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# Someone Else's War: Korea and the Post-1945 U.S. Racial Order

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# Someone Else's War: Korea and the Post-1945 U.S. Racial Order

**Abstract**

The Korean War (1950-1953) marked a major turning point in matters of race in the United States. On the one hand, the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces during the war inaugurated state-mandated institutional racial integration as a putative path to full and equal citizenship for racial minorities, particularly for African American soldiers and their families. On the other, the lifting of racially exclusive immigration laws signaled changing conceptions of who could become an American citizen at all, paving the way for the mass migration of Asian immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century. The dissertation reads the Korean War as the event that set these twin processes of integration and immigration in motion—processes that transformed the racial order in the post-45 period in the United States. It examines recent and contemporary works of literature by American writers of color, including novels by Ha Jin, Rolando Hinojosa, Chang-Rae Lee, and Toni Morrison, in order to work through the profound but often unthought effects of the Korean War for minority subjects in U.S. culture. Through these readings, the dissertation argues that the Korean War heralded a new mode of liberal inclusion for racial minorities in the United States.

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English

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2015

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SOMEONE ELSE'S WAR: KOREA AND THE POST-1945 U.S. RACIAL ORDER

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Amy June Yumi Lee

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## ABSTRACT

### SOMEONE ELSE'S WAR: KOREA AND THE POST-1945 U.S. RACIAL ORDER

A. Yumi Lee

David L. Eng

Josephine Park

The Korean War (1950-1953) marked a major turning point in matters of race in the United States. On the one hand, the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces during the war inaugurated state-mandated institutional racial integration as a putative path to full and equal citizenship for racial minorities, particularly for African American soldiers and their families. On the other, the lifting of racially exclusive immigration laws signaled changing conceptions of who could become an American citizen at all, paving the way for the mass migration of Asian immigrants in the second half of the twentieth century. The dissertation reads the Korean War as the event that set these twin processes of integration and immigration in motion—processes that transformed the racial order in the post-45 period in the United States. It examines recent and contemporary works of literature by American writers of color, including novels by Ha Jin, Rolando Hinojosa, Chang-Rae Lee, and Toni Morrison, in order to work through the profound but often unthought effects of the Korean War for minority subjects in U.S. culture. Through these readings, the dissertation argues that the Korean War heralded a new mode of liberal inclusion for racial minorities in the United States.

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## Introduction

Early in Chang-Rae Lee's *The Surrendered*, Hector, the former American GI, thinks back on his participation in the Korean War three decades earlier. Growing up in a working-class white neighborhood, he had been eager, but too young, to enlist in the army after the Pearl Harbor attacks; when war broke out in Korea five years later, he jumped at the chance to leave home and go fight on the other side of the world. But once he was in Korea and forced to both witness and commit atrocities against not just enemy soldiers but civilians and refugees, his enthusiasm waned. Before these incidents,

he had been a willing enough soldier in their war. Or maybe not their war exactly, but Mao's war, or Truman's, or someone else's; it was a war that from the beginning had been nobody's cross, inciting only mild attacks of patriotism and protest, jingoism and pacifism, a war both too cold and too hot and that managed to erase fifty thousand of his kind and over a million of theirs. (99)

For Hector, the stakes of this war, unlike World War II, are unclear, even though he risked his life to fight it. Was it a war being fought on behalf of the Koreans – “their war,” “their kind” – whose land and way of life hung in the balance? If so, the very division between North and South that had caused the war would seem to negate the distinction he was drawing between “his kind” and “theirs”: after all, “their kind” was irrevocably split across new national and ideological borders, and “his kind” in turn was far from homogenous itself. Or was the Korean conflict being used as a pretext for the

Cold War superpowers – Mao, Stalin, Truman – to prove the superiority of *their* lands and *their* ways of life to the rest of the world? If so, then the consequences of the war would determine more than just the fate of Korean peninsula; indeed, the war's results might threaten the continued existence of the planet altogether. And if none of these options was quite right, then whose war was it? How could it be everyone's war and nobody's war at the same time?

For a white American soldier like Hector, the Korean War also became “someone else's war” in another sense: one of the effects of the war was to newly integrate populations and communities of color into the mainstream of American society. Because the Korean War was the first war to be fought by formally desegregated U.S. troops, Korea became the site of an unprecedented experiment in racial integration an ocean away from, and several years before, the Supreme Court ruling that would declare segregation unconstitutional stateside in 1954. During the Korean War, in other words, among the fifty thousand of “our kind” who were killed in the war were soldiers of color who had been invited to participate in the war on a purportedly equal basis for the first time. At the same time, the Korean War was a war that sorted “their kind” into enemies and friends and facilitated the eventual transformation of the latter into potential American citizens. Before the war, Koreans, along with other Asians, were largely denied legal entry into the United States; afterwards, first through special dispensations for refugees, war brides, and adoptees and later through wider reforms, immigration policies were liberalized, allowing for mass migrations. Thus, to use the language of Lee's novel, over time, as a direct consequence of the war, “their kind” was increasingly becoming Hector's kind as well.

*Someone Else's War: Korea and the Postwar U.S. Racial Order* argues that the Korean War heralded a new mode of liberal inclusion for racial minorities in the United States. In this dissertation, I examine how, on the one hand, the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces during the war inaugurated state-mandated institutional racial integration as a putative path to full and equal citizenship for racial minorities, particularly for African American soldiers and their families. At the same time, I trace how the lifting of racially exclusive immigration laws signaled changing conceptions of who could become an American citizen at all. My dissertation thus reads the Korean War as the event that set these twin processes of integration and immigration in motion—processes that transformed the racial order in the post-45 period in the United States.

The 1950s are widely viewed in American studies as a period of global and domestic racial struggle and progress, exemplified in contentious processes of decolonization overseas and desegregation at home. The post-World War II years were a period not only of U.S. ascendancy in the Cold War contest to establish a new world order, but also of newly articulating racial formations both within and beyond U.S. borders. Historians of the global Cold War have shown how U.S. efforts to integrate newly decolonized nations into the U.S.-led sphere of liberal capitalist democracy in the Cold War took the form of developmental programs, diplomatic missions, and cultural initiatives as well as covert action and outright war across the emerging Third World.<sup>1</sup> At

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the Cold War as a conflict between competing modernities, see Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War*. For discussions of the U.S. deployment of cultural propaganda during the Cold War, see Penny Von Eschen's *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* and Serge Guilbaut's *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. For analyses of developmental discourse in the global Cold War, see David Ekbladh's *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* and Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*.

the same time, scholars of race in the U.S. in this period have highlighted the domestic turn toward formal equality for people of color, arguing that the state's new investment in racial liberalism was also tied to the U.S. bid for ascendancy in the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> The Korean War, at once a local civil war for national unification, a regional war over the political fate of East Asia, and the first hot war of the global Cold War, brought together a number of apparently remote racialized struggles in this turbulent period of geopolitical reordering. However, the place of the Korean War within the U.S. Cold War racial order has been largely subsumed under a bipolar framework of superpower competition and overlooked in the existing scholarship on race, U.S. ascendancy, and the Cold War.

In her groundbreaking work *Cold War Civil Rights*, for example, historian Mary Dudziak argues that from the years immediately after World War II until the mid-1960s, the story of race in America “was thought to have a critical impact of U.S. prestige abroad” (250). To claim the position of leader of the free world in the context of the Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union, the United States would need to address and manage the domestic racial conflicts that contradicted its desired image as a democratic nation. In this way, she shows that as the U.S. government “tried to project a story of progress” abroad, Cold War concerns created an urgent “imperative for change” and facilitated key civil rights reforms, including desegregation, at home (250). More recently, Jodi Melamed has situated the “liberal antiracisms” adopted by the U.S. state after World War II as part of a larger geopolitical reordering (9). She argues that the period after World War II saw the “inauguration of a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity under

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Mary Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*, Thomas Borstelmann's *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, and Nikhil Pal Singh's *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*.

the management of U.S. global ascendancy” that ousted the dominant formation of “white supremacist modernity” that had governed race prior to that moment (8). With regard to Asia in particular, Christina Klein argues that U.S. expansion after World War II demanded “an ideology of global interdependence rather than one of racial difference,” leading to a formation she names “Cold War Orientalism” (16). Klein ties this logic of affiliation rather than just difference or domination to Asia’s newfound importance to the United States’ ambitions for global ascendancy.

Each of these scholars describes a transformation in the domestic management of race linked to the ascendancy of the United States as a global superpower in the years after the Second World War. Yet the Korean War, America’s first “hot war” of the Cold War, factors into these analyses minimally, if at all. We might attribute this silence to the Korean War’s status as the so-called “forgotten war,” or to a tendency to define the Cold War primarily in terms of ideological and diplomatic superpower conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union rather than through its “proxy” wars across the Third World.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation provides a critical counterpart, and corrective, to this important existing scholarship by bringing a necessary focus on the Korean War to the scholarly conversation on race and the Cold War. If *Cold War Civil Rights* works by way of “setting an American story within an international context” – Dudziak points out that “An international framework helps us discover *what happened* at home” (253) – then my project asks: what happens when we set the international story of the Korean War within

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the Korean War as the “forgotten war,” see the work of Bruce Cumings, especially *Origins of the Korean War*, Volume II, in which he notes, “The Korean War is called ‘the forgotten war’ in America, because it is forgotten...By calling the Korean conflict a ‘forgotten war,’ we both name it, and we remember it—a paradox: what is it that we are remembering to forget?” (767).

an American context? How do the transnational militarized zones of Korea come to shape racial formations in the U.S. domestic context? Seeking to redress understandings of the Korean War as a peripheral skirmish with little bearing outside of its immediate context, I show how the Cold War American project of remapping the Korean peninsula both typifies and complicates a Cold War American project of resignifying race domestically and globally.

To address these questions, I turn to a site where the legacy of the Korean War for people of color in the United States is being actively confronted, contested, and rewritten: contemporary fiction. My approach to the literary archive of this project is inspired by recent scholarship in Asian Studies that has called for a collective critical reengagement with the lingering effects of the Cold War. In 2010's *The Other Cold War*, Heonik Kwon names this process the "decomposition of the cold war." For Kwon, an anthropologist, the conventional view of the cold war presents an "image of the global that encompasses local social process," rather than one that is "revealed and made through the local" (10). This privileging of the global has taken a certain picture of the Cold War to be central (the idea of the Cold War as a "long peace" in the "West," for example) and peripheralized others (the Cold War as endless violence and war in the "East" and global South) in ways that map onto longer histories of colonialism, imperialism, and Eurocentrism. Kwon argues that a rethinking of the conceptual relationship between what is taken to be central and peripheral, between the "global dynamic" and "local processes," will help us put into practice this decomposition of the cold war, which for him involves two shifts of perspective regarding cold war history: first, a shift from geopolitical to social history, and second, a shift "from the exemplary central positioning

of the cold war as imaginary or metaphoric war to a comparative positioning that privileges neither this peculiar history of war without warfare nor the peripheral unbridled reality of state terror and civil war” (9). This latter shift does not entail a simple “de-centering” of Europe or the “West,” but rather requires a “comparative positioning” of multiple local sites across different spaces, especially spaces actively contending with the consequences of the Cold War (9). It is for this reason that he sees the “decomposition of the cold war” as a “participatory, ethnographic question”: he proposes that the question of the end of the Cold War is “fundamentally an anthropological problem,” and as such, his book takes up an anthropological investigation of local practices and rituals linked to the traumas of the Cold War in Asia and their lived effects in the present (8).

For Kuan-Hsing Chen, the ongoing effects of the Cold War in Asia have “become embedded in local history” and “been inscribed into our national, family, and personal histories” (118). As he puts it in 2010’s *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*, “the cold war is still alive within us,” as “the subjectivities formed during the cold war remain within us” (119). As such, he argues that we must “undertake the critical work of confronting the ongoing problematic of the cold war,” a task he somewhat inelegantly names “de-cold war.” To “de-cold war,” he states, “does not mean simply to rid ourselves of a cold-war consciousness or to try to forget that period in history”; rather, it means “to mark out a space in which unspoken stories and histories may be told, and to recognize and map the historically constituted cultural and political effects of the cold war” (120). “De-cold war”-ing, for Chen, goes hand in hand with the also-essential twin processes of decolonization and what he calls deimperialization, respectively the “attempt of the

previously colonized to reflectively work out a historical relation with the former colonizer, culturally, politically, and economically” and the former colonizer’s need to “examine the conduct, motives, desires, and consequences of the imperialist history that has formed its own subjectivity” (3-4). He argues that because the processes of decolonization and deimperialization were interrupted in Asia by the formation of the Cold War geopolitical structure, decolonization can only truly take place once we choose to actively grapple with the effects of the Cold War. This claim recalls Chungmoo Choi’s argument that after the defeat of Japan ended its colonial rule in Korea, South Korea experienced a “deferred postcoloniality,” as liberation from Japan gave immediate way to the U.S. neocolonial occupation and domination of South Korea. Both Choi and Chen look to cultural studies to take on the work of decolonizing, de-imperializing, and “de-cold war”-ing, offering analyses of social movements and popular memory that speak to the embeddedness of the Cold War formations in daily lives and relationships.

This dissertation looks to recent and contemporary works of literature by American writers of color in order to work through the profound but often unthought effects of the Cold War for minority subjects in U.S. culture. Whereas Kwon looks to anthropological inquiry to enact the decomposition of the cold war and Chen to cultural studies, I look to literature as a sphere in which the unspoken stories and histories of the Korean War have been brought to light with increasing urgency in recent years.<sup>4</sup> And whereas both Kwon and Chen focus their analysis on sites in Asia, where the often

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<sup>4</sup> The novels I read in this dissertation represent selections from a wave of recent American literary works that have marked a renewed popular interest in the place of the Korean War in our cultural and historical memory. See in addition to the works discussed in this dissertation Heinz Insu Fenkl’s *Memories of my Ghost Brother* (1996), Susan Choi’s *The Foreign Student* (2004), Philip Roth’s *Indignation* (2008), Jayne Anne Phillips’ *Lark and Termite* (2009), Robert Olmstead’s *The Coldest Night* (2010), and Paul Yoon’s *Once the Shore* (2009) and *Snow Hunters* (2013) among many others.



painfully felt effects of the Cold War in everyday life are clear in mainstream culture, the texts I turn to in this dissertation represent a renewed attempt by American writers to excavate a story that has been largely discarded and willfully forgotten by the dominant culture. Of particular importance for our reading of American narratives of the Korean War, and of the Cold War in Asia generally, is an engagement with the difficult task of deimperialization: if the Korean War marks the inauguration of the ongoing neocolonial U.S. occupation of South Korea and the arrival of the U.S. as a global military superpower, then reading narratives of the Korean War offers us the opportunity to critically engage that history of occupation and empire-building, a task sorely needed in a nation whose imperial projects and ambitions have continued unabated into the present. At the same time, the voices of the Cold War subjects of color represented in these texts articulate a vexed relationship to U.S. power: if the Korean War also marks the inauguration of a new mode of liberal inclusion for racial minorities in the United States, as I argue in this dissertation, then these texts offer an invaluable account of the complex dynamic of belonging and distance under formation during the Korean War, from the perspective of the present racial formation.

Each of the literary works that I read in this dissertation takes the Korean War as a setting and a starting point for its main characters and traces the trajectories of these characters over the following decades as they pass through institutions and structures of racialization and citizenship. Indeed, each work concerns the question of the attainment of full and equal citizenship by subjects of color who have been previously excluded from that endeavor, whether as nonwhite Americans facing segregation and systematic discrimination or as Asians legally barred from entering the United States. And in each

work, the story of the attainment of full and equal citizenship is predicated on a character's enlistment in the military and participation in the war as a soldier. Because military service often operates as an index of national belonging, soldiering is a particularly useful frame for thinking about race and citizenship. In his study of soldiers and the management of racialized populations in the total war regimes of the U.S. and Japan, for example, Takashi Fujitani observes that during World War II, soldiering was a site in which "not only the soldiers themselves but also the racialized communities that they represented passed most paradigmatically and dramatically from the outside to the inside of the national community" (82). My readings of the literary works in this dissertation are grounded in an analysis of the figure of the soldier. In attending to questions of gender related to this figure, my project has also been informed by feminist and queer critiques of U.S. militarism that not only oppose war, imperialism, and state power, but question the political aims of assimilating marginalized communities into the institution of the military.<sup>5</sup> If the development of policies and practices of liberal inclusion over the past sixty years has largely resulted in the absorption of minority subjects into institutions of state power, then my analyses of the integration of the soldier and his family during and after the Korean War are invested in envisioning the potential radical alternatives to this outcome for the present and the future.

The first chapter of the dissertation, "Becoming Asian American: Repatriation and the Communist Soldier in Ha Jin's *War Trash*," traces the workings of Cold War

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<sup>5</sup> For feminist critiques of U.S. militarism in Asia, see Cynthia Enloe's *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* and *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, Grace M. Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*, and Katharine Moon's *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korean Relations*. For queer critiques of militarism and assimilationist attitudes toward the military, see statements by queer and queer of color grassroots organizations including the Audre Lorde Project and FIERCE.

ideological belief in Ha Jin's *War Trash* (2004), a fictionalized account of an uprising in a UN prison camp on South Korea's Koje Island during the Korean War. If the Cold War project in East Asia can be crudely thought of as dividing Asian territory – and Asian subjects – into “good” (anticommunist) and “bad” (communist) categories, then this chapter reads *War Trash* as a novel about the making of “good” Asian Americans in the Korean War. Ha Jin's narrator is unavoidably caught up in Cold War politics in the Koje Island prison camp, but he himself never subscribes to any particular ideology. Rather, the narrator sees himself above all as a pragmatic individual, and it is Ha Jin's voicing of the “universal human” through the narrator that critics have most lauded in the novel. But my chapter argues that over the course of the novel, what is coded as “universal” or “human” is firmly anchored to the liberal politics of the USA, the land of the free. I read Ha Jin's historical fiction against firsthand accounts of the Koje Island prison uprisings and the legal documents that managed the uprisings. Following the narrator on his journey from Chinese Communist soldier to prisoner of the UN Command in Korea to repatriated victim of the Communist state to, finally, Asian American patriarch of a multicultural family, this chapter explores the transformation of Asian subjects in the Cold War from enemy aliens to potential U.S. citizens.

