,000 each. For a comparison of forced relocation of Aleut people in Japan and Alaska, see Steve Kruschel, "An Ocean of Tears Between Them: Japanese and American Relocation of Aleuts During World War II" (2018).

Afghanistan. By pairing the overlapped guilt over disavowed WWII war crimes and its continuation in the War on Terror, Ozeki gestures to the entangled violence imposed by US and Japanese empires.

In addition to foregrounding WWII war crimes in transpacific contexts, Ozeki further points to the obscured violence in the Pacific through Haruki#1's secret French diary. Although Nao reads Haruki#1 as a "military hero" who "bravely completed his suicide mission" (Ozeki 367), Haruki#1's diary reveals that such myth of kamikaze heroism erases how the Pacific was rendered into a battlefield. In the diary, Haruki#2 narrates the brutal bullying he experienced in Japanese military and other connected forms of violence Japan and the US committed in Asia and the Pacific. In narrating the development of the war, Haruki#1 observes that Japanese troops have "withdrawn from northern Burma, and American forces have landed on Guam" (Ozeki 321). Haruki#1's observation points out that Japan and the US waged WWII by colonizing Southeast Asia and Pacific islands for military use. In foregrounding the sites less recognized as the battlefield of WWII such as Burma and Guam, Haruki#1's memory indicates that the US is a "networked empire" grounding on colonization of Indigenous lands in the Pacific (Oldenziel 13).[111] Ozeki further troubles Nao's war hero reading by including Ruth's footnotes in her reading of Haruki#1's diary.[112] In closing the last entry of the diary, Haruki#1 decided to "steer my plane away from my

[111] In "Islands: The United States as a Networked Empire" (2011), Ruth Oldenziel argues that attending to the Pacific islands challenges the concept of the US as a deterritorialized empire. Oldenziel indicates that islands allow the US to disavowal its territorial ambition while expanding its global power after the Cold War. As Oldenziel points out, "The legal and technopolitical moorings of islands have helped US power to expand, contract, and change as cultural movements and political administrations have waxed and waned. Many islands transformed into novel extraterritorial spaces, some even turning into engines of globalization that seemed to have little to do with military bases" (31).

[112] In the footnote, Ruth provides a brief historical context of the Battle of Okinawa. Ruth writes, "Somewhere between 42,000 and 150,000 Okinawan civilians were also killed or wounded, or committed suicide (between one-tenth and one-third of the indigenous Okinawan population)" (Ozeki 327).

target and into the sea" at the last mission Tetsu no Ame in flying south to Okinawa (Ozeki 328). It is worth noting that Ruth's note on the casualties of both Japanese troops and Okinawan civilians during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945 reveals that Haruki#1's sacrifice is conditioned on Japanese colonization of Okinawa. According to Miyume Tanji, the Battle of Okinawa is a strategy to prioritize the safety of mainland Japanese by prolonging the battle with the US with Okinawan troops. Regarding Okinawans "essentially different and, hence, inclined to be disloyal" (Tanji 40), the Japanese military ordered Okinawans to provide food and sexual service. Tanji also points out that the official timeline of the Battle centers on the US landing on Okinawa and fails to account for Japanese military atrocity.[113]

The account of Okinawa evokes the looming afterlives of WWII Ozeki has represented throughout the novel, including nuclear contamination and settler colonialism in Fukushima and Cortes Island, and the effects of Japan and US's disavowal of WWII war crimes. Ruth's note on the Battle of Okinawa connects the seemingly disparate sites in Asia and the Pacific by foregrounding the longer histories of the militarization of Okinawa. Under dual colonialism of Japan and the US, the ongoing military occupation of Okinawa points to how Japanese colonialism continues with US hegemony during the Cold War. Yuichiro Onishi argues that maintaining Okinawa in a "state of liminality" is central for the US to assert authority in foreign independent nations: "This unchecked U.S. foreign policy to exert power over territories against not only the wishes of colonized subjects abroad but also 'the concept of a national government with limited powers' affirmed in the U.S. Constitution had already

[113] The official date of commencement of the Battle is April 1st 1945, when US troops landed on Okinawa Main Island, and ended on June 23 when the commanding officers of the Japanese defending army committed suicide. Tanji points out that the dates exclude the collective suicide of the residents in the Kerama Islands, and resident killing in Kume Island, both forced by Japanese military.

become the standard practice of U.S. imperial sovereignty by the early Cold War years" (758). In noting the Battle of Okinawa in Haruki#1's diary, Ruth reminds readers of the Japanese colonization prior to the US occupation of Okinawa—historical violence elided from the diary's readers in Japan. By inserting Ruth's note, Ozeki locates Okinawa as an integral part of both Japanese and US empires.

By interweaving Ruth's research on Okinawa and Fukushima with Haruki#1's narrative, Ozeki places March 11 in longer histories of Japan's disavowal of WWII atrocity. Haruki#1's letters and the slogans promoting nuclear power in Fukushima reveal similar rhetoric obscuring violence. For fear of censorship of his letters to Jiko, Haruki#1 refers to the bullying as "special exercise" and "favor" for student recruits like himself (Ozeki 253). Haruki#1 reminds Jiko that the letters are "'official' letter" and "no matter what nonsense I write in it, please know that those are not my last words" (Ozeki 258). Similarly, Ruth's online research of the meltdown of the nuclear power plant shows banners in Fukushima saying "Nuclear power is energy for a brighter future! The correct understanding of nuclear power leads to a better life!" (Ozeki 141). Ruth's research further reveals that the Japanese government permitted Tepco to "release 11,500 tons of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean" and tried to contain the news of the reactor meltdown (Ozeki 197). Despite the radioactive levels of the water were "about a hundred times over the legal limits," Tepco did not regard it as a problem since "the Pacific Ocean is vast and wide" (Ozeki 197). By noting the Pacific Ocean, Ozeki connects Haruki#1's crash with Fukushima and highlights the parallel violence between Okinawa and Fukushima. Rather than a division, the Pacific connects the sacrifice of Okinawa with nuclear contaminated Fukushima as "abandoned people" by Japanese state's complicity with the US and corporation (qtd. in Norimatsu 3).

Satoko Oka Norimatsu indicates that building nuclear power plants in rural areas and military bases in Okinawa are both rooted in the "discriminatory policies of the national government" that "discriminates against the periphery to assure the protection of the state and guarantee the energy needs of the metropolis" (3). Takahashi Tetsuya further points out that the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima is a product of a "sacrificial system" that generates electricity for Tokyo at the expense of Fukushima residents' safety (13). In addition, Takahashi indicates that the disavowal of Tepco's responsibility after March 11 is embedded in Japan's failure to "hold anyone accountable for Japan's role in the war" after WWII (13).[114]

By noting Okinawa in Haruki#1's diary, Ozeki gestures to the intertwined sacrifice of Okinawa and Fukushima. The ongoing US military occupation of Okinawa interrupts the rhetoric of safe nuclear power in Fukushima and instead evoking histories of US nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Muto Ichiyo points out, the introduction of nuclear power in Japan in the 1950s was US strategy to maintain its domination in postwar Japan by replacing memories of nuclear bombing with safe nuclear power. Eisenhower's "Atoms for Peace" program campaigned a rhetoric of peaceful nuclear power in contrast with nuclear weapon. The campaign was reinforced by Japan's denial of its WWII atrocity by providing a reasoning for nuclear power for viewing the atomic-bombed experience as something "too late to work on to process" (Muto 177). The promotion of nuclear power obscures the fact

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[114] In "Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan's Internal Colony" (2013), Nathan Hopson indicates that Tōhoku has been Japan's internal colony long since the retardation of development since the 19th century. Historian Iwamoto Yoshiteru explains that the peripheralization of Tōhoku is the result of "the distinctly *imperialist* economic modernization process that Japan had learned from Europe and the United States" (qtd. in Hopson 5). Hopson further notes that the lack of accountability of the failure of Tepco to stave off nuclear meltdown and the Japanese state's inability derives from what Maruyama Masao terms as "system of irresponsibility" (qtd. in Hopson 4). Masao underlines that the system of irresponsibility is a wartime system which positions the emperor as the source of morality while voiding personal accountability. Hopson argues that the social system devoid of personal accountability was a root cause of Japan's WWII atrocity and used to exempt Tepco's responsibility.

that nuclear power is militarized since its birth. Okinawa became entangled with the nuclear power regime during the 1960s and 1970s, a period when the issues of the Anpo treaty, Okinawa reversion, and nuclear power became integrated in US hegemony and covered up by Japanese national security set up. In exchange for allowing the US to freely use Okinawa as a military colony, Japan receives protection from US nuclear umbrella while "maintaining and strengthening its own technological and economic foundation for its nuclear armament by dint of the all-powerful nuclear power complex" (Muto 199).