Where Ha Jin's *War Trash* concerns the transformation of the foreign enemy into the domestic ally, the subject of the next chapter concerns the assimilation of the colonized subject into mainstream institutions of U.S. power. Chapter Two, “From the Río Grande to the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel: Genealogies of Empire in Rolando Hinojosa's *Klail City Death Trip Series*,” turns to the work of Chicano author and Korean War veteran Rolando Hinojosa. In several fictional works written in a period from 1973 through 2006,

Hinojosa chronicles the Korean War from the perspective of the Mexican American GI in Korea, an unlikely agent of U.S. national-imperial domination. This chapter reads the stories of these characters in relation to the liberal narrative of civil rights as a story of increased access, integration, and upward mobility for racial minorities, particularly taking into account the role of military service and the GI Bill in this narrative. In Hinojosa's work, we find that this story of racial liberalism is also a story of continuing colonial domination. Hinojosa's work shows us how in the Korean War, the state enlisted its former colonial subjects living in one historical border space – Mexican Americans in Texas – to help impose a new colonial regime in a border war across the globe, offering the promise of upward mobility to soldiers of color in return for their willingness to risk their lives in allegiance to its goals. Engaging with scholarship in Chicano studies and transnational American studies as well as theories of racial formation in the postwar period, this chapter contends that to understand this complicated colonial and racial logic, we must read the Korean War in a long genealogy of U.S. imperial border wars.

The dissertation's second chapter argues that Hinojosa's tales of the "Texas Mexican" soldier present the potential benefits of joining the military and the upward mobility it can afford to the soldier of color. In contrast, Chapter Three looks at a text that depicts the trauma of desegregation, suggesting the extent to which the military's move toward inclusiveness itself enacts a different kind of violence upon its intended beneficiaries. This chapter, "Going Color-Blind: The Black Soldier in Toni Morrison's *Home*," assesses the place of the Korean War in constructing a Cold War paradigm of color-blindness. The desegregation of the U.S. armed forces during the Korean War, the first U.S. war fought by integrated units, marked the arrival of an era of legislating formal

equality for racial minorities under the legal doctrine of color-blindness. In this chapter, examining color-blindness as a symptom of racial trauma in *Home*, I argue that the Cold War paradigm of racial color-blindness cannot redress past violence, but rather functions as a new system of racial harm. In this way, I show, opening up the process of resolving wartime traumas for the characters in *Home* brings about the restoration of color to their worlds.

The first three chapters of the dissertation assess the figure of the soldier of color and the role he plays in the construction of a Cold War racial order from several perspectives: the Communist enemy and his potential rehabilitation in Chapter One, the colonized subject and his integration into dominant national formations in Chapter Two, and the Black soldier and the traumas of color-blindness in Chapter Three. The final chapter of the dissertation considers the fates of two figures linked to the presence of the American GI in Korea: the war orphan and the war bride. Chapter Four, “‘June, from the war’: Refugee Rescues in Chang-Rae Lee’s *The Surrendered*,” argues that wartime institutions linked to the heteronormative family underpin patterns of Asian migration to the U.S. in the second half of the twentieth century. In this chapter, I read Chang-Rae Lee’s novel *The Surrendered*, which centers on the war orphan and the war bride, figures who are granted entry to the United States through their adoption or marriage into the newly multiracial American family before the 1965 immigration reform that would allow for wider immigration from Asia. This chapter explores the dissonances between these early gendered refugee figures and the Asian American immigrant community that followed suit, examining how the violence of the Korean War became the condition of possibility for historical and contemporary modes of Asian American citizenship.

## Chapter One

### **Becoming Asian American:**

### **Repatriation and the Communist Soldier in Ha Jin's *War Trash***

#### **I. Introduction**

Early in Ha Jin's *War Trash*, the narrator, Yu Yuan, shares the story of an incident that will scar him for the rest of his life. It is 1951, less than a year into the Korean War, and Yu is one of twenty thousand Chinese and North Korean prisoners of war incarcerated in a UN prison camp on Koje Island, South Korea. The camp has organized itself into two fiercely divided factions: the pro-Nationalists have declared their intent to reject repatriation to China and are agitating instead to be sent to "Free China," or Taiwan, while the Communists demand that they, and every Chinese prisoner, be returned home to China as dictated by international law. Given the increasingly violent tactics the leadership on each side uses to intimidate and coerce the prisoners, Yu faces a difficulty: for reasons entirely unrelated to this political split, he desires to return to mainland China, where his aging mother and beloved fiancée await his return. In the upcoming individual "screenings" in which each prisoner will declare his intent to either

assent to or refuse repatriation before a panel of international observers, he plans to choose to go back home. But after a night of drinking with the pro-Nationalists, who are trying to recruit him to their side, Yu is clubbed in the back of the head and blacks out. He wakes up in the Nationalists' tent, and to his horror, he sees "two English words tattooed on my belly, right below my navel: FUCK COMMUNISM" (97).

Naturally, Yu is terrified by the new slogan on his body, certain that he will never be able to return to China. But over the course of the novel, the tattoo comes to represent not just the brutality of the situation he faces, but an unlikely way for him to manipulate those who control his fate. When necessary, he is able to deploy the tattoo as evidence of his allegiance to the pro-Nationalists (he was willing to get tattooed with an anticommunist slogan!) as well as his resistance to their demands (they tattooed him in retribution for his noncompliance!). By the end of his time in the prison camp, he has switched sides no less than five times, all the while privately maintaining his resolve to return home to China when the war ends. Once he makes it back to China, he finds a clinic where he can finally have his "embarrassing mark" removed (341). The doctor at the clinic removes the tattoos of some of his fellow returned POWs completely, while in other cases he "just removed a word or two to make a dark phrase unintelligible or give it a new meaning": he "would play with the alphabet" (341). In Yu's case, he decides, the procedure will be simple. The doctor leaves the word FUCK and suggests that they "just [erase] all the letters in the word COMMUNISM except the U and the S" (341). As a result of the operation, the original tattoo is transformed into one with a message more fitting for Yu's new situation: it now reads, "FUCK ...U...S..." (341).

The story of Yu's tattoo does not end with this transformation. In fact, the continuing problem of the tattoo takes center stage in the prologue and final chapter that frame the novel and explain its origins. The prologue, which introduces Yu as a doting grandfather visiting his family in the suburbs of Atlanta in the present day, begins with the following words:

Below my navel stretches a long tattoo that says 'FUCK ...U...S...' The skin above those dots has shriveled as though scarred by burns. Like a talisman, the tattoo has protected me in China for almost five decades. Before coming to the States, I wondered whether I should have it removed. I decided not to, not because I cherished it or was nervous about the surgery, but because if I had done that, word might have spread and the authorities, suspecting I wouldn't return, might have revoked my passport. (3)

What has protected him in China has become a liability on his extended visit to the United States. Even now, after all these decades, his tattoo remains a source of "constant concern" (3); walking down the street, he fantasizes that an "invisible hand might grip the front of my shirt and pull it out of my belt to reveal my secret to passersby" (3). He unsuccessfully attempts to hide the tattoo from his young grandchildren; in the novel's final pages, he schedules an appointment with a surgeon in the U.S. to try to have it fully removed once and for all. But before this, he explains that his true motivation for writing the memoir we hold in our hands is to tell the story behind the tattoo to his grandchildren, who he hopes will one day "read these pages so that they can feel the full weight of the tattoo on my belly" (5). The letters etched on his body, then, have prompted the words on



the page before us, and we are left in the position of Yu's American grandchildren, attempting to unpack the meaning of the words on his skin and on the page.

The image of an elderly Chinese man sporting a crude "FUCK U.S." tattoo, trying in vain to hide his brutal Cold War past while taking his American grandchildren shopping in a suburban strip mall, exemplifies a contradiction that the novel will go on to pose again and again: how can we reconcile the militancy of Yu Yuan's tattoo with the reasoned moderation of the narrative voice that bears it? Yu Yuan emerges in the novel as the picture of an individual free thinker who is uniquely equipped to move between the poles of the Cold War, humanizing the absurdity of war with the complexity and depth of his thoughts, feelings, and motivations. Indeed, reviews of the novel have lauded above all the universal humanity of the narrator's voice. According to the reviewer at *The New York Times*, Yu Yuan's narrative voice, while "not especially familiar...to an American ear," is "recognizably, authentically, universally human" in every sentence, revealing a "moral perspective" that gives the novel an "inescapable relevance" to us all (Banks). The reviewer at *The Kansas City Star* similarly declares that the novel "is not a story of Korea, or POWs, or even Yu Yuan, but of what it means to be human" (Volin). For these reviewers, it is the novel's very foreignness – of its stilted language, of its unfamiliar settings – that provides the ground against which to bring out the narrator's essential humanity. But such a view elides what I assert in this chapter is a much simpler marker of Yu's recognizable humanity: his final conversion into an American subject. I will argue in this chapter that it is Yu Yuan's concluding turn as kindly Asian American patriarch, preserving his history in English for his American grandchildren – and, conveniently, for Ha Jin's American readers – that makes our narrator such a legible and laudable bearer of

humanity. In traversing the ground from Communist Chinese soldier to prisoner of war to Chinese citizen to Asian American grandfather, I want to suggest, Yu Yuan becomes recognizably human. But how did this Chinese Communist enemy soldier and prisoner become transformed over the decades into an Asian American family man?

Asian American racialization since World War II has been bound up with the fates of U.S. wars and the demands of U.S. foreign policy. The lifting of Chinese exclusion in 1943, for example, is generally viewed by historians as a wartime measure designed to counter Japanese charges of American anti-Asian racism and to court China as an ally during World War II.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, the wartime enmity of the U.S. and Japan led to the mass internment of Japanese Americans, suspected wholesale of holding loyalty to Japan rather than the United States. Japanese Americans' conversion into enemy and menace was clearly tied to the United States' military ambitions during World War II.<sup>7</sup> The provisions for immigration from Asia made in the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, or the McCarran-Walter Act, similarly reflected the United

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<sup>6</sup> As historian Mae Ngai notes, "The exigencies of war also led Congress to repeal Chinese exclusion in 1943, in order to stanch Japanese war propaganda in Asia that criticized U.S. policy as racist" (233) – although, as she observes, "Congress's continued antipathy towards Chinese migration was evident in the annual Chinese quota of 105" (203). Yen Le Espiritu similarly argues that during World War II, the treatment of Chinese, Korean, Filipino, and Indian Americans improved "because their ancestral nations were allies of the United States" (49). Takashi Fujitani disagrees with the latter point, arguing that the United States' investment in disavowing racism in this period meant that "The fate of all U.S. minorities," including both the above Asian American ethnicities and Japanese Americans, "was tied to a larger propaganda campaign that tried to represent the United States as a nation that did not discriminate against any racial or ethnic minority" (12). In Fujitani's analysis, the larger goal of lifting exclusionary immigration laws was "to mobilize an ever-greater diversity and number of people for national projects" (13).

<sup>7</sup> Takashi Fujitani has shown the blatantly racist incarceration of Japanese Americans was at odds with the U.S. state's investment in disavowing racism in this period. As such, he argues, internment was justified as having been "motivated only by military concerns, not by racism" (13). Similarly, the use of the nuclear bomb in Japan "had to be legitimated by the logic of military necessity, rather than viewed simply as a means to exterminate an enemy cast as nonhuman" (13). He argues that serving as soldiers for the United States military became a way for Japanese Americans to move from the "outside" to the "inside" of the nation and prove their loyalty during the war. See also Colleen Lye's *America's Asia*, in which Lye ties Japanese American internment to American New Deal liberalism.

States' military agenda at the beginning of the Cold War: the act lifted racial restrictions to immigration, but maintained numerical quotas for many nations and imposed particularly restrictive quotas on the so-called "Asia Pacific Triangle."<sup>8</sup> At the same time, steeped in Cold War rhetoric, the McCarran-Walter Act allowed the government to deport immigrants suspected of subversive activities and to bar suspected Communists from entering the country. It was in this historical context that the United States formulated a plan according to which Chinese and North Korean soldiers imprisoned by the United Nations on Koje Island during the Korean War – the literal enemies of the United States – were offered the unprecedented opportunity to refuse repatriation to their homeland of Communist China and instead declare their allegiance to the anticommunist free world. This policy of "no forced repatriation" was derived from the conviction that, in President Truman's words, U.S. troops "must not use bayonets to force these prisoners to return to slavery and almost certain death at the hands of the Communists" ("Truman"); its apparent purpose was to provide propaganda value for the United States as Communist prisoners defected en masse to the "free world" in a highly publicized fashion.

On Koje Island, unlike in the internment camps, the U.S. state was willing to disaggregate Asian subjects from their countries of origin. Instead, it was now apparently willing to wager that ancestry or ethnicity did not necessarily determine loyalty or ideology. If the Cold War years saw the transformation of Asian subjects from foreign enemy and Communist menace to potential productive American citizen, then, I will

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<sup>8</sup> Under the McCarran-Walter Act's provisions for the "Asia Pacific Triangle," "Persons of Asian descent born or residing anywhere in the world could immigrate only under the Asia-Pacific quotas of one hundred per country," with an overall Asia-Pacific quota of 2000 (Ngai 237).

show in this chapter, in *War Trash*, Ha Jin naturalizes that transformation by humanizing the Chinese Communist soldier. In his fictionalized account of the events on Koje Island, Ha Jin takes great pains to depict its protagonist and narrator as not just Chinese, but human, and, ultimately, American. *War Trash* does not lionize the UN's implementation of the policy of "no forced repatriation" on Koje Island. Rather, the novel suggests that the process of electing or refusing repatriation at Koje was facile, artificial, and too coercive to be a legitimate litmus test for people's convictions and desires. It shows the disastrous consequences of the failure of the UN Command at Koje for the unfortunate, and unwitting, individuals caught up in the crisis. And it insists that that entire incident is an unmitigated failure on both sides of the war. But over the course of his time in the prison camp, the narrator Yu Yuan comes to exemplify the qualities of a true American: open-mindedness, compassion, intelligence, loyalty, a well-calibrated moral compass, and most important, individuality. In *War Trash*, to humanize the Chinese Communist soldier is to infuse him with American values. Through his encounter with the U.S. military in Asia, Yu Yuan comes to embody the exemplary American.

This chapter begins by considering how scholars have theorized the place of the American rhetoric of freedom in the ideological framing of the Cold War conflict between the American-led "free world" and the Soviet-led Communist world. I next examine prisoner of war repatriation in the Korean War as an issue that animated this ideological conflict between "freedom" and "slavery" in the American popular imagination, taking the public outcry over the twenty-three American POWs who elected not to repatriate to the United States as an exemplary case that serves as a necessary frame for our understanding of American representations of the struggle over Chinese

and North Korean POW repatriation on Kojé Island. Then, turning to the historical “screening” of Communist prisoners of war on Kojé Island during and after the Korean War, I explore how a mechanistic concept of ideological belief circumscribes American understandings of the North Korean and Chinese POWs, focusing in particular on the process of “screening,” in which prisoners’ ideological affiliations are determined by their individual responses to a set of questions asked by UN soldiers. Finally, the chapter returns to Ha Jin’s *War Trash* to work through the narrator’s agonizing decision to repatriate to China and the unexpected trajectory that ensues, eventually transporting him from his chosen life under Communism to the land of the free itself, the United States.

## **II. Discourses of Freedom and Slavery in the Early Cold War**

The struggle for power between the United States and the Soviet Union that defined the Cold War era is often characterized as, first and foremost, an ideological battle between two superpowers committed to diametrically opposed, inevitably warring worldviews: capitalism versus communism, freedom versus totalitarianism. As President Truman put it in the speech announcing his now-eponymous doctrine in 1947, the United States’ primary objective in the Cold War era was to guarantee for itself and its allies “a way of life free from coercion,” entailing a commitment to “help free peoples to maintain their free institutions and their national integrity against aggressive movements that seek to impose upon them totalitarian regimes.”<sup>9</sup> Other Cold War documents, including NSC-

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<sup>9</sup> The full text of the “Truman Doctrine” speech can be found at: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/trudoc.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp).

68, the policy paper that famously laid out U.S. foreign policy and military objectives for the Cold War, referred more plainly to a grand, apocalyptic battle between American freedom and communist “slavery.” But as Cold War scholar Anders Stephanson has noted, this framing of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union as a battle between “freedom” and “slavery” is itself an American construction with a long genealogy. In his essay “Liberty or Death: The Cold War as U.S. Ideology,” Stephanson argues that this pairing of terms dates back to the very inception of the United States as a nation. He links Cold War phraseology – “Better dead than red!” – to such iconic American utterances as Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death” and Abraham Lincoln’s admonition that our nation, a “house divided,” could not permanently endure as a land “half slave and half free.” He explains that in the conceptual field formed by the pair “freedom” and “slavery,” freedom is understood to be “always already under threat, internally as well as externally” and hence in need of constant vigilance and defense (85). In its American Cold War iteration, then, “slavery” – variously named fascism, communism, and totalitarianism in the 1940s and 1950s – is defined as that which “cannot tolerate the very existence of freedom as an idea and must systematically attempt its liquidation” (85).<sup>10</sup> For this reason, Stephanson argues, not only the United States, the

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<sup>10</sup> Stephanson notes that this construction of the enemy also has a longer lineage. He links the notion of an arbitrary, lawless, tyrannical power – namely, Stalin’s Soviet Union – to Montesquieu’s concept of the “Oriental despot,” the secretive, all-powerful ruler who crushes his anonymous subjects with his despotic will. This imagined contrast between east and west, Stephanson argues, becomes an integral part of the emerging liberal understanding of a legitimate social order defined by the consent of its members. Stephanson posits that the United States saw the coalition of World War II as “an embryonic form of ‘international community’ in that contractual sense” and hence came to see the Soviet Union as “lawlessly break[ing] the given agreements” (89). In this way, he concludes, the “contractual theory of liberal ‘society’ served...to exacerbate the negative view of the Soviet adversary” (89). See also William Pietz’s essay “The ‘Post-Colonialism’ of Cold War Discourse,” in which he argues that the theory of totalitarianism “made police terror into Oriental despotism” (70), thus “displacing the human essence of fascism into the non-Western world” (58) as a means of preserving the integrity of Western civilization.

“vanguard defender” of freedom, but the “basic principles of humankind” are represented as being at risk of annihilation by the Soviet system, and in this way, the ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union is elevated to a question of “antagonistic ‘ways of life’” (87). For Stephanson, this ideologically constructed antagonism makes the Cold War fundamentally an American project.

How did the United States deploy the concept of freedom in the Cold War, and to what ends? The United States’ self-styled ideological position as the defender of the world’s freedom against the constant threat of encroaching communism became essential to its bid for global hegemony in the 1950s. In the military arena, the defense of freedom became a key justification for the implementation of an ambitious vision of national security that, according to Melvyn Leffler, demanded the strategic establishment of a global network of U.S. military bases in the interest of maintaining a sphere of influence throughout the Western hemisphere and preserving a favorable balance of power across Europe and Asia.<sup>11</sup> The rhetoric of defending freedom, in this view, facilitated the United States’ larger and longstanding goal of seizing global power through military and economic domination.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, as Penny von Eschen has shown, the U.S. actively drew upon the cultural capital of the concept of freedom in its attempt to “win hearts and minds” globally. In particular, eager to counter charges of racism that could potentially damage its reputation as leader of the “free” world, the U.S. State Department sponsored tours of popular jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Dizzy Gillespie

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<sup>11</sup> See Leffler, “The American Conception of National Security and the Beginnings of the Cold War, 1945-48,” 348-349.

<sup>12</sup> Other revisionist historians including William Appleman Williams and Thomas McCormick have placed the United States’ Cold War agenda in a longer history of U.S. economic and territorial expansion.

throughout the decolonizing Third World in the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to promote American culture.<sup>13</sup> Such concerted efforts to disseminate American cultural forms, a second way that the U.S. state worked to “spread freedom,” often preceded or coincided with its military efforts in the same regions.

Development projects in the newly minted Third World were another important way that the United States waged its ideological battle for freedom in these years. According to historian David Ekbladh, because systems “with broad prescriptions for the organization of political, social, cultural, and economic life” such as liberalism and communism banked on the promise of a better way of life for their adherents, development discourse became “crucial to understanding how the United States confronted other ideological systems when they emerged as threats” (2). In fact, historian Odd Arne Westad characterizes the Cold War as a contest between the United States and the Soviet Union to take up the mantle of modernity in the wake of World War II and the crumbling of the Eurocentric world order. Countering mainstream views of the Cold War as an era of rigid bipolarism, Westad argues that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were in many ways more similar than they were different: both claimed to offer the Third World “a road to high modernity through education, science, and technological progress” (92). He sees the Cold War as less a monolithic ideological face-off than a conflict between

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<sup>13</sup> In a similar vein, others have investigated the state’s deployment of other artistic forms such as Abstract Expressionism during the Cold War. See Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2001). For other studies on the U.S. state’s efforts to manage international perceptions of domestic race relations during the Cold War, see Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002), Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005) and Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003).



competing modes of modernity, each of which aimed to prove its superiority by winning over – and developing – the decolonizing nation-states of the Third World. The “proxy” battlefields of the Third World thus take central importance in Westad’s view of the Cold War, which he sees as largely “a continuation of European colonial interventions” of old—with the important distinction that the objectives of the U.S. and the Soviet Union were no longer “exploitation or subjection” but rather “control and improvement” (5). Like Westad, Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo argues that American development discourse in this era replaced the erstwhile colonial “civilizing mission” with a rhetoric of freedom, marked by “imperatives of self-determination, independence, free trade, industrialization, and economic growth” for its beneficiaries (20).

Finally, in contrast to the above critiques of the United States’ attempts to spread freedom as neocolonial in nature, some have examined U.S. power in the decolonizing Third World as an “anticolonial” force in this era. Melani McAlister describes the postwar United States as anticolonial in that it “took over from the European colonial nations the role of a preeminent world power” after World War II (46). If anticolonial movements, supported by the Soviet Union, opposed the continuation of European colonial rule, then the “genius of U.S. foreign policy” in the late 1940s and early 1950s, McAlister argues, was its ability to “develop a better appreciation of the potential of third world nationalism and anticolonialism than the old colonial powers did” (47). In other words, strategically supporting certain national independence movements in the Third World could offer the United States the opportunity to challenge both European and Soviet power. U.S. policymakers could draw on the anti-British, revolutionary rhetoric that “formed the heart of American national origin stories” to suggest that “an American-

dominated international order would best guarantee the expansion of democracy and secure the liberty of all nations” (47).<sup>14</sup> In this way, even the United States’ neoimperial expansion – military, economic, and cultural – in the Third World in the 1940s and 1950s could be corralled under the rubric of spreading freedom.

The overarching story of the Korean War tells us that the United States entered the war in order to protect the freedom and sovereignty of the South Koreans, who were soon to be victims of an unwanted communist takeover. As such, it was the first U.S. war to be fought under the emerging ideological conditions laid out above. In 1951, reports that 22,000 North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war held in UN camps in South Korea wanted to defect to the “free world” would have served to confirm the American narrative about the horrors of the communist “slave world.” However, the domestic propaganda value of this mass defection was overshadowed by the apparently more shocking news that twenty-three American POWs in Korea had rejected repatriation in favor of settling down in China to live under the communist system, an unexpected turn of events that activated American anxieties about the vulnerability of freedom in the postwar world.

Although the twenty-three nonrepatriates represented only a negligible fraction of the total number of American POWs in Korea, their much-publicized choice to repudiate the American way occasioned a panicked national conversation about American weakness in the postwar world, the same world it was supposed to be leading. The failure

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<sup>14</sup> As scholars of U.S. empire have demonstrated, such a contradiction between the American rhetoric of freedom and the United States’ imperial expansion and subjugation of other peoples has been present from westward territorial expansion to the annexation of Puerto Rico, Guam, and Hawaii to colonial interventions in the Philippines to the present-day military occupation of the Middle East and other regions around the globe. See for example Amy Kaplan’s discussion of westward expansion in *The Anarchy of Empire*.

of American soldiers to properly stand up to their Communist captors in Korea was seen as symptomatic of the same “give-up-itis” that had led to the American failure to win a decisive victory in the war overall, an affliction that tainted even those POWs who did manage to return from Korea.<sup>15</sup> Upon their return home, as historian Susan Carruthers notes, American POWs became one of “the most intensively cross-questioned groups in history—by American social scientists...as much as by Communist captors in North Korea” (“Redeeming” 275). Indeed, she argues, the prisoners’ captivity “came to function as something akin to a Rorschach test for social commentators,” who believed they could diagnose “every ailment believed to afflict the body politic as a whole” by “dissecting the infirm bodies and fragile psyches of America’s POWs” through a host of psychological, criminological, and “characterological” studies (179). The flaws discovered in the bodies and minds of the POWs, she explains, “suggested that America itself was an unfit competitor in the Cold War” (“Redeeming” 276). In other words, it was not Communist brainwashing tactics but American susceptibility to those tactics that bore the brunt of the blame for the American defections.

For Eugene Kinkead, who reported on the Korean War in *The New Yorker* throughout the 1950s, the twenty-three American defectors to China were merely evidence of a larger scale of collaboration between U.S. prisoners of war and their communist captors, something “new in history” that revealed a unique weakness at the heart of contemporary American society. Countering these claims in a 1970 article, H.H.

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<sup>15</sup> A number of sensationalistic studies and profiles of the twenty-three nonrepatriates were published in the years after the war. See for example Virginia Pasley, *21 Stayed: The Story of the American GIs Who Chose Communist China: Who They Were and Why They Stayed*, Albert Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POWs in the Korean War*, and Eugene Kinkead, *In Every War But One*.

Wubben argues that the only “new” thing about the case of the American POWs in Korea was the assumption that such “selfish undisciplined behavior as existed among the POWs was...a direct consequence of a characterological deterioration in the nation itself” (19). In earlier instances of American soldiers’ being taken prisoner in war, he notes, there was “no tendency to denigrate American civilization” as such as a result of their failings (9). But in the case of the Korean War, potential American deficiencies – harmful models of progressive education, homegrown communist subversion, excessive materialism – were investigated for their contributions to this new “societal sickness” on display in Korea (7). This perceived weakness was linked to new gender and racial formations of the 1950s as well. Betty Friedan famously takes the American POW in Korea to task in *The Feminine Mystique* for his compromised masculinity. She describes the prisoner as “an apathetic, dependent, infantile, purposeless being ... reminiscent of the familiar ‘feminine’ personality” (286). In her withering diagnosis, American men in the Korean War proved themselves “psychologically incapable of facing the shock of war, of facing life away from their ‘moms’” (277). At the same time, as Adam Zweiback notes, an imagined susceptibility to promises of Communist egalitarianism among African Americans was believed to have strongly influenced the three black soldiers who chose to remain in China. Widespread discussion of the three black nonrepatriates in the press at the time, he observes, highlighted public perceptions of a special link between Communism and civil rights in the mid-1950s (347).

As Carruthers observes, the civilizational anxiety about the weakness of American power activated by the return (and non-return) of American POWs from Korea reflected a larger paradox. “Across Asia, western Europe, the Middle East, and South

America,” she writes, “U.S. influence was expanding rapidly in the years after World War II,” but many Americans “had no sense that they were witnessing their state’s ‘rise to globalism.’ Quite the reverse” (173). To some onlookers, the POWs’ captivity was a sign of danger that the American way could be eclipsed by other ideological systems. And if captivity functioned as a “testament to U.S. vulnerability” (173), then the kidnapping of U.S. Brigadier-General Dodd, commander of the UN camp on Koje Island, on May 7, 1952 by the prisoners under his watch was an even more alarming sign of American powerlessness. That Dodd’s successor, General Colson, conceded in writing to the prisoners’ major demands in order to secure Dodd’s freedom after a 78-hour ordeal made the kidnapping even more embarrassing for the U.S. military. The United States had hoped that the policy of non-forcible repatriation would be a major propaganda victory, as highly publicized mass defections by Chinese and North Korean prisoners would demonstrate to its enemies and the world the superiority of democracy. But instead, the policy gave rise to the opposite scenario, as Colson’s letter was widely publicized in the communist press as evidence for North Korea’s claims of UN and U.S. brutality in the prison camp. In the months leading up to this event, the ideological affiliations and divisions among prisoners were especially scrutinized as the opposition between freedom and slavery became a concrete matter of individual choice.

### **III. Screening the Prisoner of War on Koje Island**

The UN prisoner-of-war camp on Koje Island, which housed more than 170,000 North Korean and Chinese prisoners over the course of the Korean War, was viewed by

commentators at the time as a virtual laboratory for Cold War ideological division. In *Mutiny on Kojé Island*, a sensationalistic, semi-journalistic account of the events on Kojé Island published in Tokyo in 1965, the American psychology professor and apparent East Asia expert Hal Vetter describes the camp as “a huge tank,” a “vast electrolytic bath in which a process of polarization was at work. Anode—Communism; cathode—anti-Communism” (64). In this metaphor, the early riots in the prison are “merely bubbles breaking” on the surface; “the real agitation” remains “down below,” but will eventually erupt in the coordinated uprisings across the prison camp and the shocking kidnapping of General Dodd (64). Stanley Weintraub, an American soldier who served as a UN prison guard in Korea at this time, similarly begins his memoir, *War in the Wards: Korea’s Unknown Battle in a Prisoner-of War Hospital Camp*, with a metaphor of depth to describe the ideological commitments of the prisoners under his watch. “Deeper than skin markings,” he writes, “on the part of prisoners of every ideological complexion, was a fanaticism and hatred intensified by the corrosive effects of captivity” (6).

In these depictions, the prisoners at Kojé are at heart essentially ideological creatures, true products and soldiers of the Cold War. But the polarization in the camp that so struck these observers had larger resonances given the recent history of the region: after all, the Chinese civil war had resulted in the split of China into the Communist People’s Republic of China on the mainland and the Nationalist Republic of China on Taiwan, each of which continued to claim legitimate sovereignty over the entirety of “China,” in 1949, a year before the start of the Korean War. As such, the ideological frame that these American observers placed on the polarization in the camp mapped the foreign policy concerns of the U.S. national security state onto preexisting regional

conflicts that were not fully understood or taken into account by the American commanders of the camp. The United States' resulting clumsiness in handling the repatriation crisis on Kojé Island speaks to what Jodi Kim describes as the triangulation of the Cold War in Asia: rather than taking sides in a global, top-down opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union, prisoners in the camp were taking sides in the closer and more urgent battle between the pro-Nationalists and the pro-Communists. In this battle, as we will see below, the United States saw an opportunity to make a statement that served its own Cold War ends.

In *Mutiny on Kojé Island*, Vetter reprints the set of questions used by the UN Command to individually screen prisoners in April 1952. He reports that prisoners' responses to these questions, which had been "carefully selected to elicit true and unbiased answers" (37), were to be noted on their identification papers, and they were to be segregated and held separately thereafter according to their chosen final destinations:

1. Will you voluntarily be repatriated to Communist China?
2. Will you forcibly resist repatriation?
3. Have you carefully considered the impact of such actions on your family?
4. Do you realize that you may remain here on Kojé-do long after those electing repatriation have returned home?
5. Do you realize that the United Nations cannot promise that you will be sent to any certain place?
6. Are you still determined that you would violently resist repatriation?
7. What would you do if you are repatriated in spite of this decision? (37)

Commenting on this sequence of questions, Vetter finds it “difficult to imagine how a fairer test of the prisoner’s intentions could be devised”; indeed, he argues, the questions are “weighted heavily in favor of repatriation” (38), demonstrating all the more the strength of the convictions of those prisoners who elected not to repatriate. His view that these questions were intended to encourage rather than deter prisoner repatriation aligns with that of contemporary U.S. commentators such as Jaro Mayda, whose article on “The Korean Repatriation Problem and International Law” in the journal of the American Society of International Law cites the “circumstances under which the prisoners were polled” as “persuasive proof” of the UN Command’s desire to return as many prisoners as possible to North Korea and China (421).<sup>16</sup> In Mayda’s analysis, the UN Command ultimately took up the “voluntary repatriation” policy only reluctantly; he refers the reader to US Secretary of State Dean Acheson’s claim that “a prisoner of war who does

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<sup>16</sup> International legal scholars publishing in the United States at the time generally agreed that the U.S. and UN were in the right to refuse to “forcibly” repatriate prisoners of war despite the clause in the Geneva Convention that seemed to specifically disallow such a refusal. Jan Charmatz and Harold Wit, writing in the *Yale Law Journal* in February 1953, find that “even the sacrosanct principle of territorial sovereignty can be overridden to protect human rights”; in the case of a state that “treats its nationals in such a way as to shock the conscience of mankind, intervention in the interest of humanity may be legally permissible” (408). Josef Kunz similarly argues at the Annual Meeting of the American Society of International Law in April 1953 that the UN’s liberal interpretation of the Geneva Convention is “fully justified from a humanitarian and ethical point of view” (110). That same month, in the *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, J.A.C. Gutteridge argues further that the principles of “no detention by force and no repatriation by force” are “implicit” in the Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War, as they are “consistent with the maintenance of the general rule...[that] all prisoners of war shall be free to return to their homelands” when hostilities end (216). In July 1952, Pitman B. Potter calls the repatriation crisis a “sociological situation” in which, since the “old law [is] defective from ethical and humanitarian view points, the captor must frankly refuse to be bound by it” despite the legal and practical risks associated with such an action. Writing a year later in the same journal, the *American Journal of International Law*, Potter concludes that the very use of the term “prisoner of war” is “somewhat anomalous” in the Korean case and asks whether a “state of war” truly exists in Korea: “if so, between whom and whom?” (661). As such, he suggests that the “old rules” concerning the treatment of prisoners of war need to be revised to “cover captives taken in an international police action” (662). Lastly, in the autumn 1953 issue of the *International Journal*, Norman Alstedter claims that the “Western World’s unity was tested possibly more severely by the Korean truce negotiations than by Communist aggression in Korea” in the first place (256) and argues that the “western powers” must become “organized for making a unified policy” for “affairs in the Far East” (265). Charmatz and Wit agree, adding that the “burden” of providing for any nonrepatriates “should not be placed on detaining powers alone, but rather on some international organization” (414).



not want to go back is a problem ... something one does not want to happen” (421). Demaree Bess in the *Saturday Evening Post* similarly argues that the seven questions above “were frankly designed to encourage the return of the maximum number” of prisoners (53).<sup>17</sup> According to Bess, “powerful political pressures had been building up in Washington to get a Korean truce at almost any price” (52) – including the cost of the consigning thousands of prisoners of war to life under communism.

Susan Carruthers agrees that the UN’s screening process on Kojima Island aimed to pressure prisoners to return home rather than refuse repatriation. In the postwar era, she argues, the United States maintained an “ideological investment in escape—in captive peoples’ right to flight” that belonged to a postwar historical moment that saw “freedom of movement” as a universal and fundamental right for all peoples (88).<sup>18</sup> The primary concern of the United States government at this particular moment in the Korean War and the larger Cold War, she argues, “lay neither in offering prisoners real freedom of choice nor in securing the largest possible number of ‘converts,’” but rather in “[tapping] the symbolic potential of defection while averting the calamitous blow to U.S. prestige that would ensue if UN Command forces ended up repatriating anticommunist prisoners at gunpoint” (184). In her view, in its “indoctrination efforts” in 1951 and beyond, the U.S. primarily aimed not to foment a mass defection, but rather to “win ideological converts”

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<sup>17</sup> On the *Saturday Evening Post* and its significance to the “middlebrow” culture of Cold War America, see Christina Klein’s *Cold War Orientalism*.

<sup>18</sup> She further notes that in practice, however, the United States “was less welcoming to mobile humanity than advocates of [freedom of movement] implied” (88), both refusing to let certain Americans leave its borders (Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker) and denying entry to the vast majority of “escapees” from Communist states. Although Truman recommended that a “right of asylum” be included in U.S. immigration law in the form of a “Special Migration Assistance Act,” Congress instead passed the McCarran-Walter Act, which Carruthers argues “did its best simply to sidestep the question of refugee resettlement” (80). See chapter four of this dissertation for a discussion of U.S. refugee policies in relation to the adoption of Korean War orphans.

who might carry the lessons of freedom with them back home (184). According to Carruthers' reading of the situation, the UN never intended for repatriation to become such a contentious issue as to hold up negotiations, but rather wanted to come to an agreement with China and North Korea as quickly as possible. For this reason, when China refused the U.S. proposal for voluntary repatriation in early 1952, the UN responded by "trying to *reduce* the number of nonrepatriates" by "[posing] leading questions that emphasized the desirability of returning home" and "stressing that the UN Command would accept no responsibility for those who refused repatriation" in the questionnaire documented above (184). At the same time, she notes, the nonrepatriate category was narrowed "to exclude those who merely *preferred* not to return" (184) – marking a shift from the language of "voluntary" repatriation to that of "no forced" or "non-forcible" repatriation – in order to further lessen the number of nonrepatriates, placating China while protecting anticommunist prisoners and maintaining a symbolic victory in the eyes of the rest of the world.