In inserting Ruth's research of Japan dumping contaminated water into the Pacific after March 11, Ozeki challenges the Japanese narrative of the nation as the victim of US nuclear bombing. In addition to revealing Japan's shared violence with the US in the Pacific, the account of the Pacific gestures to the series of nuclear testing conducted by the US in the Pacific in post-WWII era. US nuclear tests were entangled with wars in Asia as they took place in the same period with the Communist taking over China in 1949 and the Korean War, which prompted the US to expand military bases in Okinawa. The development of nuclear power and anti-nuclear movements in Japan are intertwined with nuclear testing in the Pacific. In 1954, the Japanese tuna fishing boat *Lucky Dragon No. 5* was showered with radioactive fallout from a megaton-class hydrogen bomb test carried out by the US on the Bikini Atoll and the exposed crew developed symptoms on their way home. The incident sparked large scale movements against atomic and hydrogen bombs in various areas and across party lines in Japan but attention was later deflected by US campaign for peaceful nuclear power and the move of military bases to Okinawa. Yu-Fang Cho points out that US nuclearism is conditioned on settler colonialism in Asia and the Pacific. Cho stresses that nuclearism should be examined not simply as spectacles of atomic explosions but rather as

"more expansively as long, protracted processes of 'nuclear diffusion' that have produced less visible, uneven, yet linked death-making consequences across heterogeneous lands and waters" (12). Cho notes that such nuclear diffusion produces uneven conditions in Japan, Okinawa, and the Marshall Islands. During Okinawa reversion, both Japan and the US governments dismissed protestors' demand for reversion without nuclear weapon and secretly transported nuclear-armed US missiles.[115] In the Pacific, Marshallese are rendered into "expendable population" subject to displacement, radioactive pollution, medical experiment, and seizure of Indigenous lands (Barker 292).[116] By situating the meltdown of nuclear power plants in the Pacific, Ozeki engages with the entangled nuclearism and militarization in the Pacific and Asia.

Ruth's research enables readers to attain knowledge about Japan to read Nao's diary and Haruki#1's materials, thereby positioning Ruth as a figure of authority providing contexts for readers. However, scenes disrupting Ruth's attempt to make sense of Nao's narrative alert readers of the risks of positioning themselves as the subject of knowledge when reading Other.[117] The novel illustrates how Ruth's subject position is destabilized through Ruth's dreams. In the novel, Ruth has three dreams where she enters Nao's narrative and tries to access more information about Nao and Jiko without outcome. After reading Nao's bully at school, Ruth has her second dream about Jiko. In the dream, Ruth sees Jiko sitting in front of a computer with a pair of black glasses similar to hers. Unlike the first dream, where Ruth

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[115] See Yukinori Komine, "Okinawa Confidential, 1969: Exploring the Linkage between the Nuclear Issue and the Base Issue." (2013).
[116] For how Bikini is deployed to erase the unrepresentatable war in Marshall Islands, see Teresia K. Teaiwa, "Bikinis and Other S/pacific N/oceans" (2010).
[117] Elsewhere I have discussed how the textual complexities of Ozeki's novel create a space for critics of Asian North American texts to consider the potential and stakes involved in our attempts to make sense of stories of others and the knowledge produced around Ozeki's novel. See Yana Ya-chu Chang, "Making (Non) Sense: On Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*" (2018).

stays as a bystander gazing a Jiko, this dream allows Ruth to interact with Jiko as she offers her glasses to Ruth. However, the glasses undermine Ruth's sight and her ability to articulate her experiences. Although the glasses are "similar to the ones Ruth wore," they do not help her see clearly (Ozeki 122). Rather, they are "too thick and strong, smearing and dismantling the whole world as she knew it" (Ozeki 122). In addition to her visual power, Ruth's linguistic power to make sense is challenged as well. She describes how she is thrown into "a place or condition that was unformed, that she couldn't find words for" (Ozeki 122). The binary oppositions between up and down disrupted by Jiko in the previous dream further disorientate Ruth's ability to make sense of space and time. She becomes faceless and deprived of a sense of direction. She tries to delineate the experience: "No up, no down. No past, no future. There was just this—this eternal sense of merging and dissolving into something unnameable that went on and on in all directions, forever" (Ozeki 122). Instead of a subject making sense of Jiko through language, Ruth loses her subject position and becomes a floating signifier: "Nothing but a vast and empty ruthlessness" (Ozeki 122). Although Ruth is able to see through Jiko's lens, she cannot access her point of view and instead encountering a world she cannot fully understand. While the dream reenacts the scenes in Nao's diary, Ruth's position as a subject of knowledge about Jiko and Nao's world is destabilized. Simultaneously, neither can readers of Ruth's dream acquire additional information about Nao's narrative. The dream thus reveals how readers are entangled with and shaped by Nao's narrative as they read, thereby cannot easily claiming the position as subject of knowledge.

Ruth's third dream further challenges the meaning-making power of language. The dream takes place after Ruth finds that Nao's narrative end abruptly with blank pages despite

she recalls that the diary continued till the last page when she found it. The dream begins with Ruth wondering what separation is like and then she presses her fingers "against the rag surface of her dream," with her fingers "recogniz[ing] the tenacity of filaments and know[ing] that it is paper about to tear" (Ozeki 346). The paper surface of Ruth's dream symbolizes her penetration into the pages of Nao's diary and her attempt to make sense of it. However, she enters a world where words are "a pileup of sounds, like cars colliding on a highway, turning meaning into cacophony" (Ozeki 347). Although Ruth runs into words, she bumps into an opaque language that cannot provide the means to attain transparent meaning. Instead, it makes no sense and creates further confusion that prevents Ruth from understanding Nao even when she is in her diary. The pictorialized words appearing in Ozeki's text also show the limits of language's power to make sense. For instance, the word *crow* turns into a crow image on the page (Ozeki 349; See Fig. 1). This transformation of words into images opens up the meaning of the word to more varied interpretations, thereby arguably creating additional obstructions in the process of making sense. This difficulty to make sense culminates in a crucial scene where Ruth enters a mirrored room. She searches for Nao "in the mirror, a logical place, but sees only a reflection of herself that she does not recognize" (Ozeki 348). This scene forcefully defies Ruth's desire for "real and therefore traceable" Nao and her diary—desire risks reducing the diary into a window to Japanese culture (Ozeki 150). However, instead of a window, she encounters a mirror that reflects an unrecognizable self. Where she expects to find Nao's presence, she bumps into a self that has remained invisible throughout her reading. At this moment, Ruth, who has been in some accounts invisible in her process of deciphering Nao's diary, discovers her own presence in intervening in Nao's narrative with her relentless pursuit of its meaning. Furthermore, the fact

that Ruth's reflection is an unrecognizable self suggests that there is no self-affirming Other. This ambivalent difference casts Ruth as an insider in relation to Nao's narrative but at the same time casts her outside of Nao's story. In other words, Ruth at this point in the text is not a subject making sense—and thereby stands in contrast with Nao as an object waiting to be deciphered. As Ruth's reflection yells, "*Don't be fooled!*" when she tries to see the girl in the mirror, the mirror scene also warns readers about their own invisible presence in the novel (Ozeki 349).

Fig.1

The dreams not only render Ruth's invisible role as a reader visible, but also decenter her from the position of a subject who makes sense of the figure of Nao. In fact, the subject positions of readers of the novel are shaken as well. Such subject positions are destabilized by the text's multilayered narrative frames and mixed genres. For example, *you* in Nao's narrative constantly shifts through Nao's different modes of address. At the beginning, "you" is "only one special person" to whom Nao promises a "[t]otally personal, and real" message (Ozeki 26). At one time "you" even becomes "God" in whom Nao confides (Ozeki 136). "You" is even thrown outside of the narrative when Nao declares, "But the fact is, you're a lie. You're just another stupid story I made up out of thin air because I was lonely and needed someone to spill my guts to" (Ozeki 340). "You" can be both the characters in the novel who

read Nao's diary and readers of the novel. If readers focus on Nao's narrative, they arguably become Nao's "you." On the other hand, if they focus on Ruth's narrative, they become the characters reading Nao in the novel. Constantly shifted inside and outside of the narratives, readers of Ozeki's text experience Ruth's difficulty of reading as they read.

"*You"* in Ozeki's text is further complicated by the inclusion of letters and a diary by Haruki #1. Because they are presented in a semi-fictional documentary style, these letters and diary cannot simply be read as a true record of a Japanese account of World War II. Neither can readers overlook the facts in Haruki #1's narrative such as references to the kamikaze soldiers. Much like Ruth's unrecognizable self in the mirror stops her from seeing Nao, readers cannot fully make sense of Haruki #1 through the semi-fictional documentary passages included in Ozeki's novel. Even though the diary and letters presumably provide readers private access to the figure of Haruki #1, careful readers of Ozeki's text cannot claim that they fully understand him through reading.

Moreover, the intended reader of Haruki #1's diary and letters is arguably as unstable as Nao's "you." Unlike Nao's unspecified and shifting "you," Haruki #1's "you" addresses a specific reader. In terms of the letters, he addresses them not only to Jiko, but also to the imperial government of Japan. With censorship in mind, he presents the bullying he experienced as "special exercises" and as "a favor, they say, turning us into military men" (Ozeki 253). Here, language is not a transparent window to meaning but rather a means to conceal meaning. In this view, Haruki #1's words are evidently not reliable. However, in the last letter included in Ozeki's text, Haruki #1 writes, "But no matter what nonsense I write in [the next 'official' letter], please know that those are not my last words" (Ozeki 258). This

sentence suggests Haruki #1 is telling the truth in this letter and presumably makes his words reliable. This reliability seems to allow readers to understand and to enter Haruki #1's narrative frame. However, the format of the letters alerts readers that they can never fully enter the narrative frame because they are not Haruki #1's intended reader, Jiko.

Haruki #1's diary also swings readers inside and outside of its narrative. Like the letters, the diary casts readers as outsiders from the beginning by addressing the *you* in French as "ma chère Maman" (Ozeki 317). Yet, as Haruki #1 later writes in an English translation produced by a character named Benoit, "Duplicity is a hardship I am unwilling to suffer, so I have decided I will keep two records: one for show, and this hidden one for truth, for you, even though I hardly expect you will ever read this" (Ozeki 317). The "you" here seems to refer not exclusively to Jiko, but anyone who finds the diary and is able to read French. In this sense, the diary seems to promise truth for anyone able to read it. This promise of truth implies transparency and invites readers to enter the narrative frame. However, in the middle of the diary, Haruki #1, convinced that nobody will read his words, writes, "I write them for my own benefit, to conjure you in my mind. They are meant only for me" (Ozeki 323). Here, readers are ostensibly banished again, and even arguably rendered non-existent. Readers are simply Haruki #1's configuration. It is he that writes them into existence. Instead of reading Haruki #1, readers of Ozeki's text thereby encounter their selves rendered unrecognizable by Haruki #1's unstable you. Constantly shifted inside and outside of Haruki #1's narrative, readers cannot easily make sense of him. Instead, their subject positions are repeatedly challenged by the limits of their powers to make sense. This difficulty of reading, like the mirror Ruth faces, blurs the line between a subject who makes sense and an Other who exists to be deciphered.

By interweaving Nao and Ruth's narratives, Ozeki's text offers a relational reading of historical violence in seemingly scattered places in North America, Asia, and the Pacific while cautioning the necessary difficulties of reading. The relational representation foregrounds the sites less known as the battleground of WWII and the Cold War such as Okinawa and the Pacific, while pointing to Japan and Canada's complicity with US hegemony and the colonization within each nation. By juxtaposing Ruth and Nao's narratives, Ozeki offers a way to shift a sole focus on US imperialism and attend to varied imperial allies prolonging US wars—wars waged at the expense of Indigenous lands and human and non-human lives. In challenging both the US' and Japan's nationalist narratives of WWII, Ozeki's text gestures to the potentials of transpacific memories that "avoid being another imperializing intellectual gesture from the west, wherein an oppositional method also reasserts the dominant subjectivity of western practitioners" (Nguyen and Hokins 24). It should be noted, however, that the limits of Ozeki's text in representing Canada's specific accountability for settler colonialism and racism demand further investigation of how to represent Canada's historical atrocity without rerouting to and recentering on US empire.

***Dogs at the Perimeter*: Transpacific Empathic Reading**

Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* represents overlapped memories of historical violence across different geographies and temporalities by interweaving lives of two diasporic characters displaced by wars and genocide. Janie (whose birth name remains unknown to readers throughout the novel), a Cambodian refugee adopted in Canada, is a survivor of the Khmer Rouge genocide. Janie's colleague Hiroji immigrated with his parents

and brother James to Canada due to US bombing of Tokyo during WWII. As Janie investigates why Hiroji suddenly quit his job and went to Cambodia, she recalls her memories of the genocide, whose traumatic impact endures and threatens to break her relationship with her son Kiri. Janie's investigation also leads her to a series of records of the genocide and correspondence from James. We learn that James signed up with the International Red Cross in Southeast Asia in the same year when "Nixon's bombs were falling on Cambodia" and was captured by the Khmer Rouge (Thien 18). During his imprisonment, James's Cambodian wife Sorya is tortured to death along with their unborn child. During his captivity, James remembers how the bombing of Tokyo forced his family to move to Canada. Through interconnecting memories of historical trauma of Japanese Canadian and Cambodian refugee figures, Thein's novel pushes readers to engage with the Cambodian genocide not simply as a historical event unrelated to immigrants in Canada but historical violence embedded in Cold War military interventions in Asia and inseparable from the Canadian and US histories.[118]

In this section I investigate how Thien's novel reimagines postwar justice by interweaving Cambodian refugee and Japanese Canadian characters' memories of atrocity and displacement in Asia. By examining how Thien juxtaposes overlapped memories of

[118] The resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees has been promoted by Canadian government as its humanitarian achievement. In *Elusive Refuge: Chinese Migrants in The Cold War* (2016), Laura Madokoro points out that the mass refugees from the Vietnam War marked the first time white settler societies such as the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand responded en masse to refugees in Asia. Regarding Canada, Madokoro notes that the resettlement of 60,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos was, and continues to be, regularly used as evidence of the country's 'humanitarian character'" (188). The Canadian government selected refugees based on family ties and the capacity for individual migrants to successfully establish themselves While Canada created an Indochinese Designated Class, based on the provisions of the 1976 Immigration Act, to facilitate the resettlement of people who did not meet the definition of a Convention refugee, in the late 1980s, the Canadian government committed to the Comprehensive Plan of Action, which made screening and voluntary repatriation the priority solutions. Madokoro underlines, the apparent largesse of resettlement nations' response "belies the extent to which white settler societies remained highly selective in their approach" (212).

military interventions across different space and time, I contend that the novel foregrounds the unresolved aftermath of wars in Asia and the Khmer Rouge genocide, which are implicated in Cold War politics. In representing Janie and Hiroji's haunting memories of the genocide in Cambodia and US bombing in Tokyo, *Dogs at the Perimeter* challenges Canadian nationalist narrative of immigrants while pointing to the accountability of nations such as the US and Canada's foreign policy in Southeast Asia. In addition, by attending to how Thien represents memories of violence through fragmented narratives and silence, I argue that the novel offers a form of empathic reading that alerts readers of the stakes involved in bearing witness to the genocide as non-Cambodians.

From 1975-1979, Cambodia was reigned by the Khmer Rouge regime, which was grounded in agricultural revolution. In the name of eradicating Western influence, the Khmer Rouge regime declared "year zero" and systematically conducted four years of genocide, war crimes against neighboring Vietnam and Thailand, and forced removal of residents in the cities to labor camps in the countryside. Ben Kiernan points out that the Khmer Rouge is a "unique ideological amalgam of communism and racism" which seeks to annihilate urban class as traitors influenced by the West as well as ethnic groups such as Chinese, Laos, Thais, and Cham Islamic community (x). The eradication of urban educated class and ethnic minority poses the Khmer Rouge leaders as "Cambodian nationalists and racial heroes" (Kiernan x). During the regime's four-year reign of terror, Cambodia witnessed the deaths of approximately 1.7 million Cambodians, ethnic minorities, and citizens of neighboring countries. Many were forced to escape to the Thai border, where refugee camps were created by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.[119] After 1979, large waves of

[119] For an account of the camps life, see Sucheng Chan, *Survivors: Cambodian refugees in the United States*

Cambodian diaspora were relocated to the US, France, Canada, and Australia. The Khmer Rouge regime has profound impact even after its fall as the regime "undercut sentiments and cohesion among family and kinfolk" to create a radical new society (Ebihara and Ledgerwood 275). As May Ebihara and Judy Ledgerwood note, expressions of love for family members were scorned and punished during the control of the regime. The aftermaths of genocide continue in the postwar era as fear of the return of Khmer Rouge and large portions of land remain uninhabitable because of the land mines.

Despite the Khmer Rouge's massive crimes against humanity, justice for the affected has not been achieved as Cambodia and the nations such as the US perpetuate state-sanctioned forgetting of the atrocity and the failed international justice of the Extraordinary Courts in the Chambers of Cambodia (ECCC). As Cathy J. Schlund-Vials indicates, postwar Cambodia and the US in different ways obscure the histories of the Khmer Rouge. While Cambodia commemorates the day when the regime was ousted as the Victory over Genocide Day (or the Nation Day), the celebration of post-genocide nationalism renders the victims of the Khmer Rouge as a story of "a saved nationhood by way of human loss" (Schlund-Vials 5). Further impeding Cambodia from achieving justice and reconciliation is that former Khmer Rouge members still occupy positions in the government. After the 1997 coup, Prime Minister Sen issued pardons for former Khmer Rouge leaders in exchange for political truce. On the other hand, the US obscures the central role of its foreign policy in the making of Khmer Rouge regime. From 1969-1973, Operation Menu bombings targeted Vietnamese communists in the Cambodian countryside. The US-backed Lon Nol dictatorship further destabilized Cambodian government, facilitating the rise of the Khmer Rouge. By choosing not to

(2004).

acknowledge the link between the Vietnam War and the genocide, the US practices what Schlund-Vials terms as the Cambodian Syndrome, which "marries incomplete frames of forgetting to schemes of strategic remembering" (14).