From the 1950s *Saturday Evening Post* to Carruthers' recent scholarly work, the U.S. narrative that emerges about the screenings on Kojé tells us that it was the staunch anticommunism of the majority of the prisoners that precipitated the crisis over repatriation. Naturally, the story from China and North Korea looks considerably different. For example, Wilfred Burchett and Alan Winnington's *Kojé Unscreened*, published in 1953 in Beijing by the "Britain-China Friendship Association," begins from the premise that the Kojé Island prison camp was a "mosaic of unrelieved terror, bloodshed and deceit" on the part of the United States (or as they sarcastically put it, the United "Nations"). In their view, the repatriation controversy was nothing less than a

“deliberately conceived and carried out...policy” whose ultimate goal was “the wrecking of the truce talks, the continuation and expansion of the Korean War” (105). Burchett and Winnington, British journalists who base their assessments on their firsthand observations of the camp as well as interviews with current and former guards and prisoners, contrast North Korea’s insistence upon the “internationally agreed principle of the return of all prisoners of war” with what they perceive as the “Made-in-USA issue” of voluntary repatriation, “the only issue preventing the armistice in Korea” for the last eighteen months of the war (67). In this light, the screenings become a site of intimidation, violence, torture, and even murder beneath a ruse of humanitarianism. One among many accounts of the individual screening process in the book depicts a prisoner “brought individually to the table and asked ‘Do you wish to return to the mainland or go to Formosa?’”

When the prisoner replied that he wanted to return to China, he was asked ‘Why?’ while the [pro-Kuomintang] guards gathered in, expectantly twirling their clubs. ‘Why do you want to go to the mainland? Are you still loyal to the Communists?’ If he still insisted, a beating followed that left the prisoner covered in bloody dust and the question was put again ... It was made very clear that the way out of his misery lay toward Formosa and the Kuomintang army. (27)<sup>19</sup>

According to Burchett and Winnington, conditions were no less coercive outside the interrogation chamber, where prisoners who wanted to return to China were forcibly tattooed with anticommunist slogans by Kuomintang agents and forced to sign bogus

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<sup>19</sup> Burchett and Winnington note that this example, from November 1951, was “the first case we were able to trace of the type of ‘screening’ that later became universal” (27).

petitions refusing to return to China with their names in their own blood.<sup>20</sup> Any prisoner who desired to be repatriated “was at once branded as a ‘diehard Communist,’ with all the brutal treatment that entailed” (136). Far from a neutral or equitable exchange, the individual screening, like the prison camp at large, becomes a nightmarish site of intimidation in which the full force of the U.S. war machine is brought to bear on its captives, one by one. In this counternarrative to the UN’s version of what took place at Koje and why, the individual screening becomes the very site of ideologically-driven fear and intimidation, rather than the site of its alleviation, and “voluntary repatriation” becomes an excuse to artificially prolong the Korean War rather than an unfortunate but necessary measure to protect prisoners of war from totalitarian persecution. As Burchett and Winnington put it, “‘Forcible repatriation’ or ‘voluntary repatriation’ was in fact only a camouflaged term for ‘forcible detention’ of prisoners,” a “certain stumbling block to peace in Korea” that was “eagerly accepted by [the] American government” (3).<sup>21</sup>

Given these divergent understandings of the motive for and the meaning of the UN’s individual screening process at Koje, I would like to return here to the sequence of

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<sup>20</sup> It is clear that these acts of tattooing and blood petitions did take place on Koje Island; what is contested is who carried out these acts and under what conditions. For the UN, tattooed prisoners and names signed in blood provided incontrovertible evidence of the desperation of the prisoners not to return to China and North Korea; for those on the other side, these same things served as proof of the abuse and torture that prisoners faced under UN Command.

<sup>21</sup> The UN’s response to these charges at the time was to deny any such wrongdoing in the camps, condemning the lies generated by the other side as an attempt to manufacture its own propaganda victory in the Cold War. Burchett and Winnington quote one U.S. officer who claims that the North Korean and Chinese POWs were only “being taught the fundamental concepts of democracy...the basic principles of democratic life, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from disease and freedom from fear ... There is nothing that remotely resembles coercion or intimidation” (Burchett and Winnington 35). But some of the UN’s own agents also held doubts about the integrity and efficiency of the screening process, not to mention conditions in the camp in general. General K.S. Thimayya, the Indian officer who led the “Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission” charged with overseeing the repatriation screening process at the war’s close, stated that in his view, the “terror tactics” employed by Rhee’s South Korean regime and the Kuomintang “negate[d] all assumptions or assertions about Freedom of Choice”; in fact, he believed that “any prisoner who desired repatriation had to do so clandestinely and in fear of his life” (Carruthers 215).

questions asked to the Chinese prisoners of war during the UN Command's individual screenings in the camp in April 1952. The administration of a loyalty questionnaire as a method of determining national allegiance and fitness for citizenship is, of course, a familiar process in the annals of Asian American history. During the World War II-era internment of Japanese Americans, the questionnaire given to all internees notoriously featured two questions regarding the extent of their national loyalties: question 27, which asked if the subject would be willing to serve in the U.S. armed forces "wherever ordered," and question 28, which asked, "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese Emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?" Those who answered with two yeses were declared loyal, while those who answered "no" to both questions, the so-called "no-no boys," were considered to be disloyal to the United States, housed in special camps, and threatened with deportation. As many have noted, the second of these questions is a particularly difficult one: to answer "yes" is to admit a preexisting loyalty to the Japanese Emperor even in the act of affirming "unqualified" loyalty to the United States, a contradiction in terms that has the effect of categorically casting suspicion on all Japanese Americans.<sup>22</sup> Like the questionnaires administered to Japanese American internees, the individual screenings on Kojima Island were intended not just to assess prisoners' loyalties, but to potentially reassign their nationalities. The

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<sup>22</sup> See also Caroline Chung Simpson's *An Absent Presence* for an analysis of Japanese American internment and the Cold War; Mae Ngai's *Impossible Subjects* for a discussion of internment and U.S. immigration policy; Colleen Lye's *America's Asia* for a discussion of internment and the Asian American racial form; and Takashi Fujitani's *Race for Empire* for a treatment of internment and the Japanese American soldier.

screenings similarly featured a rhetorically complicated series of questions administered to subjects under duress: captives interrogated by their captors, with their futures hanging in the balance.

The first in the set of screening questions, “Will you voluntarily be repatriated to Communist China,” allows for the prisoner to elect or refuse voluntary repatriation. This question demands a straightforward yes or no answer, but the following six questions do not exist unless the prisoner has answered “no” to this first question. From that point on, each question depends on an affirmative response by the prisoner in order to maintain the rhetorical stability of the questionnaire as a whole, presupposing a subject resistant to repatriation. “Will you forcibly resist repatriation? Have you carefully considered the impact of such actions on your family? Do you realize that you may remain here on Kojedo long after those electing repatriation have returned home? Do you realize that the United Nations cannot promise that you will be sent to any certain place?” (Vetter 37). These questions evoke without directly stating the vast range of negative consequences for the prisoners who refuse repatriation and their families: the potential torture, imprisonment, or killing of family members, indefinite detention on Kojedo Island, a lifetime of statelessness and exile. The fact that the vast majority of the prisoners clearly choose to “forcibly resist” repatriation with full knowledge of the negative consequences for them and their families back home – “Are you *still* determined that you would violently resist repatriation?” (my emphasis) – appears then as a testament both to the sheer strength of the prisoners’ desire not to return to life under Communism and to the irrefutable duty of the UN to abide by that desire. Those who made it to the end of the questionnaire, having answered *no*, *yes*, *yes*, *yes*, *yes*, and *yes* to the questions above,

would be faced with these final question, the response to which would serve as proof of the force of their convictions: “What would you do if you are repatriated in spite of this decision?” Only this last question of the seven allows for an answer beyond yes or no, and presumably the prisoner’s response to it would provide a gauge for the interrogators to distinguish between those who “merely *preferred* not to return,” in Carruthers’ words (184), and those truly determined to *forcibly* resist being repatriated.

The questions asked in the screening as well as the conditions under which the screenings took place highlight the extent to which ideological conflict overdetermines the very concepts of “free choice” and “coercion” in the prison camp on Kojima Island. I have suggested here that they presuppose a certain sequence of responses that demonstrate an already existing militant anticommunist subjectivity, a Cold War politicization so deep that it trumps all other human concerns. It is this opposition of ideological versus “human” motivations that seems to most trouble American observers. Near the end of his memoir, for example, Stanley Weintraub, wondering at various prisoners’ decisions to “screen North” rather than South, briefly considers the possibility of factors that exceed the purely ideological. Discussing one prisoner, referred to by the GIs as “No-face” due to his disfigurement from napalm attacks by UN forces, Weintraub recounts that his captain

queried No-face about why he decided to screen North, since he probably could get better medical care here. ‘But I won’t be here all my life, because you won’t be. What good will I be to the Koreans, or even to the Nationalists [in Taiwan],’ he said, ‘without eyes and without a nose? But back home in China I’ll be a hero, even if I’m not good to look at. And my brother has a basket factory. I won’t be

good for very much, but probably I can help make baskets and feel useful. It has nothing to do with politics.’ (160)

In relaying this anecdote, Weintraub acknowledges the less ideologically driven, more mundane – might we say, more human – reasons for wanting to return to Communist China: to be with one’s family, to make a secure living, to feel useful and wanted despite a war-inflicted disability. But even in this most sympathetic of cases that professes to have “nothing to do with politics,” we see the way that the U.S. anticommunist military intervention in Korea has shaped prisoners’ decisions about their life chances in a politically uncertain future. From Weintraub’s point of view, this prisoner’s chances of survival look better in the South, where he can receive better medical care from U.S. military doctors, but the prisoner is not willing to stake his life on the U.S. military’s continuing benevolence and stewardship. “I won’t be here all my life, because you won’t be”: this comment betrays the political calculation behind a decision supposedly not driven by political concerns. (Of course, he was wrong, although he couldn’t have known it at the time; U.S. military forces have occupied Korea continuously since the war.) That is to say, this prisoner’s choice is “not political” in that it is not his Communist or anticommunist allegiance that primarily determines his decision, but it is profoundly political in that the Cold War conflict has radically curtailed the available choices for his life—not to mention his life itself. In this context, what does it mean to make a decision motivated by “human” concerns?

The American rationale for insisting on a policy of non-forcible repatriation was that the United States had a duty to protect the human rights of anticommunist prisoners whose lives would be in danger back at home due to Communist reprisals. For



Weintraub, the plucky GI in over his head at the prison camp in Korea, surrounded by militant, violent communists, the U.S. military's protection of the human rights of prisoners is one of the only things that seems to be going right. Just after the UN announces it will be screening prisoners for voluntary repatriation, he writes home to explain to his family what is taking place in the camp:

*It may sound corny, but the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of April were momentous days for men all over the world as a result of the screening begun and accomplished. It signifies a step forward in human history. We dare not turn back. We have committed ourselves irrevocably to a policy unheard of before, the principle that men have the right to ask for our protection from unwanted Communist domination, and that we must guarantee their right to decide for themselves whether they prefer to live under Communism or to reject it. The middle ground of passive looking-on has about disappeared. (47)*

Here, Weintraub elevates what might appear to us now as mere Cold War hyperbole to a groundbreaking principle of human rights.<sup>23</sup> The act of screening is figured as nothing less than a “step forward for human history,” momentous not just within the walls of the

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<sup>23</sup> While the UN stakes a claim to protecting the “human rights” of its prisoners, the messaging that emerges from inside the prison camp claims that it is the UN, not Communist China or North Korea, that is transgressing prisoners’ human rights and violating international law. For example, after kidnapping the commander of the camp, General Dodd, the prisoners in the communist compounds of the camp on Kojé Island issued four written demands. These demands call for the guarantee of basic human rights in the camp, an end to the “illegal” practice of voluntary repatriation, an end to forcible screenings, and recognition by the UN Command of a “PW Representative Group” as a negotiating entity. Their first demand, for example, reads, “Immediate ceasing the barbarous behavior, insults, torture, forcible protest with blood writing, threatening, confine, mass murdering, gun and machine-gun shooting, using poison gas, germ weapons, experiment object of A-bomb, by your command. You should guarantee PW human rights and individual life with the base on the International Law” (Vetter 127). Where we might expect to find pure Communist propaganda, we find here instead that the prisoners invoke the language of human rights. In this sense, the concept of “human rights” functions as a contested property that each side would like to claim as wholly its own.

hospital that provides the setting for what Weintraub later calls “our private little cold war” (74), not just for the North Korean and Chinese prisoners who will live its consequences, but for “men all over the world.” The “unheard of” policy that Weintraub describes offers a Cold War vision of human progress, one that irrevocably splits men into a “we” and a “they,” celebrating the obliteration of any potential “middle ground.” This refusal of “passive looking-on” calls upon every individual prisoner – not just the fortunate prisoners at Kojima, but eventually all the prisoners of Communist domination in the world – to make a choice, to irrevocably state a “preference” for Communist systems or a rejection of them, even if such a rejection does not necessarily entail the privilege of entry or citizenship in any other preferred location. Given that the possibility of neutrality has disappeared in this particular vision of human history after the Korean War, U.S. troops emerge as the most fitting guarantors of this act of self-determination (“we must guarantee their right to decide for themselves”). The exercise of individual freedom of choice becomes the marker of a fully human existence, and the Communist world, which offers no such freedom, emerges as a shadowy outside to that existence. In fact, the U.S. state’s magnanimous act of proffering a choice to those living under Communism is seen as an act itself in need of humanitarian protection and enforcement. And if individual choice is understood to be the hallmark of humanity, then the Communists, who fear and abhor choice as such, have already lost legitimacy in the eyes of the rest of the world.

#### IV. Feeling at Home in America: *War Trash*

The narrator of *War Trash*, Yu Yuan, manages to sidestep the political debate ostensibly at the heart of the repatriation crisis. Despite having joined the “Chinese People’s Volunteer” Army, he explains, he was not a true Communist even before the war began. He had matriculated at the Huangpu military academy before the Communists came to power in China in 1949, but was pleased to see the Communist government put an end to the corruption that had taken place under the Nationalists. When the Korean War started, he felt, as “most Chinese” did, that “it was obvious that MacArthur’s army intended to cross the Yalu River and seize Manchuria... As a serviceman I was obligated to go to the front and defend our country” (8). Once in the prison camp, he defends the Communists when pressed – for example, he states at one point that he “believed in socialism,” since the Communists “had brought order and hope to the land” (122) – but makes clear to the reader that his participation in any “pro-Communist” activities is purely strategic, since he does mean to return to China and will need to answer for himself there after the war. He reasons, “Whether I join them or not, they’ll never leave me alone, so I mustn’t stand aloof. Either you become their friend or their enemy. The Communists don’t believe anyone can remain neutral” (123). His true motivation for wanting to return to China, he insists again and again, is to be reunited with his mother and fiancée: a personal reason, as he continually reminds the leaders of both sides in the camp, not a political one (65). Thus, when it is his turn to undergo the final screening that will determine his destination, his desired political or national affiliation does not enter his thought process. Rather, as he sits before the various arbitrators and “persuaders” in

the UN tent, his mother and fiancée are at the forefront of his mind. Even if he could bring himself to move elsewhere and begin a new life without them, he fears that they would be harassed or punished by the Chinese government for his desertion; as he writes, “it grew clear to me that there was no way I could go elsewhere without implicating my mother and my fiancée,” and thus he tells the arbitrator that he wants to repatriate.

Once Yu Yuan makes it back to China, however, in an ironic and not entirely unpredictable turn of events, he is crushed to find that his reason for returning to China no longer exists. His mother has passed away during the three years he’s been gone, and his fiancée has since moved on, asking Yu to stop bothering her, since “she couldn’t possibly marry a ‘disgraced captive’” (344). Her reaction mirrors that of the Chinese government, which regards the repatriated POWs as traitors and failures. Rather than being rewarded for their service and loyalty, the returned soldiers, all dishonorably discharged, have been relegated to the “dregs of society” (345). But over time, Yu is able to salvage his dream of starting a family: he is assigned to teach in a middle school in a new city, where he marries one of his fellow teachers, never again returning to his hometown. He and his wife raise a son and daughter who both go on to graduate from college. Their son “manage[s] to come to the States” and obtain a master’s degree in civil engineering, and Yu proudly informs us, “I even have two American grandchildren, and I love them dearly” (347). This brings us to the present day, when Yu is visiting his son’s family in the Atlanta area, writing down his story for his grandchildren to read one day.

Yu recovers remarkably quickly from the jettisoning of the future he had imagined with his fiancée, the figure whose idealization had sustained him for two years in the camp and driven his most important life decisions. But writing from the U.S., Yu

looks back on the decades after his repatriation to China with a kind of wistful satisfaction: he considers himself “very fortunate compared with the other repatriates” in every respect (347), but remembers that when he first returned to China, “I felt as though time had played a cruel joke on me. If only I had known about my mother’s death when I was Korea; if only I had foreseen that home was no longer the same place” (344). Had he known, he tells us, he might have chosen to go to Taiwan and restart his life there, but it’s more likely that “at any cost I would have gone to a third country, where I could have lived as a countryless man, and probably as a lonely drudge for the rest of my life” (344). This specter of a “third country” is on his mind throughout his time in the camp. When he first tells the pro-Nationalist leadership that he does not want to go to Taiwan, the first thing they ask him is, “Then to the U.S.A.?” (95), to which he responds, “That country doesn’t take in Chinese prisoners like us, you know that” (95). But as the final repatriation screening looms ever closer, he wonders whether a viable third choice exists: “Where in the world can I ever be among my true comrades? Why am I always alone? When can I feel at home somewhere?” (305). Later, he thinks to himself in anguish that if only a “third choice” existed, “I could disentangle myself from the fracas between the Communists and the Nationalists” (313). Finally, just before the screening, he hears from an Indian UN officer that “if you were reluctant to go to either mainland China or Taiwan, you could apply for a third country” like India, Brazil, or Argentina (325). He rejects Brazil and Argentina because of the language barrier and India because of that country’s rigid caste system (in which he imagines he would quickly fall to the bottom rung). The question that remains, then, is: “Was there another neutral English-speaking country where I might go?” (325).

As we know, Yu Yuan does not request to be sent to a neutral “third” country, instead suffering through his return to an unwelcoming China until he finds his footing.<sup>24</sup> But by the novel’s end, the United States becomes that third country for him: certainly not a neutral space in the context of the Cold War, but a place where he can feel at home and fulfill his dreams of having a good life with his family. One could argue that it is clear throughout the novel that he was always going to land in the U.S.: from the beginning, it was his English literacy that saved him, from his ability to communicate with the American doctors who operated on his infected wounds after his capture to his ability to communicate directly with prison guards and officials to the privileged position he occupied as a translator for the leadership of both the pro-Nationalist and pro-Communist factions within the camp. It was his knowledge of English that allowed him to secure a steady job teaching English in a middle school after his return to China, and it was his and his wife’s higher education that allowed his children to succeed. Perhaps most pointedly, it is his fluency in English that has allowed him to write the memoir that constitutes *War Trash* itself. That this novel about Cold War violence in Asia begins and ends with the narrator in the present-day United States, though, is a curious development: why has this novel about choosing China been written in the United States?

Ha Jin comes closest to offering an answer to this question, I think, in the novel’s final pages: it is Yu’s reflection on the occasion of the writing of his memoirs that most

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<sup>24</sup> One might read in Ha Jin’s invocation of a “third” or “neutral” country a reference to the Cold War’s Non-Aligned Movement, the association of primarily postcolonial nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that attempted to maintain neutrality and independence from the superpowers during the Cold War. India, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Argentina was a member from 1973-1991. Brazil was aligned with the United States throughout the Cold War. See Vijay Prashad’s *The Darker Nations* for an analysis of the Non-Aligned movement in the context of the formation of the “Third World” during the Cold War.

clearly underscores the underlying Americanness of his story. Before leaving China, Yu hears from a former comrade from the prison camp, who tells him that Commissar Pei, the leader of the pro-Communist faction, has passed away, his dying words an entreaty to his fellow repatriates to “Please write our story!” (349). As though in response to Pei, Yu ends the novel with the following words:

Now I must conclude this memoir, which is my first attempt at writing and also my last. Almost seventy-four years old, I suffer from gout and glaucoma; I don't have the strength to write anymore. But do not take this to be an “our story.” In the depths of my being I have never been one of them. I have just written what I experienced. (350)

Yu's own last words are in direct opposition to the Communist commissar's final directive to his underlings to tell “our story.” He resists being folded into the collectivity of the rest of the repatriates, insisting on the singularity of the text he has penned with at once a kind of false modesty (what we have read “just” represents a first attempt at writing down his thoughts) and a grating self-importance (his story is too unique to be merely grouped in with all the others). His claim that he has “never been one of them” extends beyond his dissatisfaction with the Communist party in China. Rather, it speaks to a more fundamental aspect of his character: Yu Yuan is his own person, a self-possessed individual acting in accordance with his own personal moral compass in a world of followers. And what could be more American than exercising your freedom to be an individual?

While in the camps, Yu learns to see individualism as a peculiarly American trait. When he is called upon to provide translations during the Communists' kidnapping of the

American UN commander of the camp, fictionalized in the novel as General Bell, he overhears the captive Bell on the phone with another American general. He is “amazed” to find that they speak not of military matters, but about Bell’s wife and family, physical health, and mental well-being. “They treated each other as friends, not as comrades who shared the same ideal and fought for the same cause,” he writes; “They hadn’t mentioned any ideological stuff. What a contrast this was to Chinese officers, who, in a situation like this, would undoubtedly speak in the voice of revolutionaries, and one side would surely represent the Party” (181). Yu doubles down on this impression shortly thereafter, when an American Lieutenant berates him and his comrades for ruining the career of General Bell, who he claims is a good person. Yu finds that the Lieutenant “hadn’t thought of the incident in the way an officer should”: “He took it personally, thinking of General Bell as a specific individual... though he still regarded me as no more than a Red” (192). It is the latter “obliteration of human particularities” that Yu thinks of as the greatest “crime of war”: on both sides, war “reduces real human beings to abstract numbers” (193). It is for this reason that he frequently recalls with appreciation one Dr. Greene, a woman doctor from the U.S. who treated his potentially life-threatening wounds in a POW hospital in Pusan when he was first taken prisoner by the UN. Dr. Greene speaks Mandarin, and Yu speaks English; they strike up a friendship, trading gifts and language lessons. Later, as he healed from the surgery that saved his injured leg, Yu concluded that what made Dr. Greene “different from others” is that she “treated [him] with genuine kindness, which must have stemmed not just from her professional training but from real humanity” (66). With the others around him, including his Chinese Communist comrades, Yu confides, he could not feel safe, because “there was always some ulterior motive behind every activity



and every statement, and I had to take care not to be victimized” (66). In contrast, with Dr. Greene, he could sense the inherent “goodness” that “[flowed] out like water from a fountain, constant and effortless” (66). Amidst all the ideological violence in the prison camp, it just so happened to be the American doctor, radiating maternal energy and a genuine care for Yu’s individual health and happiness, who reminded Yu of his humanity. Long after their meeting, Yu sees Dr. Greene as a role model for himself and his children and grandchildren; he hopes his grandson will become a doctor so that he, too, can one day help people in need.

Yu’s abhorrence of the party mentality understandably amplifies his distress at both versions of the tattoo forced upon him – first “FUCK COMMUNISM” and later “FUCK ...U...S.” Yet it is oddly fitting both that he is willing to once again play the maverick, choosing to enter the country in spite of the tattoo, and that he will finally be able to remove the tattoo in America, the land of personal liberty. He is inspired to finally look into having the tattoo removed through the most mundane of American activities: watching reruns of *The Simpsons* on television. “These days I often watch *The Simpsons*, which I like very much,” he writes (348). “Last week I saw Bart, the mischievous boy, get a tattoo removed from his arm. This gave me the idea of having mine erased” (348). Of course it is watching *The Simpsons*, the iconic American cartoon that lampoons both the nuclear age and the nuclear family in the post-Cold War era, that resolves his lingering and outdated Cold War anxieties.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> For an analysis of the Simpsons’ satire of the nuclear age, see Mick Broderick’s “Releasing the Hounds: *The Simpsons* as Anti-Nuclear Satire.” For a study of how *The Simpsons* upholds and defends the nuclear family form even as it satirizes the family and flouts “family values,” see Paul Cantor’s “*The Simpsons*: Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family.”

The episode in question, “Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire,” is in fact the series premiere, which first aired on December 17, 1989, just over a month after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the event conventionally used to mark the end of the Cold War; as such, it may be said to be the first ever post-Cold War television show.<sup>26</sup> In the episode, Bart Simpson, like Yu Yuan, must deal with a tattoo gone awry and a misdirected message. While doing Christmas shopping with his family at the mall, Bart sneaks into a tattoo parlor and asks for a tattoo of a red heart emblazoned with the word “MOTHER.” Hearing his cries of pain, Marge, his mother, barges into the parlor, interrupting the session before the tattoo is completed, and so instead of “MOTHER,” the tattoo now reads, “MOTH.” Marge decides to use all of the family’s Christmas money to have Bart’s tattoo removed at a clinic, not knowing that her husband Homer will not be receiving a Christmas bonus from his job at the nuclear plant this year. As a result, Homer is desperate to find a way to buy Christmas presents for the family. During a trip to the races where Homer tries, and fails, to win money by betting on racing greyhounds, Bart convinces him to adopt the losing dog, Santa’s Little Helper, which has been abandoned by its owner. The dog finds a home with the Simpsons and becomes a beloved addition to the family, and the episode thus ends on a happy note.

In the episode, Bart’s tattoo serves several functions: it’s a sign of Bart’s rebelliousness, a nod to the show’s countercultural milieu, and a linguistic and visual gag.

But most importantly for the purposes of this chapter, it’s a tattoo that binds together the

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<sup>26</sup> The conditions of the production of *The Simpsons* are also bound up in the history of U.S.-Asian relations since the Cold War: from the first episode through the present, the show has been animated in South Korea through overseas contractors. See the 2010 article in *Time* magazine, “South Korean Cartoonists Cry Foul Over *The Simpsons*,” for a brief discussion of the ongoing relationship between *The Simpsons*’ producers in the United States and its animators in South Korea. See the *Simpsons* wiki for credits and details on the production of different episodes: [http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Simpsons\\_Wiki](http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Simpsons_Wiki).

nuclear family. Bart intends for the tattoo to express his love for his mother; the familial crisis that the tattoo and the cost of its removal sparks sets off a chain of events that ultimately brings the family closer together. And although the episode displays the anarchic, juvenile yet self-aware brand of humor that becomes the show's trademark, its message is remarkably sincere: it's an episode that affirms by satirizing the heteronormative nuclear American middle-class family. Together, the Simpsons learn to eschew materialism and value one another, and on top of this, they complete their family with the addition of the dog Santa's Little Helper, a creature that was abandoned and left to fend for itself once it was no longer of use to its previous owner. Hence Yu's passing reference to the episode yields more than just proof of his familiarity with American culture and humor. In one sense, he's Bart, the mischievous boy, stuck with a problematic tattoo that doesn't say what it should. In another, he's Homer, just trying to provide a decent living for his family. At the same time, he's Santa's Little Helper, mistreated by his homeland and seeking a loving home and family. And like the *Simpsons* episode, the novel ends by affirming the American family and its future.

In fact, I would argue that it is Yu Yuan's Asian American family that cements the status of his memoir as an American story. As we know, Yu Yuan fondly addresses his entire memoir to his grandchildren, Bobby and Candie, whom he takes shopping for Chinese treats in the Asian strip mall in the Atlanta suburbs – “Asian Square on Buford Highway,” where they buy “a chunk of hawthorn jelly and a box of taro crackers” – in a ritual familiar to all readers of immigrant literatures. He mentions in the novel's opening pages as well Karie, his “Cambodian-born daughter-in-law,” from whom he carefully hides the secret of his tattoo even though she “knows I fought in Korea and want to write

a memoir of that war while I am here” (4). Specifying his daughter-in-law’s ethnicity helps us to better picture his family as a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, multicultural immigrant family. At the same time, mentioning that she is Cambodian-born evokes other unspoken histories of war and trauma, reminding us of the other hot wars the U.S. has waged in Asia and of the way that the post-Cold War nation has been able to absorb many of those who survived them.

But where *The Simpsons* makes a joke out of the idea of “playing with the alphabet” through Bart’s unfinished tattoo – you can’t write MOTHER without MOTH! – the matter of Yu’s tattoo in *War Trash* is deadly serious. That you can’t write COMMUNISM without U.S. is no laughing matter for Ha Jin, who seems to find the group mentality that either version of Yu’s tattoo represents equally reprehensible. Both versions of the tattoo would seem to tell an “our story,” but Yu wants us to read in the journey from one version of the tattoo to the other a “my story” instead. In the end, Yu Yuan bears allegiance to no land. Whereas the anti-Communists and pro-Nationalists in the camp imagined becoming Americans by espousing pre-given beliefs and adhering to party lines, for Yu Yuan, it was choosing to return to China on his own terms that most clearly proved his Americanism. He was able to get here, the novel suggests, by valuing education, working hard, and listening to his own conscience—even when it meant standing up to authority. In this sense, the tattoo etched on his body for the past five decades serves as a fitting personal slogan for his journey from Communist soldier to American subject: fuck “us,” there’s only me.

## Chapter 2

**From the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel to the Río Grande:**

**Genealogies of U.S. Empire in Rolando Hinojosa's *Klail City Death Trip Series***

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"

### I. Introduction

Early in Rolando Hinojosa's *Claros Varones de Belken*, or *Fair Gentlemen of Belken County*, the narrator, Rafe Buenrostro, shares the following story in a vignette entitled "Where Another Life of Rafe Buenrostro is Seen":

Raul Serna, Lorenzo Castillo, and Armando Ledesma took no part during that business in Korea; in June of that year of 1950, the People's Army of the Republic of North Korea crossed the dividing line of the now well-known 38<sup>th</sup> parallel; a month later when the Immun Gun armies were advancing toward the

Pusan Peninsula, those three took off across the border by way of Jonesville-on-the-River. (16)<sup>27</sup>

Here, Hinojosa collapses the physical space between two national borders, bringing the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel dividing the newly constituted North and South Korea and the Río Grande separating Mexico and Texas into the same narrative universe. The crossing of the “dividing line” at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel by North Korean troops in June 1950 not only gives rise to this escape across the Río Grande, but – more to the point – it also takes our narrator and many other “Texas Mexicans” from the Río Grande Valley halfway around the world to fight in Korea.<sup>28</sup> Rafe and his friends find themselves leaving one site of border conflict only to encounter, and to police, another. And while the abovementioned three men who crossed over to Mexico in 1950 “did very well” there, the narrator informs us, those “who did not do at all well in Korea were Charlie Villalón, Pepe Vielma, Tony Balderas, David the ‘uncle,’ and others who died some 10,000 miles away from Belken County,” the fictional home of Buenrostro’s recurring cast of characters throughout his fifteen-volume *Klail City Death Trip Series* (CV 16).

Rolando Hinojosa, a pioneering author in Chicano literature since the 1970s, is best known for his wide-ranging portrayal of a fictionalized Mexican American community in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of South Texas in the *Klail City Death Trip Series* [KCDTS], a set of works written in Spanish and English that span multiple literary

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<sup>27</sup> I cite Julia Cruz’s English translation of *Claros Varones de Belken* from the original bilingual edition of the book here. Hinojosa has published different versions of the same books in Spanish and English (*Estampas del Valle y otras obras* and *The Valley*; *Klail City y su alrededores* and *Klail City*; *Mi querido Rafe* and *Dear Rafe*, *Becky and Her Friends* and *Los Amigos de Becky*); however, these different editions are not English or Spanish translations of the original texts, but rather, in Hinojosa’s words, “recastings.”

<sup>28</sup> “Texas Mexican” is the term Hinojosa uses throughout the series for Mexican Americans from Texas; I use the same term in this chapter when discussing Hinojosa’s work.

genres and forms, including poetry, short stories, detective novels, and epistolary fiction. These works tell and retell stories in different voices, iterations, and languages, and in this chapter, I read them as a continuous archive. Of the fifteen works that comprise the *KCDTS* to date, two have been wholly devoted to recounting Rafe and his friends' time served in Japan and Korea during the Korean War: *Korean Love Songs* (1978), a book of poetry, and *The Useless Servants* (1993), a novel composed of Rafe's diary entries and letters written from Korea.

Given that the *Klail City Death Trip Series* [*KCDTS*] is generally understood to be a chronicle of Mexican-American communal life in South Texas over the twentieth century, critics have been largely undecided about how to interpret the Korean War stories in relation to the larger narrative. Some have chosen to bracket this Korean War content entirely, while others have acknowledged the place of the Korean War as an "all-informing event" in the narrative arc of the series (Calderón 166).<sup>29</sup> Few critics, however, have offered substantive readings of Hinojosa's Korean War stories. In this existing scholarship, it has been argued that the Korean War functions primarily as an allegory of or parallel to the historical-fictional world of the Río Grande Valley in Texas, as in a review of *The Useless Servants* that sees "parallels between war-torn Koreans and war-riddled Texas Mexicans" as "inescapable" in the novel (Doyle 124). Cultural critic Ramón Saldivar reads the "theme of war" in *Korean Love Songs* as an allegory more

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<sup>29</sup> In an example of the former, Helena Villacrés Stanton states in "Death in Rolando Hinojosa's Belken County" (1986) that she omits *Korean Love Songs* from her analysis of the series "because, focusing on the Korean War scene, it introduces a different perspective" (Stanton 9). In examples of the latter, Rosaura Sanchez states that *Korean Love Songs* serves to crucially "connect" the works in the series (76), and Klaus Zilles observes that *Korean Love Songs* is the first book to feature the phrase "Klail City Death Trip Series" on its title page, thus officially inaugurating an understanding of Hinojosa's work as an ongoing serial project (23).

broadly of Chicano struggle. In his reading, the characters' American military units and bases in Korea and Japan, like their hometowns back in the Valley, become sites of Chicano struggle for "cultural integrity, communal identity, and social justice" in the face of racial prejudice and alienation (136). For this reason, Saldivar argues that even though the book takes place in Korea, *Korean Love Songs* is still ultimately "about South Texas and Mexican American life in a moment of crucial self-formation" (136).

This chapter proceeds from a different premise. If the figure of a parallel evokes straight lines that run side by side, never intersecting, then, I contend, the Korean War does not parallel the wars and conflicts in Texas' past and present. Rather, I argue that in the *Klail City Death Trip Series*, Rolando Hinojosa sketches a genealogy of U.S. imperial border wars whose crisscrossing lines of descent connect the Korean War to past and present wars and conflicts on the Texas-Mexico border. His work insists that we see the Korean War as a part of the history of Chicano life, and the history of Texas and Mexico as a part of the Cold War division and consolidation of the two Koreas. It reveals South Texas, Japan, and Korea to be ongoing and enmeshed U.S. imperial projects. Reading the Korean War in a genealogy of U.S. imperial border wars, I argue in this chapter that Korea and Japan become the sites of these characters' recruitment into an American imperial apparatus. As I will show, the experience of fighting in the Korean War on the side of the colonizer irrevocably alters Rafe and his fellow Texas Mexican soldiers' relationships to U.S. empire.

I use the term genealogy advisedly here, with regard to both how we read Hinojosa's work and how we narrate histories of the Cold War and U.S. empire. As Juan Bruce-Novoa has observed, genealogies, in the sense of naming and tracing family



lineages, lie at the heart of Hinojosa's literary project (155).<sup>30</sup> In a nonfiction piece, Hinojosa explains this genealogical sensibility by way of the following example:

[A Texas Mexican] could look at a plaque commemorating the dead of World War I, II, Korea and so on, read the names listed there, and see something different from what an outsider would see ... The outsider's eyes would also see a flat surface with names, while we would see differing configurations with extending and extensive bloodlines... We would see lines crossing and crisscrossing across the years and across the wars that would cause the flat surfaces to show us another reality. ("Baroque" 109)

In this example, genealogy gives rise to different modes of seeing and knowing: it crafts what appear to be given facts on a flat surface into differing configurations, or what Hinojosa describes later in the essay as "vistas not always clarified nor clearly seen" (114).<sup>31</sup> Such an aesthetic guiding principle shares an affinity with what Wendy Brown, following Foucault, calls the "genealogical work of defamiliarizing" (95). Brown explains that a genealogical method aims to "denaturalize existing forces and formations...to take that which appears to be given and provide it not simply a history

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce-Novoa argues that Hinojosa's work "has evolved into a history of land claims closely interwoven with family relations," making genealogy the key to what he calls the "recuperative venture" of the texts, that is, the recuperation of oral tradition as an object under the threat of erasure in contemporary society through the production of the Chicano literary text (156). José David Saldívar, too, argues that the *KCDTS* functions in part as a genealogy of South Texas ("Chicano Border Narratives" 178).