In 2005, the ECCC was established to try the senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge regime and "those most responsible for the atrocities committed" (Urs 61). The hybrid tribunal was created jointly by the UN and Cambodian government in order to allow more local participation in the convictions. In 2011, the ECCC convicted the first Khmer Rouge leader, Kiang Guek Eav (known as Duch) for his part in the genocide. According to John Ciorciari and Anne Heindel, the ECCC "will likely be the last officially sanctioned opportunity to seek a measure of justice and pronouncement of legal truth on the inner workings of the Pol Pot regime" (4). Despite the ECCC's aim to deliver international justice, the tribunal is deemed as failed justice, mired in corruption allegations, administrative mismanagement, and feud between international and Cambodian personnel. The belatedness and limited temporal scope of prosecution (1975-1979) constrains accountability solely to the senior leaders, against many Cambodians' wish to bring local low-level perpetrators to justice. Furthermore, the limited temporal frame fails to address the war crimes of foreign nations such as the US and China, thereby isolating Khmer Rouge war crimes from histories as well as creating "a culture of impunity for foreign actors who committed serious crimes in Cambodia" (Urs 84).[120] The tribunal also fails to address Cambodians' desire to "know about the role of

[120] The US was not the sole contributor to the genocide in Cambodia. In *Refugee Lifeworlds: TheAfterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia* (2022), Y-Dang Troeung underlines that Chinese engineers sent over by the Mao regime to consult on Pol Pot's agricultural dam projects were "the only other foreigners besides the tour groups allowed to travel to Democratic Kampuchea" when the borders of Cambodia were closed from 1975 to 1979 (xx). Troeung points out, "China's inspiration of the ideology of Democratic Kampuchea contributed to the loss of innumerable lives, both Cambodian and Chinese, yet tour groups who travel to Tuol Sleng from China today have little interest in learning about this history" (xx).

foreign nations and foreign individuals in the atrocities" (Urs 73). The international justice the tribunal pursues does not correspond to the Cambodian public's notion of justice. Tara Urs points out that many Cambodians wish to see consequences for a greater number of defendants, including the dead notorious leaders such as Pol Pot. Whereas the tribunal focuses on retributive punishment for those "most responsible" for the regime, Cambodian public think that "giving support to the perpetrators (political or financial support, for instance) is enough to make one responsible for what happened and therefore eligible for prosecution at the Extraordinary Chambers" (Urs 74). The impossibility of the trial to bring the dead leaders to justice fails to address Theravada Buddhism's notion of karma. As Urs notes, "not having any consequence for major perpetrators who have already died makes it hard for many Cambodians to feel that the trials will bring justice" (73).

Within this context of selective remembering and unresolved justice, I read Thien's novel as a fictional witnessing of historical violence that challenges the court's limited temporal framework of accountability. In the novel, Thien challenges the figure of refugee as an object of rescue by the West. Early on in the novel, Thien juxtaposes Janie's memories of Cambodia with her work as neuroscientist and reveals how the haunting trauma of the genocide cannot be simply explained by science. Janie remembers a paper she co-authored with Hiroji on a patient named Elie's condition of gradually losing the ability to speak. As the MRI result shows an imbalanced neurons processing words and visual image, Janie explains that Elie's disease is "degenerative, a quickening loss of neurons and glia in the other parts of her brain, impeding speech, movement, and finally breathing itself" (Thien 15). From the fragment appearing at the beginning of the novel, we learn that Janie also struggles with words, a symptom similar wit Elie's. In the fragment, Janie narrates her response to Hiroji's

sudden disappearance, "but the words didn't come" (Thien 2). Janie reflects, "Just as before, they didn't come to me in time" (Thien 2). Nevertheless, Janie cannot apply scientific explanation to her own insomnia and loss of words. Following the description of Elie's "diseased inner world" (Thien 14), we encounter the scene where Janie investigates James's letters to Hiroji, which provoke her memories of how the Khmer Rouge regime forced her migration to Canada. Janie recalls, "I remembered arriving in Canada, my stomach clenched, ashamed that I had lived yet terrified of disappearing." (Thien 21). By juxtaposing Elie's case with Janie's memories, the scene points to how Janie's trauma cannot be isolated from the historical violence that conditions her displacement to Canada. Rather than a result of diseased neurons, the juxtaposed scenes question pathologizing refugees simply as victims of psychological issues without accounting for the violent historical contexts.

In addition to highlighting the limits of psychological approach to Janie's trauma, Thien further illustrates the historical context fracturing Janie's sense of identity, problematizing the narrative of refugees turning into grateful citizens.[121] When Janie remembers her life with her foster parents, we learn how the memories of the genocide keep haunting her life in Canada rather than resolved by her new family. Janie recalls that she used to help her foster mother Lena—an academic writing about the history of science—with organizing documents because she "wanted to be of use to her, to repay her somehow" (Thien 22). Janie's awareness of her duty to repay Lena suggests that although the new family provides a refuge from the genocide, the safety is conditioned on a sense of indebtedness for which she needs

[121] In *The Cambodians, Laotians and Vietnamese in Canada* (2000), Louis-Jacques Dorais documents the historical context of Southeast Asian immigration to Canada. Southeast Asian immigrants to Canada dates back to French war and defeat in Indochina in the 1950s. The 1954 Geneva conference ratified the independence of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam and divided Vietnam into two states, the north and the south (4). In *Cambodian Refugees in Ontario: Resettlement, Religion, and Identity* (2009), Janet McLellan observes that Canadian resettlement programs failed to provide Cambodian refugees culturally sensitive services.

to work to prove her worth.[122] Moreover, we further learn that helping Lena with the research documents invokes Janie's memories of the Khmer Rouge as Janie narrates that she used to steal Lena's collection of biographies of mathematicians and neuroscientists. The episode is puzzling for readers as Janie remarks, "In my mind, it was as if these people walked through Lena's rooms, as if they were family and they were still alive" (Thien 22). The conundrum is later revealed as Janie remembers that the Khmer Rouge regime has been "obsessed with recording biographies" and that "we understood that the story of one's own life could not be trusted, that it could destroy you and all the people you loved" (Thien 25). While readers might initially consider Janie's obsession with the biographies as a refuge from the traumatic past, Janie's memories reveal that accumulating knowledge about others' lives and rendering them into words is a form of violence at the expense of the lives killed in Cambodia.

The juxtaposition of Janie's memories of her life in Canada and Cambodia also challenges the celebration of multicultural identities that erase the historical atrocity involved producing refugees. In recalling she used to secretly watch the reels her foster parents shot during their vacation in Cambodia in the 1960s night after night, Janie narrates that she asked Lena for "a new name, a new existence" (Thien 24). Giving her new name Janie, Lena assures Janie that she is not "an unaccompanied minor, a separate child" as the aid world labels her (Thien 24). Lena insists, "we are granted a second chance, a third one. You don't have to be ashamed of having lived many lives" (Thien 24). Yet, Janie's memories of her deceased family and friends immediately interrupt Lena's denial of Janie's other identities as

[122] For an analysis of how Vietnamese refugees were constructed as a figure ever indebted to US' gift of freedom, see Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (2012).

Janie ponders, “I wanted to tell Lena that we were too many, that I needed to guard the world that held us all together” (Thien 24). By referring to the deceased who are not able to become refugees in Canada, Janie’s reflection points out that her request for a new name is not an embrace of a new identity to forget her past. In recalling the many lives not able to survive the Khmer Rouge regime, Janie problematizes Lena’s approach to Janie’s “many lives” as a liberating identity (Thien 24). Rather than multiple identities granted by many chances, Janie’s new identity literally bear the many lives who do not have the chance to live. Instead of a narrative of a blessed immigrant, Janie’s turn to “we” underlines the unforgettable collective memories that cannot be easily reduced to an individual’s story of obtaining freedom through Canadian citizenship. Janie’s self is always already collective memories of “absent presences that politically, juridically, and culturally persist in the more than three decades that have passed since the dissolution of Democratic Kampuchea” (Schlund-Vials 189-90). As Y-Dang Troeung elucidates, Thien’s representation of Janie’s shattering subjectivity illustrates “how public acts of disappearance are mirrored in or initiate private acts of disappearance, how parts of the self are stolen or hidden away, whether in response to the need to present trauma or as a self-protective measure to allow for the possibility of future selves” (163).

In addition to complicating a positivist narrative of the refugee, Thien further interconnect forms of historical violence in Asia by interweaving James’s memories of the US bombings of Tokyo in 1945 and Janie’s memories of the US bombings of Cambodia. As the Vietnam War was ending, James recalls the radio reporting the war and “the shaming of Americans not only here in Cambodia and next door in Laos” (Thien 181). The war-ravaged Cambodia further reminds James of “how the air burned his throat in Tokyo when he was

small, how he was terrified of fire, and then the long journey by boat and plane and bus that took them to Vancouver where everything was green, where things were young and not skeletal, but still he was so fucking scared" (Thien 182). Similar with Janie's haunting memories, James's fear of the war persists even after he arrives in Canada. By representing James's and Janie's overlapped memories of displacement, Thien points to the interconnected violence in Tokyo and Cambodia. James's memories highlight the US war crime obscured by the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Joseph Coleman underlines, the bombing of Tokyo has long been "overshadowed by the U.S. atomic attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki" despite that the bombing "resulted in more immediate deaths than either of the nuclear bombings, [standing] as a horrifying landmark in the history of warfare on noncombatants" (Coleman). By representing how the war in Cambodia provokes James's memories, the scene also overlaps temporalities of the bombings, interconnecting the seemingly unrelated historical trauma. As David McNeill notes, Tokyo bombing was "the apprenticeship for a generation of future Cold War warriors" (2). The jellied petroleum that filled the bombs was "a prototype of the napalm that laid waste to much of Vietnam two decades later, stuck to everything and turned water into fire" (McNeill 2). Moreover, the bombing of civilians leaves enduring legacy: "the trumping of political and moral arguments against mass civilian slaughter by military technicians and rationalists" (McNeill 3). Borrowing from Mark Selden, McNeill notes that the justification for killing civilians shape the following wars in Korea and Vietnam. Although bombings of Tokyo and Cambodia took place in different periods, Janie and James's overlapped memories foreground that the bombing of Cambodia is part of the series of US military interventions preceding the Vietnam War.