<sup>31</sup> The figure of the commemorative war plaque appears in Hinojosa's fiction as well: in *Klail City* (published in Spanish 1976 as *Klail City y su alrededores*, 1977 as *Generaciones y semblanzas*, and 1994 as *El condado de Belken* – three different editions of the same text – and in English in 1987 as *Klail City*, cited here), Hinojosa's narrator tells the story of Ambrosio Mora, a young World War II veteran shot in the back and killed by the Anglo sheriff outside of a shopping center. Afterwards, Mora's father smashes a plaque commemorating those who had died in World War II. After he is done "breaking the living hell and memory a-the damn thing," he explains that Mexicans in Texas are "Greeks ... Greeks whose homes have been taken over by the Romans" (38). This story is retold several times and referenced repeatedly throughout the *KCDTS*.

but one that reveals how contingently it came into being and remains in being, the degree to which it is neither foreordained nor fixed in meaning” (103).

Taking on a genealogical approach, this chapter critically engages the histories of race, the Cold War, and U.S. empire contained in the *Klail City Death Trip Series*. Focusing on Hinojosa’s Korean War stories, I make the case that in these works, the Korean War serves to broker the inclusion of Mexican American soldiers into the American mainstream. In return for risking their lives and being willing to kill to serve in the U.S. military, these subjects are offered newfound access to institutions of power and the promise of upward mobility. José David Saldívar has argued that Hinojosa’s series “subverts the lofty tradition of the Spanish chronicle by focusing not on the powerholders in south Texas, but on the powerless, not on the colonizers, but on the colonized men of Belken County” (“Limits” 257).<sup>32</sup> In critical conversation with this reading, I contend on the contrary that in Hinojosa’s work, the Korean War fundamentally transforms these colonized subjects’ relationship to U.S. empire. After fighting in the U.S. military overseas, these soldiers must newly negotiate the terms of their American national belonging. The first part of this chapter discusses several key frameworks for understanding U.S. empire and the origins of the Korean War, and makes a case for the importance of theorizing empire comparatively across space and time. Then, turning to the *Klail City Death Trip Series*, I examine Hinojosa’s representation of the military

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<sup>32</sup> José David Saldívar and other Hinojosa scholars including Rosaura Sánchez, and Héctor Calderón have discussed the way in which Hinojosa situates his work in a tradition of chronicle writing through his manipulation of form and the allusive titling of his works: for example, Saldívar points out that *Claros Varones de Belken* references Fernando del Pulgar’s medieval Spanish chronicle, *Claros Varones de Castilla*, and Sánchez discusses *Estampas del Valle* in relation to 18<sup>th</sup> century European “sketches of manners” and *Generaciones y semblanzas* in relation to a 15<sup>th</sup> century Spanish text of the same name by Fernán Pérez de Guzmán.

during the Korean War as an institution that facilitates the integration of Rafe and his fellow Texas Mexican soldiers into dominant structures of American citizenship. Then, following the disparate trajectories of Hinojosa's core group of characters after the war, I trace the long-term impact of that institutionalization under the rubric of Cold War racial liberalism. In these readings, taken together, I aim to bring out the reciprocal effects of one imperial situation – the longstanding U.S. annexation of Texas – on another – the U.S. occupation of South Korea. In a coda to the chapter, I consider a third space that both illuminates and further complicates these readings: Japan after World War II, at once an imperial power recently dispossessed of its colonies, including South Korea, and a nation itself newly occupied by the U.S. military. This coda takes up the case of Sonny Ruiz, a character in Hinojosa's novels who comes to reject his affiliation with the U.S. military while serving in the Korean War and flees to settle in Japan. Examining the colonial situation of occupied Japan, I argue that even in this act of refusal, Sonny cannot evade the gendered power dynamics of colonial and racial control under global capital.

## **II. Empire(s) of the Cold War**

Conventional readings of the Cold War locate its origins most immediately in geopolitical dynamics following the Second World War. For example, Robert McMahon explains in a recent historical overview of the Cold War that at the end of World War II, the prior Eurocentric world order had vanished and was replaced by a struggle for power between the United States and the Soviet Union; the Cold War resulted from this sudden, shattering overturning (5). In his influential two-volume *The Origins of the Korean War*,

historian Bruce Cumings offers a timeline of the Korean War that also begins in the ashes of World War II. His study locates the origins of the war in Korea's liberation from Japanese colonial rule in 1945 and the ensuing civil and revolutionary conflict that overtook Korean society. As Cumings and other left scholars of the Korean War have argued, the process of decolonization in Korea was interrupted by U.S. and Soviet occupation at this time, and a number of "domestic and international contingencies" came to define the agenda for liberated Korea (xxi).<sup>33</sup> These contingencies "remained unresolved in the period from 1945 to 1950 and gave the ostensible solutions forced upon Korea by the great powers (national division, alter regimes) a distinctly temporary quality in the minds of all Koreans" (xxi). Such a perspective opposes conventional understandings of the Korean War as a proxy war originating in superpower conflict. Whereas most American scholars saw the war as "a thunderclap that burst in the summer of 1950, a sudden hot war in a distant and unexpected place amid a Cold War focused in Europe" (xxix), Cumings explains in the second volume that his project is to show that June 25, 1950, the given starting date of the Korean War, is actually "a *denouement* mistaken for a beginning" (9). To understand the Korean War, he argues, we must first investigate the "unbroken chain of critical events linking August 1945 with June 1950" (xxii), that is, Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945 and its subsequent division and occupation by the United States and Soviet Union.

Revisionist historians such as William Appleman Williams and Thomas McCormick see the roots of U.S. Cold War policy far earlier in U.S. history. McCormick

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<sup>33</sup> For example, see Chungmoo Choi's "The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory: South Korea" (1993), in which she argues that South Korea's postcoloniality was deferred by these overlapping occupations.

traces the Truman Doctrine – the U.S. imperative to “support” the world’s peoples in their struggles against communist takeovers, announced in 1947 – back through Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points negotiating peace among the European powers after World War I, the Open Door Policy of 1899 securing Chinese markets for international trade, and the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 declaring U.S. hegemony over the western hemisphere (21). According to McCormick, the Truman Doctrine served essentially to globalize the Monroe Doctrine: it was a “declaration that America’s proper sphere was not just the New World but the whole world” (74). Williams similarly argues that the Open Door notes, which “became the history of American foreign relations from 1900 – 1958,” came to shape U.S. Cold War foreign policy (52). He sees the Open Door policy as essentially a Monroe Doctrine for Asia (64), and the Monroe Doctrine as itself a logical extension of American Revolutionary thought. America “matured in an age of empires as part of an empire,” he writes, and Americans “thought of themselves as an empire at the outset of their national existence” (21). In this way, Williams and McCormick draw a through line from the Cold War era back through the earliest days of U.S. settler colonialism and westward expansion.

According to historians Melvyn Leffler and David Painter, scholarly interest in the origins of the Cold War has been renewed since the “end of the Cold War,” usually understood to refer to the period encompassing the fall of the Berlin Wall and dissolution of the Soviet Union in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In their analysis, prior interpretations of the Cold War’s origins such as those discussed above were “grounded in deep, if unacknowledged, ideological and philosophical differences” that were

themselves shaped by the ongoing Cold War. Thus the ending of the Cold War has presented “an opportunity to reassess its beginnings” from a clearer perspective (1).

As the anthropologist Heonik Kwon states, the only consensus about the beginning of the Cold War is that “there is no consensus about the question of beginning” (1). However, for Kwon and other recent scholars, the matter of “ending” the Cold War is just as untidy as that of its origins. As Kwon points out, the current story of the Cold War may be said to have “an open-ended beginning and a closed ending” (1), but the Cold War did not “end” everywhere in the same way or at the same time; indeed, he argues, this disparity in ending of the war shows that “there has never been a conflict called *the cold war*” (6). Kuan-Hsing Chen similarly points out that although the Cold War may appear to be over in Europe, its structures in Asia “have been weakened, but by no means dismantled” (119); because the “effects of the cold war have become embedded in local history” in East Asia, he argues, it is “not yet the post-cold-war era” (118). Jodi Kim also problematizes the question of endings, noting that “the Cold War is not only a historical period, but also an epistemology and production of knowledge, and as such it exceeds and outlives its historical eventness” (3). Her project reads this “protracted afterlife” of the Cold War in Asian American cultural productions, which she argues “[generate] a critical genealogy of the Cold War *as* a genealogy of American empire” (8).

Each of these takes on the origins of the Cold War tells a certain kind of story about U.S. empire. A reading of the Cold War that places its origins in the Open Door policy, the Monroe Doctrine, and the founding of U.S. settler colonialism, for example, sees a continuous line of colonial conquest throughout U.S. history that moves further and further west. Placing the Cold War’s origins squarely at the end of World War II, in

contrast to this long view, marks the postwar period as the moment of U.S. global ascendancy, in which the United States takes the reins from the dying European and Japanese empires and becomes newly invested in far-flung locations such as Korea. Finally, insisting that the Cold War is not yet over, especially in Asia, points to the diffuse effects of U.S. empire in the present. Each of these timelines offers valuable insight into the historiography of the Cold War, and yet, in different ways, I think they each risk reproducing what Amy Kaplan terms a “teleological narrative that empire tells about itself, the inexorable westward march of empire” (18). Kaplan argues in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* that this teleological narrative revolves around “a central geographic bifurcation between continental expansion and overseas empire, and the related, yet not identical, division between territorial annexation and deterritorialized forms of global domination” (17). This “spatial splitting,” she further argues, often “takes the temporal form of a developmental narrative that moves from continental national expansion in the nineteenth century to formal colonial annexation at the turn of the century to the neo-imperial exercise of military and economic might in the twentieth” (17).

Such a view of a spatial and temporal split between continental expansion and overseas empire as a progress narrative has also contributed to the misreading of the Korean War in Rolando Hinojosa’s work as a bounded event totally separate from the history of U.S. imperial border conflicts in Texas and Mexico. On the contrary, I show in this chapter that Hinojosa’s work helps us to apprehend the Korean War as a site of the articulation of multiple, co-present, ongoing formations of empire. One scholarly example of such an approach is Takashi Fujitani’s comparative analysis of U.S. and

Japanese empire during World War II, which takes the mobilization of Japanese American soldiers for the United States and colonized Korean soldiers for Japan as “optics through which to examine the larger operations and structures of the two changing empires, which were based on the nation-state form, as they struggled to manage racialized populations within the larger demands of conducting total war” (6). Reading across these two imperial sites and histories allows Fujitani to broadly theorize the military as an institution that facilitates the national inclusion of racialized and colonized populations at mid-century. In discussing the U.S. military’s simultaneous employment of and disavowal of racism during World War II, Fujitani looks specifically at Japanese American soldiers, but his insight about the integrative function of the military and his argument about the cross-pollination of different imperial systems over space and time hold for the “Texas Mexicans” that Hinojosa writes about as well. The *Klail City Death Trip Series* invokes multiple imperial sites and histories, most notably including the U.S. occupation of Japan, the U.S. occupation of Korea, Japan’s occupation of Korea, the U.S. annexation of Texas, and the Spanish colonization of Mexico. To consider the status of the Mexican American soldier in the Korean War is necessarily to critically engage the overlay of these disparate histories and think them together. In this sense, the readings that follow in this chapter represent an attempt to heed Lisa Lowe’s recent call for scholars to investigate the “forgotten intimacies...of four continents” in their studies of race, empire, and capital (207).



### III. “After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas”: Racial Belonging in the Korean War

In the *Klail City Death Trip Series*, Hinojosa repeatedly compares the Korean War to other wars in U.S. history. These wars – especially but not exclusively wars fought in Texas and Mexico in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including the War for Texas Independence, The Mexican-American War, and the Mexican Revolution – appear as structuring reference points in the historical memory of the Valley across the works in the series. For example, in *Rites and Witnesses* (1989), a town elder named Abel Manzano narrates the family history of Esteban Echevarría as a history of various wartimes. He tells us that Echevarría was born “just a few years after the Americans fought between themselves; in their own war” (109), and that one of Echevarría’s uncles fought for the Confederates while another fought for the United States; that Echevarría’s family land is near the site where “the Texas Rangers shot the three Naranjo brothers in 1915” during the time of the Seditonists’ raids in the Mexican Revolution (109);<sup>34</sup> and finally that the town sheriff, an ex-Texas Ranger suspected to be involved with that same shooting, has recently murdered a young Texas Mexican veteran of World War II. Such a compression of historical time through references to war is typical of Hinojosa’s narration throughout the series.

Hinojosa has explained that part of his motivation for making the Korean War so prominent in his work is to “show that that the military had been another experience (as

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<sup>34</sup> The Seditonists, or the “Texas-Mexican Liberating Army,” as Hinojosa sometimes refers to them, appear several times in the *KCDTS*, perhaps most memorably in *Claros Varones*, in which we learn about Rafe’s family’s support of the Seditonists, and *Dear Rafe*, in which Jehú recounts an argument he has with an Anglo woman over dates and places of events of the Mexican Revolution. In *The Valley*, the narrator Jehú Malacara tells us that the Mexican Revolution of 1910 appears as a living event for those around him in such a way that a “conventional term when speaking of the Mexican Revolution” is “yesterday” (37).

had the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, etc.) of [Mexican Americans in Texas]” (Jason 299). In Korea, the character-narrator Rafe Buenrostro finds that his experiences there are constantly referred back to these and other wars, both recent and long past, by those around him. After one particularly grueling battle, he writes in his journal that “the Marine Old Guys must’ve thought they died and were being forced to fight the Pacific wars all over again” (*US* 47); after another, a wounded fellow soldier from Jonesboro, Arkansas tells him that the “fight with NK was like the French-and-Indian War...all guerrilla fighting by both sides” (*US* 62); after he watches his own forces blow up a bridge that thousands of Korean refugees are attempting to cross, he records, with no small amount of horror, the response of one of the “Old Guys,” who comments nonchalantly that “it’s not the first bridge. The Union Army did it in the Civil War. Bound to be other examples” (90). In fact, Hinojosa has stated that his process of writing about the Korean War was essentially comparative from the start: it was literature on World War I – he names Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That*, and the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, David Jones, and Wilfred Owens – that inspired him to begin *Korean Love Songs* (Jason 298).<sup>35</sup>

“The Eighth Army at the Chongchon,” a poem in the first section of *Korean Love Songs*, takes place in the fall in 1950, as the Eighth United States Army (the commanding

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<sup>35</sup> In that interview and elsewhere, Hinojosa discusses his experimentation with form in composing *Korean Love Songs*. As he explains, he initially attempted to write the book in Spanish, but came to realize that, given that army life happened in English, he had “tried to write in the wrong language and wrong genre” (Jason 298). Working through a process he documents in his essay “Crossing the Line: The Construction of a Poem,” he comes to write the poems in the form of the *arte mayor*, a Spanish twelve-syllable form, in English. As such, he sees the poems in *KLS* as poems “written in English using Spanish syllable norms” (“Crossing” 65).

formation of U.S. troops in South Korea to this day), positioned in the Ch'ongch'on River Valley at the top of the Korean peninsula, is preparing to push the Chinese army out of the war. Instead, defeated by the Chinese in a surprise counteroffensive in what becomes the weeklong Battle of the Ch'ongch'on River in late November, U.S. troops are forced to retreat south. In Hinojosa's account of this battle, the brutality of the fighting that Rafe observes haunts him for the rest of his time in Korea and beyond. But in this poem, Rafe has other things on his mind. I quote it in its entirety here:

Creating history (their very words)  
by protecting the world from Communism. I suppose  
one needs a pep talk now and then, but what  
Gen. Walton H. (Johnny) Walker said  
Was something else.

Those were darker days, of course,  
And the blinding march South  
Cannot be believed  
Unless you were there. But the point is  
That the Chinese  
Were stoppable, so Gen. Walker believed.

And he was right; later on he was killed  
At one of the fronts, standing up  
On a jeep. We understood.

This wasn't Ketch Ridge or Rumbough Hill  
Or the Frisco-Rock Island RR Junction at Sill,  
But then, it wasn't the Alamo either.

And those who survived  
Remember what he said:  
"We should not assume that (the)  
Chinese Communists are committed in force.  
After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas."

And that from Eighth Army Commanding  
Himself. It was touching.  
And yet, the 219<sup>th</sup>  
Creating history by protecting the world from Communism,

Brought up the rear, protected the guns, continued the mission,  
And many of us there  
Were again reminded who we were  
Thousands of miles from home. (24)

“The Eighth Army at the Chongchon” offers a few unexpected reference points for the battle at hand. Ketch Ridge and Rumbough Hill are locations in southwest Oklahoma that have historically been used for artillery training. The nearby Fort Sill is the site of Rafe’s basic training (*RW 15*) and a U.S. Army post that, according to the Oklahoma Historical Society, has “played a significant role in every major American conflict since 1869” and was especially important in “policing Indian Territory and fighting against American Indians” during westward expansion.<sup>36</sup> And as is well known, in the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, the Mexican army, attempting to retake land in Texas, attacked and defeated a garrison of Texan soldiers stationed at the Alamo Mission, leaving only a handful of survivors. It is memorialized in the United States as a rousing moment of patriotic sacrifice (“Remember the Alamo!”) that galvanized the Texans into eventual victory over Mexico.

These references in “The Eighth Army” to past outposts of U.S. empire in Oklahoma and Texas set the stage for General Walker’s analogy between Chinese Communists and Texas Mexicans, repeated several times in both *Korean Love Songs* and *The Useless Servants* and often quoted in Hinojosa scholarship: “We should not assume that (the)/Chinese Communists are committed in force./After all, a lot of Mexicans live in

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<sup>36</sup> The history of Fort Sill is discussed by Lance Janda on the website of the Oklahoma Historical Society at <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/encyclopedia/entries/F/FO038.html>. References to Ketch Ridge and Rumbough Hill appear in a World War I-era text entitled *Notes on Training Field Artillery Details: Practical Instruction for Field Artillery Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers, and Members of Special Details*.

Texas.” Just as Mexicans living in Texas are not always loyal to our government, Walker implies, Chinese troops impressed into military service by their Communist government may not be “committed in force” to the North Korean cause. That someone lives in a certain country – is risking his life for that country – doesn’t necessarily prove his loyalty thereto, a belief Walker stakes on the apparently paradigmatic example of Mexicans living in Texas.<sup>37</sup> General Walker’s hypothesis about the disloyal Chinese is, of course, proven wrong at Ch’ongch’on: the Chinese troops are apparently quite committed to fighting this war, and the UN forces face a resounding defeat.<sup>38</sup> Walker and thousands of the soldiers he leads pay for his wrong guess with their lives.

The tension between Rafe and his fellow soldiers and U.S. military authority – the opposition of “us” and “them” – animates “The Eighth Army at the Chongchon.” When General Walker proclaims, “We should not assume that (the)/Chinese Communists are committed in force,” his first-person plural pronoun seems to refer to the entirety of the forces under his command, the U.S. soldiers fighting in Korea. And yet the next words out of his mouth – “After all, a lot of Mexicans live in Texas” – would appear to perform

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<sup>37</sup> This inherent suspicion of Mexican Americans speaks to the entrenchment of the ideological apparatus that B.V. Olguín argues “prefigures Mexican Americans as potential enemies whose loyalty – and nationality – cannot be determined until they have made the ultimate sacrifice” (90). In “Sangre Mexicana/Corazón Americano: Identity, Ambiguity, and Critique in Mexican American War Narratives,” Olguín ties this characterization of Mexican American soldiers in the U.S. military to Juan Nepomuceno Seguín, who fought with Anglo and Mexican Texans against Mexico in the 1836 Texas War of Independence and for Mexico ten years later during the Mexican American War. He argues that Seguín becomes the paradigmatic Mexican American soldier, “repeatedly forced to take sides against family, friends, and the warring peoples to whom he feels equal amounts of filiation and antipathy” (88).

<sup>38</sup> In fact, in *The Useless Servants*, the racialized American troops who are characterized as not being “committed in force” are not Mexican Americans, but African Americans: in a journal entry dated December 5, 1950, Rafe records the story of the “Negro arty guys” who “ran away twice when their CO volunteered them as Inf to help truck convoy. Negroes kept separate from us; they have their own units. I’ve no idea how I’d behave if I were an Amer Negro in the service. Separate, but in combat just the same. Am told most of the Os are white in those units. Don’t know if this is true or if it makes a difference” (114). The Korean War was the first American war fought after Truman’s executive order to desegregate the military, but this order was unevenly implemented during the war; for a longer discussion of the participation of African American soldiers in the Korean War, see chapter three of this dissertation.

a fundamental exclusion of our narrator, Rafe Buenrostro, and the other Texas Mexican soldiers present for Walker's speech, interpellating them as untrustworthy elements in "our" midst. In Hinojosa's Korean War stories, Mexican American soldiers have been deployed by the U.S. government to protect its geopolitical interests with their bodies and lives, the same bodies and lives that have been systematically devalued by the white supremacist power structures back at home over a period of centuries. Even as they fight alongside other American soldiers in Korea, Rafe Buenrostro, Jehú Malacara, and other Texas Mexicans are marked again and again as racially, regionally, linguistically, and culturally alien, and their loyalties to the U.S. state are constantly cast under suspicion by their superiors as well as their fellow grunts. Thus, Rafe's final lines in the poem tell the reader that "many of us there/Were again reminded who we were/Thousands of miles from home," pointedly emphasizing the differential status of Mexican American soldiers within the U.S. military.<sup>39</sup>

Rafe's "we," then, stands in for a racially marked and colonially inflected subject position that is separated from the larger collectivity of the U.S. army, and by extension, of U.S. society. If the (white) leadership of the U.S. army represents an opposing "they," then the poem's opening lines, "Creating history (their very words)/by protecting the world from Communism," give the troops their mission in the guise of an order from above. The omission of this parenthetical statement when the lines repeat toward the end of the poem, "Creating history by protecting the world from Communism," reinscribes

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<sup>39</sup> As B.V. Olguín (see note 8 above) points out, Mexican American veterans have chosen to respond to this racialized suspicion in varying ways. He cites an anthology of writing by Mexican American veterans titled *Among the Valiant: Mexican Americans in WWII and Korea* whose mission is to "revise the lingering notion that Mexican American soldiers cannot be trusted" (89). Underwritten by a "patriotic Mexican American veterans organization" called the G.I. Forum, *Among the Valiant*, according to Olguín, offers a "racist and immanently masculinist prescription for Mexican American citizenship" (89).

Walker's performative exclusion by underscoring how the (racial) majority of the troops have adopted the mission and its given rationale. Rafe's "many of us," then, maintain a necessary and bitter distance from "their" mission. Elsewhere in the *Klail City Death Trip Series*, Texas Mexicans back at home voice the same skepticism about "their" wars. An elderly character, reminiscing about past days in the Valley in *Claros Varones*, talks to Rafe about "the wars ... Those in the Valley, your brother's overseas, and your own, Rafe, and those other wars of theirs in which they always involve us" (208). Another character puts it more baldly in *Becky and Her Friends*: "In thirty years now, this country of theirs has been in half-a-dozen wars, hasn't it? and what for? The Germans? Friends again. The Japanese? Same damn thing. And the dead? Dead" (51).

Hinojosa's "The Eighth Army at the Chongchon" thus tells a story about racial exclusion and the long memory of colonial war, as Rafe carries the histories of conquest at the Alamo and the Río Grande with him to the Ch'ongch'on and the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. But I'd like to return to the omission of the parenthetical, "(their very words)," in the repetition of the slogan, "Creating history by protecting the world from Communism," at the end of the poem. As I have stated above, one way to read this poem is to see an irreparable breach between the "many of us" who were "reminded who we were/Thousands of miles from home" and the "we" who would liken Chinese Communists to Texas Mexicans. But I'd like to suggest that the poem also effects a suturing of those two collectivities through the repetition-with-omission of those opening lines. That is, if the repetition of "Creating history by protecting the world from Communism" without the parenthetical demonstrates the extent to which Rafe and other Texas Mexican soldiers have also adopted "their very words," then we must also read the

poem's last three lines differently. What if General Walker's words interpellate Rafe and his friends not just as Mexican outsiders, but also as American soldiers abroad? What if his "we" is at once exclusionary and performatively inclusive? In this sense, the Texas Mexican soldier in the poem *is* just like the Chinese Communist in Korea: a member of a foreign occupying army, committed in force only because he is under orders to be so.<sup>40</sup> The poem's final lines – "And many of us there/Were again reminded who we were" – thus speak not just to a minoritarian Texas Mexican "us," reminded of collective subjugation in and by U.S. imperial history, but also to a universalized and imperial American "we," creating U.S. (imperial) history by protecting the world from Communism.

#### **IV. "A new life?": Racial Liberalism after the Korean War**

I have argued thus far that the combat experiences of Rafe and his fellow Texas Mexicans fighting in the Korean War serves to underscore their exclusion from the white American mainstream at the same time that it compels their identification with that mainstream. This tense dynamic of conditional liberal inclusion has been described by historians and scholars of postwar and Cold War U.S. culture as part of the ascendancy of a newfound attitude of domestic liberal pluralism with regard to race in the postwar United States. Mary Dudziak argues in *Cold War Civil Rights* that from 1946 through the

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<sup>40</sup> Indeed, in *The Useless Servants*, Rafe Buenrostro's last journal entry before being sent back home to Texas is dedicated in part to "all the other useless servants, the CCF, who also fought for their masters in a foreign land" (184). Such a characterization puts the Chinese and American troops on the same side, that of the foreign invader. In the same entry, we learn that the phrase "the useless servants" comes from Luke 17:10 in the Bible: "Well, will we then be like the useless servants who did nothing more than that which was commanded of us?" (184).



mid-1960s, the federal government “engaged in a sustained effort to tell a particular story about race and American democracy: a story of progress, a story of the triumph of good over evil, a story of U.S. moral superiority”—even if American race relations did “not always stay neatly in this frame” (13). And as Mae Ngai argues in *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of America*, this story necessarily enlisted pluralism as an assimilationist strategy that “recognized difference in order to efface it within the universality of liberal democratic politics” (234).

Dudziak, Ngai, and other scholars also show that this progress narrative of race relations became important in the unfolding global Cold War, as the U.S. state attempted to prove the superiority of liberal capitalist democracy over Soviet Communism by pointing to its gradual accommodation of civil rights reforms, ostensibly achieved through civic participation as a hallmark of democratic process, at home (13). In this way, as Jodi Melamed argues, racial liberalism and U.S. global ascendancy were mutually constitutive in this period (4). In Melamed’s analysis, the postwar liberal racial formation “sutured an official antiracism” – that is, an official state antiracism – “to a U.S. nationalism itself bearing the agency for transnational capitalism” (5). This “official antiracism” in the context of the Cold War also curtailed the conversation about different visions for change. As Dudziak notes, the postwar racial formation limited the purview of civil rights reform “to formal equality, to opening the doors of opportunity, and away from a broader critique of the American economic and political system” (252). The dominant fiction of postwar race relations was one of the ethnic subject assimilating into an ever more accepting U.S. society, helped along by the democratic state.

In Hinojosa's depiction of his characters' return home to Texas after the Korean War, this dynamic of gradual racial assimilation and class attainment is facilitated by their affiliation with the military. The time that Rafe and his friends have served in the war yields material benefits that were previously beyond their reach because of staunchly enforced class and racial barriers. For Rafe and Jehú, these benefits come about largely through their access to the Veterans' Adjustment Acts of 1944 and 1952, popularly known as the GI Bill. The GI Bill promoted what has been called a "bridging process" for many Mexican-American veterans in the postwar period, providing a new avenue for gaining access to education, improved health care, and higher income—even if the distribution and implementation of these benefits was still decisively marred by racial discrimination.<sup>41</sup> In Hinojosa's work, this process comes to bear clear rewards for both Rafe and Jehú. Before the war, Rafe is a farmhand on his family ranch, but after returning from the war and earning a degree at the University of Texas in Austin, he finds a job as a teacher at his old high school, earns a law degree, and eventually becomes a lieutenant in the Belken County Police Department. Jehú similarly goes from working odd jobs before the war – assistant to a Bible salesman, stagehand in a traveling carnival, migrant farm worker – to holding a position at the Klail City First National Bank as a successful banker and loan officer after receiving a college diploma.

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<sup>41</sup> In his article "Fighting the Peace at Home: Mexican American Veterans and the 1944 GI Bill of Rights," Steven Rosales refers to "the many potential opportunities that have benefited veterans as compared to their non-veteran counterparts, such as preferential hiring practices, military training, and exposure to mainstream bureaucratic organizations, as well as the GI Bill" as a part of the "bridging environment" that aided Mexican American veterans after World War II and the Korean War. He further argues that "veteran status for socially marginalized and other working-class groups seemed to enhance this bridging process even more because of their previously disadvantaged position in U.S. society" (599).

The Korean War in this way becomes integral to Hinojosa's depiction of Rafe and Jehú's upward mobility in the Valley.<sup>42</sup> But an anecdote Rafe shares in *The Valley* illustrates how racist assumptions continue to pervade the implementation of the technically color-blind GI Bill. After returning home from Korea, Rafe goes to see a Veterans Affairs adviser for advice about the potential benefits and uses of the GI Bill. The adviser, an Anglo, suggests that Rafe use his GI Bill to sign up for a "two-year course in boat-building," and perhaps after that, another in "cabinet making" (53). Remembering the same story years afterward in *Claros Varones de Belken*, Rafe adds that the VA adviser "told me that if I had any ambition I could well attend high school with the same GI Bill" (24). It is not lost on the reader that Rafe ends up teaching, not attending, high school later in the same volume. In the version of the story told in *The Valley*, Rafe merely comments to the reader, "Some adviser; some advice," and announces that he is leaving the Valley for Austin, where he has registered at the University of Texas. Wondering about his prospects there, he writes, "It'll be a new town for me. Will it be a new life? We'll see" (53).

Rafe's university education does indeed offer him a new life, one that maps onto the emergent progress narrative of racial liberalism. The anecdote about the "rowboat gringo," as Jehú calls him, reveals how race and class continue to circumscribe Rafe's

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<sup>42</sup> Hinojosa has also commented on this phenomenon in relation to his own career. In his opinion, "what happened in the Seventies [when he began to publish] is that the Veterans' Entitlement Acts of World War II and Korea had produced a sizable and critical mass of educated U.S. Hispanics by the Fifties and Sixties" (Ibarrola-Armendariz 219). He adds that he feels "privileged to have witnessed and to have participated in the changes in the US academy" (Ibarrola-Armendariz 224). His novel *We Happy Few* (2006), the most recent book in the *KCDTS*, is set on a fictional state college campus in the Rio Grande Valley and dramatizes some of these changes, particularly with regard to the inclusion of people of color in the academy since the 1950s. Hinojosa earned his Ph.D at the University of Illinois in 1969 and is currently a Professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin.

life choices even as new opportunities are systematically being made available to him. But his service for the state in the U.S. military fuels his ability to transcend residual racial barriers. That is, the “official antiracism” of the U.S. state places him alongside Anglo American soldiers in Korea and funds his education, allowing him to break out of a racialized and classed trajectory that, in the new postwar liberal racial formation, is no longer his sole option. Over time, he and Jehú do manage to penetrate some of the most cherished centers of power in Belken County (and U.S.) society – the bank and the police – but that is not to say that they find unmitigated acceptance among the white Anglo elites of Belken County. Jehú in particular finds that even with the institutional imprimatur of the Klail City First National Bank, his leapfrogging into a higher socioeconomic status is met with resistance by the still-racist Anglos around him who can only barely disguise their distaste at his attempt to join their ranks. At the same time, he encounters disbelief verging on resentment from some of the Texas Mexicans whom he has “left behind,” so to speak. In *Dear Rafe*, for example, an old acquaintance of Jehú’s, Emilio Tamez, complains, “And Jehu? Well? Well? When has he *ever* faced anybody down in this cantina? In *any* cantina? College has ruined that guy; got himself educated, and then he couldn’t measure up in the street or in the Bank!” (117).

While Rafe and Jehú’s careers after Korea and the GI Bill appear to make good on the promises of racial liberalism, other characters’ trajectories in the *KCDTS* challenge and disrupt the operative terms of that progress narrative. Unlike Rafe and Jehú, for example, Charlie Villalón does not get to access the GI Bill as a reward for his military service in Korea, because he is killed in combat. In his case, the military’s liberal inclusion is fatal. In *Klail City*, Rafe tells a story about his junior year in high school

when “Charlie Villalón was awarded a letter and a football jacket to go with it: K C in purple inside a white map of Texas” (72). Rafe is given a letter, but no jacket: he is told he “hadn’t played enough quarters as per University Interscholastic League requirements” (72). But that was “bullshit,” he continues: “The Texas Anglo kids *all* got sweaters or jackets. Oh yes.” The following year, he and the other overlooked Texas Mexican football players collectively refuse to participate in practice. When the coach asks them why they “ain’t out there running wind sprints and getting your licks like the rest of ‘em,” they explain the situation. He gets the point, and soon after, “the school-board, somehow, came up with enough money for sweaters for all the eligibles” (72).

So far, this story reads as a parable of racial progress through a collective struggle for civil rights: the Texas Mexican students discover a clear-cut case of racial discrimination, fashion a collective plan to fight it, and successfully manage to claim full and equal status on the team. But it turns out that the story’s ending is far from celebratory in nature. Rafe concludes the story by commenting that their victory “didn’t mean much, really. In fact, it didn’t mean a thing: Charlie Villalón and a couple of the other guys on the team died in Korea in 1951 at the Chongchon River crossing” (72). We find that the narrative of upward mobility for Charlie ends before it can really begin. He never gets to access the promised benefits of the GI Bill because the one precondition for those benefits, fighting for the U.S. military in the Korean War, leaves him dead. In Charlie’s case, the actual Cold War interrupts the Cold War racial formation that would allow him to fulfill his youthful quest for full and equal citizenship.

If a model of racial liberalism aspires to efface racial difference within the universality of liberal democracy, to repeat Mae Ngai’s words, then the poem

commemorating Charlie Villalón's death in *Korean Love Songs* also presents an interesting rebuttal of that model. When Rafe and his friend Joey Vielma finally find out a few months after the Battle of the Ch'ongch'on River that Charlie, whose whereabouts had been unknown since that battle, died in that battle, they decide to visit his presumed burial site during their time off to pay their final respects. To their chagrin, they are also joined by an army chaplain named John McCreedy who drinks with them at the gravesite. In "Boston John McCreedy Drinks with Certain Lewd Men of the Baser Sort" from *Korean Love Songs*, Rafe depicts their evening in part as follows:

He's from New England, Charlie;  
A true descendant of our Founding Fathers  
Who settled on a cape  
Not ten thousand miles from this very spot.  
Lately, Boston John's been wondering  
What *he* is doing hee-ah.

The question is simple and direct,  
But it doesn't compare to ours:  
Chaplain Mac (and we point we do to this Korean soil)  
What the hell's Charlie Villalón  
Doing hee-ah?  
And he cries, does Boston John  
In his GI issue bee-ah. (56)

For Rafe, Boston John's "why am I here?" is so "simple and direct" a question that he and Joey can only deign to answer it with one of their own: *why is Charlie here?* What is a simple and direct question about Boston John McCreedy apparently becomes more complicated when it's about Charlie Villalón from Belken County, Texas. In what sense is it that these two men, to use the language of the poem, don't "compare"?

Chaplain John McCreedy is figured in this poem as incontestably American, a "true descendant of our Founding Fathers" from New England. Later described more

humbly in the poem as a “descendant of whalers and traders,” he can apparently nonetheless trace his lineage back to a proud and classically American tradition. Charlie Villalón’s lineage reveals him to be the virtual opposite of Boston John McCreedy in this regard. In *Claros Varones de Belken*, we learn that the Villalóns run a goat ranch on an estate that is “among the largest and also the poorest in the Valley,” which the narrator P. Galindo informs us has been “goat land” since before “Escandón brought the first settlers” (114). According to the Texas State Historical Association, José de Escandón, a Spanish colonizer of Mexico born in 1700, is “sometimes called the ‘father’ of the lower Rio Grande valley” in Texas (García). Where John is a “true descendant of the Founding Fathers,” then, Charlie is the descendant of Mexican settlers led by a foundational Texas Mexican – not American – colonial figure. Where John is the “descendant of whalers and traders,” Charlie is the descendant of Mexican goatherds.<sup>43</sup>

John McCreedy’s conspicuous Boston accent as rendered in the poem – hee-ah, bee-ah, and so on – reveals that he comes from a distinctive American culture. It marks him as more, not less, American. Charlie, Rafe, and Joey, on the other hand, find that their regional dialect at turns interests, annoys, and threatens their fellow soldiers. Rafe notes such occurrences throughout his journals in *The Useless Servants*. For example, his entry for August 6 notes that “Skinner and Stang [two members of his unit] are forever after Joey, Charlie and me about speaking Spanish... The three of us will prob have it out...with Skinner and Stang and whoever else wants some after this is over” (41). On

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<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that this discussion of the Villalón family roots is one of the few moments in the *KCDTS* that directly discusses Spanish settler colonialism in Mexico, a history that largely goes unspoken in the series’ characterizations of Mexico. Hinojosa’s elision of settler colonialism in his depictions of U.S. empire on the Texas/Mexico border is a topic in need of further critique and investigation in scholarship on his work.