While James describes Vancouver as "where everything was green, where things were young and not skeletal" (Thien 182), Hiroji's memories of racism challenges Canada's image as a safe refuge. Hiroji recalls once he and James were on a drive to Squamish, "they rolled the windows down and listened to the tide, admired the teenaged girls sitting on the picnic tables. 'Japs,' one said the other girl giggled. 'Sayonara!' (Thien 225). The scene illustrates that despite Hiroji and James' Canadian citizenship they are still excluded as Oriental other—a process of racialization of Asians tracing before the creation of the legal status of Canadian citizenship in 1946 and was fundamental to "state formation, to the creation of notions of 'whiteness' in Canada" (Price 13).[123] Challenging the narrative of immigration to a haven from war, the episode repositions Canada as a place where the Japanese immigrants experience a process of racialization and exclusion. Furthermore, readers may recall that prior to the scene, we also encounter James imagining what could have been if the family had not been displaced by the war. Captured by the Khmer Rouge, James remembers a trip with Hiroji, who was curious about Japan and kept asking him to share the life in Tokyo. However, keeping the memories to himself, James recalls "the bomb shelters and the charred dog he saw once, and the brief sojourns home his father made, and how the war in China had sculpted his father into someone both powerful and empty" (Thien 190). In the following passage, James, in delirium, sees a ghostly figure whom he recognized as Hiroji or Kwan (a Chinese-Khmer boy known by James's captor Chorn, who insists on addressing James as Kwan). James then ponders that the figure might be "some metamorphosis of the two or was it James as he once was, the James that might have grown up in Tokyo with a father and a

[123] In *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific* (2011), John Price points out that the colonization of western Canada opened up mass Chinese migration in the 1850s. As a settler colony, Canada's racialization of Chinese took place against the backdrop of controlling the Aboriginal population and the question of Chinese labor as valued commodity.

language of his own" (Thien 193). By interweaving James and Hiroji's memories, Thien not only reveals racism in Canada but further illustrates that postwar Japanese immigration to Canada is entwined with US imperialism in Asia and Japanese colonialism in China. The juxtaposed memoires point out that Canada cannot be easily seen as a safe refuge embracing all immigrants while highlighting how the wars in Japan and China make growing up as a Japanese with an unbroken father impossible for James. Moreover, in depicting the ghostly figure as an open referent of Japanese Canadian, Chinse-Khmer, and the James who might have been a Japanese, the passages illustrate the obscured interconnected histories shaping Asian immigrants and Asians who stay. It is also worth noting that James is misrecognized as a Chinese-Khmer and later forced to adopt the Chinese-Khmer Kwan's identity. In his early days in Cambodia, James grows used to being taken for "a local here, a regular Chinese-Khmer slogging through the mud" (Thien 183). In contrast with being marked as "Japs" in Canada" (Thien 225), the misrecognition seems to offer James a place to belong in Cambodia. Yet, James's following imprisonment cautions readers against conflating James with Cambodians simply through Asian identity. During his imprisonment, James adopts varied identities to survive, including "a soft Canadian" (Thien 185), someone from "Japan. Tokyo" (Thien 186), a doctor treating "the people hurt by American bombs" (Thien 186). By the time when James adopts Kwan as his identity, we can no longer view the Chinese-Khmer identity as a racial or national identity but several intersecting and overlapped routes of becoming diaspora. James's imagining of his might-have-been past shows that his becoming of a Japanese Canadian is partly conditioned by US imperialism in Asia.[124] Through

[124] It should be noted that the US is not the sole determinant of Canada's complicity in wars in Asia as Canada derives from imperial histories different from the US. In "The Minor Transpacific: A Roundtable Discussion" (2018), Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung propose that attending to Canada's position as a "minor" empire in relation to other minor empires such as Australia and Singapore that share legacies of British

juxtaposing the memories of wars in Cambodia and Japan, Thien shows that the Khmer Rouge regime and Tokyo bombing are not unrelated to Canada but a crucial force determining Canadian immigration. As Yves Engler underlines, Canada is complicit with supporting French colonialism in Indochina in the 1950s and played an integral role in supporting the following US invasion. Throughout the 1980s, Engler notes, Canada provided aid to the Cambodian political coalition that included the Khmer Rouge after Vietnam toppled the regime in 1978. Canada also endorsed the Cambodian coalition government that included Khmer Rouge along with ASEAN states whereas Australia and the European Community withdrew recognition of Khmer Rouge in 1981.[125]

In representing the entwined histories of Cambodia, Canada, and the US, Thien's novel reveals that the Khmer Rouge regime is implicated in Cold War politics rather than an isolated case of exceptional violence—a separation that enables what Troeung calls "a comforting myth for the West" to conceive Cambodia's trauma as "a cultural dystopia apart from the world's making in the twentieth century" (*Refugee Lifeworlds* xi). When reading James's letters to Hiroji, Janie remembers the last stages of Cambodia's civil war, "The North

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colonialism provides a way to shift referential frameworks from dominant centers such as the US and China to regional contexts (15). Kim and Leung indicate, "While nations such as Canada, Australia, and Singapore are less dominant than the United States and China in terms of population, economic power, military might, and many other respects, they are nonetheless still influenced by the imperialist imaginaries of these current major empires even as they are haunted by the ghosts of the British Empire" (15). In *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire, and the Transpacific* (2011), John Price contends that the question of immigration and racializing Oriental other is fundamental to Canada's colonial state formation and the construction of Anglo-Saxonism in international affairs. Price points out that Canada's racialization of Japanese immigrants derives from its settler colonization of Indigenous peoples and anti-Asian racism against Chinese immigrants in the 19th century. After the race riots against the increasing Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian immigrants in Vancouver in 1907, Canadian government shifted focus to the control of Asian immigration and began to work more closely with the US government to "coordinate immigration policies and to promote closer Anglo-American relations" (Price 20). After WWI, Canada joined the US and Great Britain as "an informal global network linking the American and British empires" (Price 26). At the Versailles peace conference (1919), Canada's prime minister Robert Borden pursued "the idea of Canada's acting as an honest broker in harmonizing US-British relations while seeing to it that its own racist legislation was not threatened by new international regulations" (Price 27).

[125] See Engler, Ives. *The Black Book of Canadian Foreign Policy* (2009).

Vietnamese Army against the American military, the Khmer Rouge versus the Khmer Republic, Communism against Imperialism, everyone takes a side, and some take every side" (Thien 20). By referring to the varied bipolar conflicts, Janie uncovers that the Vietnam War is not simply a war between Vietnam and the US but a transnational war expanding to neighboring countries. A binary approach to the war thus risks erasing how both the US and Vietnamese military turned Cambodia into a battlefield, thereby deeply implicated in Cambodia's civil war. Khatharya Um contends that the Vietnam War is a limited reference as it is "promoted as being *in*, *about* and *for* Vietnam" ("Vietnam War"136). Attending to the invisibility and centrality of Cambodia and Laos is significant as their paradoxical position in US foreign policy characterizes the clandestine nature of American involvement. As Um indicates, "though Cambodia and Laos became a political and military stomping ground for all contending parties in the conflict, they were never seen in any light other than as instrumental to the success in Vietnam" ("Vietnam War"136). Furthermore, in juxtaposing the Cold War rivalry parties, Janie reveals that both sides, whether Left or Right, East or West, are complicit in the Khmer Rouge's rise to power. In situating the Cold War in Cambodia, Thien challenges the denial of the genocide by some Western intellectuals during the Cold War. Donald W. Beachler observes that the debates on how to interpret the Khmer Rouge regime were driven by political interests based on Cold War ideological positions and that "it often appeared as though the Cambodian people were little more than props in the rhetorical, ideological, and policy strategies of academics, journalists, and governments" (214). Whereas the US Leftists credited the Khmer Rouge as anti-imperialist revolution and advocated its program of economic development as new way against capitalism, the Conservatives saw the regime as "evidence of the evils of Marxism and a rallying point for reinvigorating the fight

against 'communist expansionism' in Southeast Asia" (Beachler 224).[126] Analyzing both Left and Right intellectuals' instrumentalization of Cambodian suffering, Troeung underlines that "the Cold War complicities of these intellectuals were not simply accidental, uninformed, or retrospectively justifiable" but "reflected the rigid commitment to unyielding ideological visions and agendas, at the expense of Cambodian lives" (*Refugee Lifeworlds* xx). The Cold War conflicts were also evoked in the following memories recalled by Janie's brother Sopham, at this point renamed as Rithy and sent to be trained by the Angkar: "The Americans and the Vietnamese were pressing at the borders, Teacher said, and every child, every Cambodian, must defend their country. We are pure, she said, we are free within ourselves" (Thien 102). Set in US military interventions in Southeast Asia, the passage shows that the closing of Cambodian border and the making of the regime cannot be viewed apart from Cold War politics—politics inseparable from US and Canadian histories.

Thien's novel does not simply seek to recover the erased histories but further alerts the risks of witnessing violence inflicted on Othered subjects. As a fictional witnessing account by a non-Cambodian writer, the novel frequently cautions readers of the violence of the desire to know and rendering the diasporic experiences into words. Through different characters, Thien represents how memory and language are deployed as weapon by the Khmer Rouge. For instance, James's captor Chorn describes that the regime is "very organized (Thien 205). Chorn narrates, "They are making an archive in which nothing is missing. Every person must write a biography. They must write it many times to ensure that

[126] Beachler indicates that responses to the genocide in Cambodia and the aftermath were entangled in Cold War realpolitik. Seeking to improve US-Sino relations, the Carter administration encouraged the Chinese and Thai governments to provide aid to the remnants of the deposed Khmer Rouge regime. The US and its allies opposed to unseating the Khmer Rouge's designee as Cambodia's representative in the UN, until the Cold War was winding down, in the early 1990s. Beachler notes, "Only then did the United States, having participated in a decade-long proxy struggle in which the consequences of the genocide had been far from the primary concern, end its economic and diplomatic sanctions against Cambodia's existing government" (225).

all the details are correct" (Thein 205). Chorn adds, "This is Angkar's memory. We are all writing out histories for Angkar" (Thien 207). Chorn's description shows that rendering people's memories into words is a violent project of making personal memories a national archive that leaves no room for the unknown and unknowable. To remember is to risk making one's life a file subject to the regime's interpretation. The violence of the regime is therefore not only the power to kill but also the power to undermine everyday language and intimate relations. In the scene where Janie and her family were forced to evacuate from Phnom Penh, she recalls hearing the soldiers talking about Angkar: "I understood the boy's words but I couldn't follow their meaning, it was as if another vocabulary, another history, had distorted the language I knew" (Thien 72). Janie's memory illustrates that under the regime's control language is emptied out of meaning and cannot be used to articulate or express experiences. As Um points out, "With words vacated of their original meaning, language under the Khmer Rouge in effect became an unstable weapon, deployed by perpetrators as a tool to deceive, lure, threaten, and injure, and by the oppressed to protect each other with veiled admonitions" (*Shadows* 189). In attending to the terror of making everything known and accounted by the state and the unreliability of language, Thien cautions readers of the desire to know the violence in Cambodia from Janie's first-hand account. Thien's concern for violence of language is especially significant as the ECCC is criticized for its complicated structure and legal notions incomprehensible for ordinary Cambodians. As Urs observes, "The names of the crimes in the Extraordinary Chambers Agreement include words that many Cambodians have never heard before such as 'crimes against humanity'" (69).

Instead of deploying the refugee characters' memories for a better understanding of the wars in Asia or restoring history, Thien underlines the importance of silence and not-

knowing. For example, in contextualizing James's departure from Canada in the same year when "Nixon's bombs were falling on Cambodia, spies were breaking into the Watergate building" (Thien 18), Janie remarks "but I was young and didn't know those stories" (18-19). Janie recalls, "I remember staring up at the sky, transfixed by the airplanes. They were everywhere above us—commercial planes, fighter planes, transport planes, helicopters—a swarm that never ceased" (Thien 19). Shifting to the perspective of those on the ground, Janie's memories do not name the US as the perpetrator of the bombings in Cambodia. In underlining Janie's unawareness of the history and turning the narrative perspective to the ground, the passage illustrates that for those subjected to the violence the perpetrators are an unknown and unrecognizable "swarm" (Thien 19). By highlighting Janie's lack of knowledge about the broader history, I do not intend to dismiss the historical contexts and US accountability for the bombings in Cambodia. Rather, I wish to suggest that the scene of unidentifiable planes epitomizes the complex colonialisms and imperialisms US militarism in Southeast Asia is entangled with, thereby gesturing to the limits of the form of juridical justice the ECCC envisions. The unnameable "swarm" suggests that those involved directly and indirectly in the atrocity cannot be simply reduced to punishing named individuals in the court as justice cannot be achieved without undoing US military complex and its collusion with varied imperial allies such as France and Canada, and many others less explicit supporters of the regime (Thien 19). The scene thus resists the foreclosure of the temporal and geographical frame of prosecution, pushing us to address the limits of judicial justice.

The scene where Janie and James meet in Laos reinforces the importance of leaving room for the unknowable. As the two survivors of the regime talk, Janie describes, "The days and nights we remembered began to overlap." (Thien 171). Their overlapped memories are

not revealed to readers. Instead, we only know that Janie has terrible dreams afterwards and that she sees the returning dream as “the shape of my life, this was where the contours lay, this was the form” (Thien 171). Not revealing what the dreams are, Janie declares, “Yet I wanted, finally, to be the one to describe it. To decide on the dreams that took root in me” (Thien 171). In refraining from representing Janie and James’ memories, Thein leaves space for the survivors to process and determine the meanings of their experiences while cautioning against speaking for and claiming knowledge about the diaspora figures without caring their willingness to share their memories. Thien thus reveals the limits of knowledge and representing the violence in Cambodia as a non-Cambodian writer. In so doing, Thien leaves space for what Jolie Chea terms as *nonmemory*, which describes “a general impossibility for nonsurvivors to know the true experience of war, gesturing towards the (problematic) ways in which nonsurvivors might go about demanding survivors speak about their experiences” (160).

This key moment is immediately followed by Janie remembering her son Kiri, who “names the rivers for me just as I once taught him: *St. Lawrence, Fraser, Kootenay, Mackenzie, Yukon, Chaudière, Assiniboine.* Words to keep him company, to name the world, to contain it” (Thien 171). In turning to how words are deployed to “contain” and deliver Canadian nationalist pedagogy (Thien 171), Thien alerts readers that the ongoing settler colonial violence of renaming Canadian geography is not distinct from the violence of the Cambodian genocide. As Beauregard indicates, “The forceful turn to a Canadian nationalist pedagogy—signalled here through a mix of colonial and Aboriginal (re)namings of rivers, repeated and arguably reproduced through the figure of Kiri—raises the question of additional ‘cartographies of violence’ (to use Mona Oikawa’s resonant phrase) that are not

locatable in Cambodia in the 1970s and beyond but remain inextricably present in Canada" ("Interwoven" 184). By shifting from Janie's determination to control her narrative someday to how words are used to contain Canadian geography, Thien pushes readers to read the text not simply as a representation of the Cambodian genocide but further imagine transnational geographies of historical violence and ongoing violence in Cambodia and Canada.

Thien's storytelling frequently problematizes reading the narratives of the characters who have experienced the Khmer Rouge as archives shedding light on the Cambodian genocide. This caution is especially forceful in the sections titled "Mei," "Rithy," and "James." While the titles seem to promise a first-hand witnessing account of the atrocity, Thien's use of third personal narrative and Janie's first personal narrative cautions that the narratives are not directly from the characters of the titles. Rather, the narratives are mediated, retold, and represented by others. For example, Rithy's section opens with Janie reminding us what follows is her retelling of Sopham's words: "This is the way he described it to me, later on, in the caves" (Thien 101). Immediately following the reminder, we learn that Rithy is the alias Sopham adopts to become a Khmer Rouge cadre. By highlighting the retelling and Sopham's renaming, Thien alerts that the section cannot simply be read as a Cambodian's account of how the Khmer Rouge worked or the violence Sopham experiences. Although Sopham tells Janie that "One day, I promise, I'll find a way to tell you everything" (Thien 137), his first personal narrative never appears as he was drowned on the way out of Cambodia. Instead of Sopham's experience, the section leaves readers with Janie's retelling: "My brother told me about the prisons, about Prasith, about the woman named Chanya. His voice was flat" (Thien 129). Thien thus refuses reducing Sopham's narratives to an autobiography offering readers authentic knowledge about the regime. Furthermore, by

deploying Janie's narrative voice, Thien underlines that Sopham's stories cannot be isolated from the collective memories of other survivors and those deceased. For instance, via Janie's memories in the section, we encounter Bopha, a girl Janie befriended with in the unit and died. Bopha teaches Janie how to escape from the violence through stories as Janie remembers: "Our own lives were littered with traps, unanswerable questions, and it was Bopha who first taught me how to escape from myself in this way, disappearing into the souls of other people, both the real and the imaginary" (Thien 122-23). The shared memories with Bopha underscore that authenticity is not the main issue in reading Rithy's section or simply dismissing Janie's retelling. Janie's narrative voice, as well as other survivor characters', is always already born with the voices of those who did not survive to tell their stories. Janie's retelling therefore is not simply recounting Sopham's experiences but also rearticulating collective memories. As Janie recalls, "Thida disappeared, then Chan, then Srei. Other children arrived to replace them. Su, Leakhena, Dara, every one of us like water spilling into the ground" (Thien 123). In narrating, Janie refuses to let others disappear while challenging the narrative frame entitled by the forced alias "Rithy."

Whereas Rithy's section highlights collective memories, Mei's and James's sections underline the violence of wanting to know about the survivors' experiences. For instance, the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime does not enable James to articulate his memories. In 1980, James adopted the name Kwan—a "mute, a smuggler, and a solitary man" (Thien 210)—and returned to Kampot, which became "a bombed-out ruin" (Thien 212). The boy who gave James a ride tells him, You can speak now . . . Angkar is done. Finished" (Thien 212). Instead of speaking, "Kwan gestures that he can't speak, he has never spoken" (Thien 212). James/Kwan's silence gestures to the difficulty of articulating traumatic memoires. Yet, the

silence is also a refusal to remember the violence of making everything known—a form of violence the regime imposed. As Um indicates, silence of the Cambodian genocide survivors "urges a different reading of silence, not as pathology but as fortitude and resistance, not mutedness and submission but a scream" (*Shadows* 192). In Mei's section, we encounter another key scene alerting readers of the violence of reading Other's pain. In this scene, the Khmer Rouge cadre Prasith renames Janie as Mei and lifted his shirt to "reveal an unhealed scar" (Thien 93). Although Prasith's body demonstrates the material impact of US bombings, Mei's first personal narrative does not offer readers depiction of the unhealed wound. Rather, Mei narrates, "I averted my eyes" (Thien 93). Through turning away Mei's gaze, Thien leaves a crucial gap that refuses to exploit detailed depiction of the wound at the expense of reducing the wounded body to spectacle of violence. As Beauregard elucidates, the scene underlines "the need, at times, to *look away*" ("Interwoven"180). Thein thus cautions that refraining from exploiting the material impact of historical violence is equally significant with resisting elimination.

Thien's depiction of the Red Cross and international media also cautions the stakes of producing humanitarian narratives. James and Hiroji's experiences as volunteers for the Red Cross challenge the organization's image as the pinnacle of humanitarianism. Instead of a narrative of offering humanitarian aid, Thien underlines the brothers' frustration and encounter with subjects challenging the figure of refugee in need for Western rescue. For instance, James's relationship with Sorya constantly challenges his desire to be the role of offering help to those in need. James observes, "She is clever and fearless, she married for practical reasons, and she will never be completely grateful" (Thien 179). In addition to defying the role of grateful refugee, Sorya's body also refuses to be turned into a sight of

Oriental beauty. Gazing at Sorya's long hair, James notes that "it eats the light and hides the thoughts that no one says: I married you as a favour to Dararith, I married you because of the war, out of loneliness, out of fear" (Thien 180). In refusing to depict Sorya as a victim in need, Thien underlines James's doubt of "living off the fat of the land: a noble Red Cross doctor healing children who will be pushed to the front lines tomorrow" (Thien 177).

Hiroji's encounter with the Cambodian refugee boy Nuong further questions the production of humanitarian narrative. During his volunteering with the Red Cross in 1979, Hiroji witnesses how international media exploits images of the refugees: "Film crews record a girl, the same age as Nuong, suffering from starvation. On camera, she dies" (Thien 232). Rather than depicting how the Red Cross saves the refugees, Hiroji is "ashamed to witness such hardship" and the privilege of Red Cross staff (Thien 241). Hiroji recalls, "The food in the hotel is fresh and bountiful, the Red Cross has its own private stock of food. He's never eaten so well in his life" (Thien 241). While Nuong was sponsored and bound for Massachusetts, his sudden deportation interrupts the narrative of the US as a refuge offering permanent settlement. We learn through Hiroji that after a fight, Nuong became labeled as a "refugee who had committed a felony" despite "his refugee status in the United States, his high school diploma, his green card" (Thien 159). Nuong's deportation questions how humanitarianism limits temporal frame of crisis to the immediate aftermath of wars and setting refugees' arrival in receiving countries such as the US as the endpoint of their displacement. Nuong's narrative reveals that the forgetting of the war in the US renders him an ever outcast. As Nuong tells Janie, when he first arrived in the US, "it wasn't the war he had left behind—the refugee camps, the Khmer Rouge—that has struck him as incomprehensible" but the "vastness of this new country" (Thien 162). Nuong remembers,

"He felt out of place, unknowable" and comments that "hardly anyone outside the country remembers this war. Only us, only here" (Thien 162). Whereas the Khmer Rouge violently rendering people into comprehensible biographies, the US forgetting of the war reduces refugees to an "unknowable" being (Thien 162). Knowing and forgetting are revealed to be overlapping forms of violence.

By underlining the violence of knowing and humanitarian narrative, Thien cautions against representing and reading the Cambodian genocide for the interests of charity or recovering history. This is particularly crucial as the emergence of the Red Cross in the US is entwined with the history of mobilizing the homefront for war effort in the 1920s. As Kevin Rozario points out, with the rise of mass media such as movies and newspapers, the Red Cross in the US appealed to the public's empathy with sensational images and depiction of horrors of wars. The development of humanitarian enterprises and new fundraising strategies produced "a need to make the suffering as real, as immediate, and as disturbing as possible" (Rozario 435). Such depiction is seen in *Cambodia: A Question of Relief*—a short video produced by the ICRC in 1970. The film records the ICRC's humanitarian aid in 1979 Cambodia. Centering on the devastation in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia, images of Cambodian refugees are presented as evidence of suffering without contexts of how the war happened and who were involved. The opening scene features a helpless mother sitting on the ground with a child (See Fig. 2) with the narrator describing, "These are the lucky one. They survived. Just" (*Cambodia*). refugees are also represented as moving crowds and described as "rootless existence" (*Cambodia)*. The desperation of Cambodia is presented as an urgent need for aid by repeated back-and-forth cuts of ruins and images of crowds of refugees heading to places unknown to viewers (See Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). As images of silent crowds, the

refugees became a sign symbolizing humanitarian crisis.

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

In foregrounding the unknown and unknowable, Thien's novel not only pushes readers to engage with difficult histories but also demands "renewed forms of critical commitment needed to respond to such narratives" ("Interwoven" 181). A form of such critical commitment is represented through memories exceeding the aftermath of war. In the final scene where Janie is on the way to the airport to go back to Canada, Janie remembers a scene of her parents' argument and reconciliation. Janie recalls, "My childhood is full of images like this, passing moments I didn't understand, as if I were looking through a window into the aftermath of a great event" (Thien 252). Not knowing what her parents' argument was about

and neither can she understand their gesture of reconciliation, Janie observes that between her parents "was a world I couldn't enter, full of pathos and history and seeking. What I saw this time was not an aftermath, but a window opens to a different way of loving each other" (Thien 252). By refusing to determine the episode as a window to the aftermath of war, this key scene calls for a reading practice that does not center on reading the novel only as a forceful critique of the perpetrators of the wars at the expense of reducing the diasporic subjects to victims of historical atrocity. In remembering the love her parents share, albeit it is a world she couldn't enter, Janie brings back expressions of intimacy forbidden by the Khmer Rouge.[127] Janie narrates, "I want to remember the way they lived, carried forward by intimacies and dreams I cannot know. The way they lived much more than the remaining days could give them" (Thien 252). Refusing to frame the memories of her parents as evidence of the violence the regime committed, Janie calls attention to their humanity and lives exceeding the period of the regime. In this sense, Thien's representation offers a way of commemoration that Khmer Rouge survivor Rithy Panh describes as "the work of research, of understanding, of explication" (162). Panh underlines that such work "isn't some sad passion; it's a struggle against elimination. Of course such work doesn't raise the dead . . . But it gives us back our humanity, our intelligence, our history. Sometime it even ennobles us. It makes us alive" (162). In leaving space for a world unknown and not contained by aftermath, Thien turns to a project of "writing an existence that might have been, had such an escape been possible" ("What").

[127] In "'To the Intellectuals of the West': Rithy Panh's *The Elimination* and Genealogies of the Cambodian Genocide" (2016) Y-Dang Troeung and Madeleine Thien indicate that the revolutionary language of the regime fuses Marxist and Maoist concepts. Troeung and Thien note that "the language of Khmer Rouge Marxism—one of slaughter—sought to purge the linguistic remnants of the past perceived as threatening: terms of family, love, desire, ownership, learning, tradition and hospitality" (n.pag).

Thien further reminds us that such work of commemoration requires decentering patriarchal history and cross-boundary diasporic friendship. Toward the end of the novel, in response to Hiroji's remark that he cannot remember his brother's face before he left Canada, Janie wonders "How many lives can we live? . . . How many can we steal back and piece together?" (Thien 253). In the following passage Janie remembers the stories her mother used to tell her, "stories that had been handed down by her own grandmother's grandmother" (Thien 253). The story is about the soul, the *pralung*, which while easily gets distracted and runs away from the body, can be returned. Janie recalls, "We did not come in solitude, my mother told me. Inside us, from the beginning, we were entrusted with many lives. From the first morning to the last, we try to carry them until the end" (Thien 253). Unlike the many lives Janie's foster mother Lena celebrates, Janie's memories of the *pralung* and the many lives one was born to carry are grounded in the oral history passed down from her maternal lineage. Rather than positioning "many lives" as multicultural identities demanding one start anew and forget the past (Thien 253), the story situates one's identity in collective memories of relationship with others. By placing Janie's life in collective memories and her "friendship" with Hiroji and James, Thien gestures to many lives who share overlapped memories of displacement as a way to "piece together" ravaged souls and bodies (Thien 253).

Through interconnecting Janie and Hiroji's memories, Thien's novel represents the atrocity in Cambodia beyond recovering a first-hand witness account. By interweaving overlapped memories of displacement and immigration experiences of Cambodian refugee and Japanese Canadian characters, *Dogs at the Perimeter* pushes readers to account for the varied perpetrators such as Canada and the US involved in Cambodian genocide as well as connecting seemingly unrelated wars in Vietnam and Japan—an account failed in the

international justice the ECCC pursues. In so doing, Thien suggests that the Cambodian genocide is not a single historical episode but embedded relational forms of historical violence exceeding temporal and geographical boundaries. As Thien states in an interview, "I hoped that *Dogs at the Perimeter* would be able to stand behind the historical and witnessing books, to say that all of us have a stake in understanding what happened there, that we are all connected to it" (Lam). Furthermore, in leaving space for the unknown and unknowable, Thien's novel offers a way of empathic reading that alerts the risks of reading diaspora's pain for a better understanding of wars and power. Underscoring collective memories and cross-boundary friendship, the novel calls for a reading practice that allows the diasporic figures to determine their narratives.

In this chapter, I have examined how Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* and Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* represent entangled memories of wars and displacement across varied sites such as Asia, the Pacific, Canada and the US. Through interweaving narratives of seemingly unrelated subjects, the novels urge readers to account for the difficult histories conditioning their migration—histories readers are part with. By foregrounding the intersection of US empire with Japan and Canada, both novels highlight the limits of formulating critiques centering on the US. By investigating how the texts represent the difficulties of reading the diasporic figures' narratives, I have sought to demonstrate how the two Asian American/Canadian writers alert readers of the ethical distance of reading and representing Othered subjects by refusing to foreclose the unresolved pasts and reduce the diaspora figures to simply victims of historical violence.

Conclusion

Borzutzky: "The history of atrocity is not a series of separate events here. Rather, to be alive is to experience all the obliterations at once."

——Don Mee Choi, "Womb 8691945"

In this dissertation, I have analyzed how contemporary Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural productions elucidate Cold War afterlives in post-WWII Asia and North America by representing seemingly unrelated historical atrocity as entwined imperial networks. By illustrating the entwined complicity of the US with Asian states as well as with less recognizable Western imperial allies such as Canada, the selected cultural texts illuminate that the US is not the sole actor inflicting racial and gendered violence on racialized subjects at home and abroad. Through examining how the Asian American/Canadian and Asian authors connect US military interventions in Asia with US anti-black racism at home, militarization and nuclearization in the Pacific, settler colonial violence, and postwar Asian state violence, I hope to have shown that placing US empire in broader and relational contexts enables us to decenter the US as the sole object of critique. To do so is not to exempt the US from the responsibility for its ongoing colonial and imperial violence or to offer a more "diverse" understanding of US empire. Rather, by investigating Asian American/Canadian texts along with Asian texts, my goal has been to highlight relationalities obscured by a US-centric understanding of the Cold War. Through analyzing how the texts reimagine US wars in Asia in relation to postwar violence, I have attempted to show that accounting for the role postcolonial Asian states and imperial allies such as Canada play in enabling US wars provides a more nuanced understanding of the Cold War. That is, in

addition to reframing the Cold War as what Jodi Kim terms as "a geopolitical, cultural, and epistemological project of imperialism and gendered racial formation undergirding U.S. global hegemony" (237), I have also sought to show how the Cold War continues through US-backed Asian regimes and settler states, disavowal of Japanese war crimes, uneven economic distribution, and postcolonial Asian nationalism. On the other hand, by attending to the entwined imperial networks in the texts, I also hope to have shown that the obscured relationalities may generate unlikely transnational, cross-racial, and cross-gender alliances.

Throughout the chapters, I have explored how the Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts imagine relational imperial networks and resistances. Adopting inter-Asian and transpacific frames, I have examined how the texts illustrate Cold War afterlives in "sites not conventionally understood as arenas of combat" (*Violent Peace* 225). In the first three chapters, I have analyzed how Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student*, Don Mee Choi's *Hardly War* and *DMZ Colony*, Lee Issac Chung's *Minari*, and Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* interweave Korean War memories with Korean migration to the US and less recognizable atrocity committed by US-backed South Korean regimes. By examining how the texts depict US War in Korea in relational contexts of Japanese colonialism, South Korean state violence and subimperialism, and contemporary South Korea's capitalist development, I have argued that such relationalities elucidate historical atrocity doubly forgotten by both the US and South Korean nationalist narratives of the Korean War. In the following three chapters, I have examined how lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking for,* Ku Yu-ling's *Our Stories: Migration and Labour in Taiwan* and *Return Home*, Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*, and Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* illustrate Cold War afterlives in sites not commonly known as the frontstage of US wars in Asia. By grounding US wars in

militarization and nuclearization in the Pacific and foregrounding Japan's disavowal of war crimes and Canada's complicity with US empire, and the explicit and implicit US presence in Taiwan and Vietnam, I have argued that the texts help us further investigate historical atrocities that are intertwined with the more well-known US wars in Asia and yet rendered implicit. In addition to analyzing the entwined imperial networks in the texts, I have also underscored how the texts address the limits of comprehending and representing the Cold War. Through highlighting how the authors refuse to render traumatic memories into comprehensive narratives and instead attending to unlikely friendship and alliances, I hope to have shown that imperial networks also generate relationalities forged by shared yet distinct histories and positionalities.

This dissertation has thus sought to, on the one hand, reframe the Cold War in relation to post-WWII violence in Asia and the Pacific, and, on the other hand, to provide an alternative way of reading Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts as mutual historical resources. One intervention this reframing of the Cold War and Asian American/Canadian cultural productions brings to Asian American studies is a deeper interrogation of the field's national ontology. In "Un-American Geographies: Transpacific Thinking and Asian American Studies" (2022), Lisa Yoneyama argues that as a filed whose practices and knowledge are intermeshed with US Cold War geopolitics, it is crucial for Asian American studies to refuse the reiteration of US geopolitics or any other form of state-governed interpellations. To unsettle the Americanization and disciplinization of Asian American studies, Yoneyama underlines, the field needs to forge "unruly affiliation" with other fields of inquiry and that un-Americanization of Asian American Studies requires "alternative geographies" of knowledge to interrogate the field's national ontology (360,

354). By situating these texts *simultaneously* in varied historical contexts of the US, Canada, the Pacific, and Asia, my reading of the Asian American/Canadian cultural texts suggests that one way of decentering the US and Cold War geopolitics is to attend to the concurrent geohistorical contexts in addition to the US context despite and because of their absence in the representations. Through placing Asian state violence in relation to US imperialism, this dissertation also seeks to conversely bring intervention to Asian American studies in Asia. By analyzing the entanglements between Asian states and US hegemony, this dissertation may provide a reading method that provokes reading and teaching of Asian American/Canadian texts in Asia for "renewed structures of knowledge" about entangled colonial violence within and across Asia in addition to learning about racial violence in the US ("Knowledge in Movement" 74). Reading Asian American/Canadian cultural productions in this way may allow further investigation of how postcolonial Asian nationalism perpetuates Cold War ontology and settler colonial violence.

Attending to Cold War afterlives in relational contexts is especially crucial as we witness renewed Cold War logics of the escalation of US-China rivalry during the pandemic. Accounting the Cold War through interconnected histories allows us to see the geopolitics of anti-Asian violence in the US, thereby revealing the risks of framing anti-Asian hatred as "an exceptional moment of brutal violence, decoupled from the geopolitical circumstances of US imperial and capitalist domination across the Pacific" (Bae and Tseng-Putterman 419). Rather, we may interconnect anti-Asian violence with South Korea's announcement to resolve Japanese war crimes against Korean forced labor during WWII by compensating the victims with fund from South Korean business in 2023—a decision President Joe Biden immediately celebrated as "a groundbreaking new chapter of cooperation and partnership"

for a “shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific” (The White House).[128] Placed in the protracted Cold War afterlives, the seemingly unrelated events are revealed to be US-Japan complicity in disavowing both countries’ war crimes that concurrently structure anti-Asian racism in the US and US hegemony in Asia and the Pacific. As New York Times journalist Amelia Nierenberg acutely observes, South Korea’s proposed resolution promises increased trilateral cooperation with the US and Japan, which is “a boon to the U.S., which is trying to shore up regional alliances as China grows stronger” (Nierenberg). The disturbing developments in “post”-Cold War era index how Cold War logic and sentiment continue to intercept redress movements and decolonization in Asia and that activism against anti-Asian racism in the US cannot be achieved without undoing the enmeshed complicity of the US and its Western and non-Western imperial allies.

By way of conclusion, I want to reflect on the linked obliterations in Don Mee Choi’s poem “Womb 8691945” (2015), whose title refers to the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on August 6 and 9 in 1945. Interweaving a range of translated texts, Choi places the nuclear bombing in broader contexts by highlighting B-29 bombers dropped in North Korea during the Korean War as “Hiroshima and Nagasaki simulated bombing runs” and further connecting with the forced Korean laborers, soldiers, and sex slaves who were killed by the nuclear bombing in Japan (“Womb”). Against the erasure of violence by the nuclear bombs codenamed as “Little Boy” and “Fat Man,” Choi foregrounds the obscured US war violence and reconceives nuclear bombing in Japan as a womb giving birth to atrocity in other sites: “We were all conceived in the warring womb, our memory lining radiated. We were all fed

[128] For the contexts of South Korea’s proposed compensation plan, see Choe Sang-Hun, “South Korea Offers a Resolution to Wartime Labor Dispute with Japan” (2023).

from the same placenta, empire's placenta. We all need to be translators against the empire. Our code names: Anti-Little Boy, Anti-Fat Man, Anti-colonial, Anti-dictatorship, Anti-austerity, Black Lives Matter, and others" ("Womb"). Significantly, Choi also indicates that tracing the connected histories cannot simply center on US atrocity but also involves accounting for South Korea's state violence: "8691945 of Korea. We had our own Little Boy and Fat Man in South Korea. Dummies too. An equation for rapid neocolonization = Generals→ Dictators→ Presidents. Many protested, many massacred, many tortured, many qqqq" ("Womb"). In reframing the nuclear bombing in relational and transnational contexts, Choi points out that the transpacific imperial networks inevitably engender other stories and memories that counter interconnected erasures. By tracing the linked contexts of US Cold War military interventions, entwined complicity in historical violence in Asia and the Pacific, and narratives exceeding critiques of empires in Asian American/Canadian and Asian cultural texts written in English and other Asian languages, I hope to gesture to a more relational interrogation of Cold War ontology. Emerging from seemingly hopeless circumstances, these stories imagine linkages across the Pacific while pointing to other narratives and subjects whose entanglements with Cold War afterlives yet to be addressed.

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