September 15, he notes that the three of them “got to speaking Spanish and then went into English and then mixed both as we always do,” driving a nearby member of their unit “crazy” (72).<sup>44</sup> In perhaps the most pointed example, on October 21, he writes that one Lieutenant Brodkey “asked if we spoke Spanish and we said, ‘Sure, Lt. All the time.’ Said our English was very good, and we told him we were Americans, just like him” (79). (He continues, “We call ourselves Mexicans, we said, and our fellow Texans call us that too. Wanted to know if that bothered us. At this, Charlie said it depended on *how* it was said.”) In this exchange, Brodkey’s naïve compliment about their “good English” and his confusion about what to call them show to what extent Charlie, Joey, and Rafe are viewed as something other than American even as they are serving in the U.S. army.

To return to the scene at Charlie’s burial site in Korea, then, the poem’s question about what John and Charlie are each doing “hee-ah” in Korea brings out a bitter irony: the question of why John is in Korea has apparently only occurred to him lately, while Rafe, Joey, and Charlie have had that question foisted upon them by other soldiers in Korea – recall General Walker’s comments in “The Eighth Army at the Chongchon” – ever since they arrived there. Indeed, they have asked and been asked why they are where they are back in Texas for their entire lives. Now, in this poem, they pose that same question to Boston John: “Chaplain Mac (and we point we do to this Korean soil)/What the hell’s Charlie Villalón/Doing hee-ah?” The universal, existential question here – why is our friend dead? – goes unanswered, as does the more basic question of what exactly

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<sup>44</sup> These entries recall similar conflicts over the use of Spanish in the stories in the *KCDTS* set in Texas as well. In *Rites and Witnesses*, for example, an older Anglo woman named Rebecca Ruth Verser complains to the narrator, “If they like Spanish so much, why don’t they go to Mexico? It’s right there. It’s right *there*, right on top of us, for crying out loud” (97).



the U.S. army is doing in Korea and why. But the question Rafe dwells on is both blunter and more pointed: what is Charlie Villalón doing here, in Korea? And did he ever really belong here?

Rafe addresses these questions, among others, with a psychiatrist whom he is assigned to see before being discharged in May 1951. By this point, Joey, like Charlie, has been killed in action, and his friend Sonny Ruiz has gone AWOL. But, he writes grimly, “I’m still here.” When Dr. Perlman asks if he feels guilty for surviving, he replies that it’s not guilt but a sense of loss that he feels. He writes in his journal,

Dr. Perlman has always listened attentively and (I guess) sympathetically, but even he doesn’t know about us, about home, Texas. I explained that we were different; that that part of Texas is *home, our* home. We’re not like the rest of the guys in our outfit; they can go live anywhere in the United States, and many of them talk about moving to California, wherever. We *can’t*, and don’t want to, either. That some of us leave for a while, but that we have to come back. Home.

And so on. (*Useless* 167)

Just as Charlie Villalón is different from Boston John McCreedy in the poem above, in this passage, “we” are “not like the rest of the guys in our outfit.” Rafe insists that unlike other Americans, who can choose where in the country they’d like to settle, he and his people have one place, “that part of Texas,” that constitutes home—and he despairs over the fact that Charlie, Joey, and Sonny will not be returning there with him. In effect, he repeats the same bitter question about Charlie Villalón’s death that we encountered in *Korean Love Songs* (“what the hell’s Charlie Villalón/doing hee-ah?”) in the form of a

now-impossible injunction: “some of us leave for awhile, but we have to come back.” For Rafe, Charlie did not belong in Korea, or at least not forever.

Rafe claims that Texas Mexicans “can’t, and don’t want to” live in different parts of the United States in the same way that other Americans can and do, the formal equality of postwar racial liberalism be damned. Recall that in “The Eighth Army at the Chongchon,” he also discloses the distrust that “many of us” felt about “their very words,” a we/they formulation that I argued must be read as ambiguous. In this passage, more than the pairing of “we” and “they,” which represent clearly articulated groups, I am interested in the conceptual gap that Hinojosa opens up between “can’t” and “don’t want to.” We encounter this rhetorical slippage elsewhere in Hinojosa’s work as well. Earlier in *The Useless Servants*, for example, Rafe and his friends go to Mass at a Roman Catholic cathedral in Tokyo while there on “R&R,” rest and recuperation, and they notice “some people sitting in two marked-off sections” (80). When they ask about “the people in the boxed-in benches,” they find out that they are Korean Catholics living in Japan who “*couldn’t and didn’t* sit with the rest of the faithful” (80, my emphasis). (When the white American soldier with them is shocked, Charlie responds, “Hell, Lt, I don’t even know where the Klail Anglos go to Mass or if they even have a church.”) Similarly, in *Rites and Witnesses*, an Anglo woman shopkeeper, recalling when the first Mexican-owned business opened up in town, voices her suspicion about where the Mexican-American owner acquired the startup funds for his business: “Vicente was a hard worker, don’t you know. It was just that it was a lot of money in those days, see...? And since he *couldn’t, I mean, he didn’t-a, didn’t* have a bank account, at the First ... Know what I

mean?” (78, my emphasis).<sup>45</sup> Each of these three stories concerns the nature of a particular instance of racial segregation: a country that is not equally welcoming to all, a boxed-in section among the pews in a church, a bank that is not open to everyone. What inheres in the space between “can’t” and “don’t want to,” between “couldn’t” and “didn’t” in these stories?

In the latter two examples, “didn’t” presents a softer, friendlier, more happenstance version of the proscriptive, ugly “couldn’t.” After all, the Korean Catholics “couldn’t and didn’t” sit with the Japanese because they were prevented from doing so, just as Vicente Vizcarra, Jr. “couldn’t, I mean, he didn’t-a, didn’t” open a bank account at the Klail City First National Bank because he wasn’t allowed to. In both of these cases, the hopeful “didn’t” provides a kind of cover for the coercive reality of “couldn’t.” The rhetorical slide from “couldn’t” to “didn’t” thus marks an understanding that the logic of segregation is, however slowly, becoming unacceptably antiquated in the postwar moment of racial liberalism. That is, it maps onto a historical transition in understandings of race and racism.

Rafe’s version of these words – “we *can’t*, and don’t want to” move anywhere else – name a different relation. In the other two cases, we imagine that both parties did, in fact, want the option to do what they were barred from doing. That is, they *didn’t* because they *couldn’t*: they didn’t have a choice. Here, in contrast, Rafe essentially argues the opposite: he and the others *can’t* move away from Texas, but more importantly, *they don’t want to*. He desires the same proscription that he instates: he

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<sup>45</sup> The First, or the Klail City First National Bank, is the same bank that hires Jehú some years later, a fact that demonstrates the extent of the racial “progress” that the bank achieves in a short amount of time.

clings to the “can’t” and refuses to want otherwise. Refusing to abide by the lie that smoothly replaces “couldn’t” with “didn’t” over time, he articulates an inversion of the formula that follows a progress narrative of racial liberalism.

Rafe believes that Texas is the place for Texas Mexicans to live, then, now, and in the future. But ironically, at the end of the Korean War, he is one of the only Texas Mexicans from the Valley who gets to return home. While most of his friends from home are killed in Korea, making a return to Texas impossible, one of them makes a choice that goes against his strict formulation in this passage: Sonny Ruiz can and does choose to remain in Japan after the war. To conclude this chapter, I’d like to turn to his story as it appears in *Korean Love Songs*. In this chapter, I have argued that the U.S. military served as an institutional access point for the Texas Mexican characters of Hinojosa’s narrative universe in the period of Cold War civil rights, allowing these characters opportunities to enter spaces of power and privilege that previously excluded them. I have argued that this transformation brings together two histories of U.S. empire often viewed as completely separate: U.S. empire in Texas and Mexico and U.S. empire in South Korea, and in doing so, I have made the case for a comparative mode of reading colonial and imperial texts. The coda that follows attempts to take such a reading practice further, examining Hinojosa’s ambivalent engagement with the subsumed history of Japanese colonialism, which prefigures the U.S. occupation of South Korea and predates the U.S. occupation of Japan. In doing so, I aim to highlight the value of not just reading across different instances of U.S. empire over time and space, but contending with the multiply layered histories of race and empire in the spaces we study—in this case, in occupied postwar Japan.

## V. Coda: “To Americans he looks Japanese”: Competing Racism(s) in Occupied Japan

In the *KCDTS*, Sonny Ruiz is the one character serving in the Korean War who comes to actively refuse to participate in a system that would trade in his willingness to risk his life for the promise of future benefits. After being wounded twice, Sonny picks up and leaves Korea, literally walking away from the military after filling out his own missing-in-action card. According to Rafe’s journals in *The Useless Servants*, Sonny “was wounded lightly both times, but he said the third time could be a charm, and he sure as hell wasn’t going to take a chance” (158). In the third and final section of *Korean Love Songs*, which begins in September 1951 during Rafe’s second “R&R” in Japan, Rafe goes to see his old friend:

Not long after, cards started to arrive from Nagoya and signed  
By Mr. Kazuo Fusaro who, in another life,  
Had lived as David Ruiz in Klail City,  
And who, in this new life,  
Was now a hundred and ten per cent Japanese.

There he is, punctual as death: Business suit, hat, arms at his side,  
And as I approach, he fills the air with konnichi wahs,  
As he bends lower and lower, arms still at his side, smiling the while.

He and I are the only ones left:  
Charlie Villalón, Joey Vielma, Cayo Díaz  
And a kid named Balderas  
Have all been erased from the Oriental scene. (98)

When Rafe confronts Sonny with the question of home, he responds, ““*This* is home, Rafe, Why should I go back?”” (100). When the army’s “Board of Inquiry” finally gets around to investigating his disappearance, Sonny calls on Rafe to “swear/That, to the very best of my knowledge,/Cpl. Ruiz is dead” (114). Rafe acquiesces, and with that, the case is closed. Sonny settles down with a Japanese schoolteacher named Tsuruko – news that Rafe responds to with the line, “And didn’t we/As Cayo said,/Make out better with Japanese girls because we were Chicanos?” (100) – and plans to live the rest of his life in Japan. Sonny’s mother back at home will receive “something to eat and live on” from the army, and Rafe swears to never reveal to her, the rest of his family, or anyone else back in Texas that Sonny did not die in Korea.

Rafe doesn’t think the army will ever find Sonny, for “to begin with/To Americans he looks Japanese” (98). In the poem “Brief Encounter,” the ineptness of the U.S. army’s racial perception is on full display. As two military police officers stop Rafe to check his papers on the street,

Just then, Sonny Ruiz passes by and tips his hat, showing,  
As he carries, the biggest, the loudest, the most glorious bouquet  
In the whole of Honshu.

One of them grunts and says:

“Pipe the gook and them flowers, there.  
Damndest place I’ve ever seen.” (102)

Without his uniform, it seems, Sonny is just another “gook” in a foreign land. As someone who grew up under the shadow of U.S. empire, Rafe, our narrator, is sensitive to the peculiar capaciousness of the term “gook.” Early in his war journals in *The Useless Servants*, he learns that “K’s call their homeland Hanguk (Han-Guk?),” and at the same time that he wonders whether “*gook* come[s] from that,” he notes that a fellow American

soldier who was once married to a Puerto Rican told him that “Puerto Ricans were called gooks by GIs stationed in the Caribbean” (39).<sup>46</sup> Under this occupation, then, Sonny is one kind of “gook” disguised as another. The lazy racism of the U.S. military allows him to pass undetected, even to flaunt his freedom after his criminal act of desertion, under the very eyes of its occupying guards. After all, in this scene, it is Rafe in his U.S. military uniform, not Sonny in his racial drag, whose papers are being checked by the police.

As Ramón Saldívar argues in “Chicano Border Narratives as Cultural Critique,” these scenes of Sonny’s new life as Kazuo Fusaro in Nagoya, Japan “seem to project a utopian fantasy about cultural synthesis” (145). Sonny chooses to see a “cultural affinity between Japanese and Mexican American life” that offers him a “turn away from an oppressed, self-negating home in South Texas” (143). For him and Rafe, Saldívar argues, this “alien world seems rich...in contrast to the one to which they must return” (145). Although Sonny and Rafe are both susceptible to a romanticized view of Japan, it is Sonny whose certainty that he will “find in Japan what he cannot possess at home” leads him to the radical decision to settle there (145). As Saldívar points out, this decision entails his repudiating not just the U.S. military and its exploitation of his person, but his former home and the Chicano community along with it. Rafe, in contrast, “chooses not to turn against his American home,” a decision that Saldívar reads as an affirmation of the “community and collectivity which has been the historical heritage of the border

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<sup>46</sup> In *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, Jodi Kim outlines the “enduring, varied, and infamous etymology of ‘gook’” as a marker of “America’s long-standing history of military intervention and war not only in Asia, but in other parts of the world” (2-3). Citing Paul Kramer and David Roediger, she notes that “gook” has been recorded as a pejorative term against Filipinos, Asians, Haitians, Arabs, and other people of color since at least the Philippine-American War, which began in 1899.

communities of South Texas” (147). Indeed, Saldívar concludes that Sonny and Rafe represent two different “solution[s] to the confusion of serving one’s own oppressor”: “assimilation to another world” for the former and “the determination to return to the contradictory but familiar one” – and a renewed sense of commitment to the Chicano community – for the latter (146).

Hinojosa depicts Sonny’s choice to settle in Japan as extreme but understandable, given the duress he faced as a soldier and the oppression he lived under back at home. Saldívar critiques Sonny’s escapism as both a romanticization of Japan and a rejection of Chicano culture. But I want to point out here that Saldívar’s characterizations of the Korean and Japanese settings that these characters encounter – the “masking quality” of their cultures, the “ritualized Japanese way of life” (141) – also draw upon a familiar set of tropes about the Far East as an alluring yet alien place for drifting Westerners. “It is no wonder,” he writes, “that [Rafe and Sonny] are charmed by the allure of Japanese self-sufficiency, integrity, and family solidarity in the face of an occupying American army” (145). But such a rendering of postwar Japan flattens the complexities of race and empire that persist in that space. It also elides the peculiar status of these characters, colonized at home in Texas but part of the colonizing force in Japan. As I will show below, far from an idealized site of escape from racism and colonialism, Japan in the Cold War era was deeply bound up in both residual and newly emerging racial and colonial systems. Sonny Ruiz’ unique status as an outsider in Japan – and as a *persona non grata* in the eyes of the U.S. military following his desertion – would not exempt him from participating in these systems. The white American soldiers that Sonny encounters mistake him as just another



“gook”: “to Americans he looks Japanese.” But what does Sonny Ruiz look like to the Japanese?

At the time of the Korean War, Japan was simultaneously a nation under occupation and a decolonizing power. In the early twentieth century, Japan had promoted the “master ideology” of the so-called “Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,” another name for the Japanese empire which, in historian John Lie’s words, “promised Asian unity and liberation from Western rule” (102). Under these auspices, it colonized East and Southeast Asian and Pacific territories including Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria in the first half of the twentieth century. After its defeat in World War II, Japan was occupied by the U.S. military from 1946 to 1952, a period in which, according to John Dower, Japan “had no sovereignty,” as “no major political, administrative, or economic decisions were possible without the [U.S.] conquerors’ approval” (23). At the same time, Japan was rebuilding as a capitalist regional power under the protection of the United States in the context of the emerging Cold War. Put otherwise, as historian Bruce Cumings has argued, Japan in the twentieth century functioned as “‘core’ vis-à-vis Korea and China” but “semi-peripheral vis-à-vis the United States” (86).<sup>47</sup> Takashi Fujitani similarly argues that the United States made Japan into a “puppet” or “client state” through occupation after World War II in the same manner that Japan had set up client states across Asia in the first half of the twentieth century (103). The terms of Japan’s surrender in World War II called for its immediate withdrawal from its colonial

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<sup>47</sup> Cumings outlines the following timeline for Japan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century world system: 1900-22: Japan in British-American hegemony; 1922-41: Japan in American-British hegemony; 1941-45: Japan as regional hegemon in East Asia; 1945-70: Japan in American hegemony; 1970-1990s: Japan in American-European hegemony (103).

territories. But Japan's conquest of Asia had already resulted in an influx of Taiwanese, Koreans, and other colonized peoples to Japan. These colonized subjects had either been conscripted as forced laborers or migrated to Japan in search of work, and like Japan's indigenous ethnic minorities, they faced widespread discrimination and conditions of poverty (Lie 110). No longer considered Japanese nationals after Japan's surrender, they were also stripped of citizenship and referred to as *daisankokujin*, or "third-country people," rather than *gaijin*, the conventional term for "foreigner" which "was reserved for Caucasians" (Dower 578). Given these conditions, many ethnic minorities in Japan adopted Japanese names and attempted to "pass as 'ordinary' Japanese and hide their ethnic background" for fear of discrimination (Lie 5).<sup>48</sup>

The Japan that Rafe, Sonny, and their fellow soldiers encountered, then, would have been a space rife with racial and colonial tensions. As members of the U.S. occupying forces, they are partly shielded from these dynamics, but in his journals in *The Useless Servants*, Rafe registers his recognition of Japan's erstwhile colonial relationship to Korea. At one point, as his unit heads northwest toward the border between North Korea and Manchuria, he learns from an officer that "both Korea and Manchuria were under Jap domination for years. Korea was called Chosun or Chosen by the Js and Manchukuo was their name for Manchuria" (77). Rafe goes on to wonder "who named it Korea," but concludes that "One thing is sure: the Old Guys all agree that Koreans don't like the Japs one damned bit" (77). In a conversation soon after that, he recounts an

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<sup>48</sup> Fujitani argues that the ideology of the "supremacy of the pure Yamato race" was fading in the last years of the war, in large part because of the Japanese empire's need to mobilize ethnic minority soldiers to fight for Japan in World War II. As such, he considers the World War II period a moment of a shift to what he calls "inclusionary racism," in which ethnic minorities in Japan were newly being interpellated into the Japanese nation (77).

instance of having attending Mass at a Catholic cathedral in Tokyo during which he “saw some people sitting in two marked-off sections” (80). He learned that the “people in the boxed-in benches” were “Korean Caths” who “couldn’t and didn’t sit with the rest of the faithful” (80). He reports that his white lieutenant was surprised at the story “until Charlie said, ‘Hell, Lt, I don’t even know where the Klail Anglos go to Mass or if they even have a church’” (77). Here, Charlie draws an immediate structural comparison between the segregation of the dominant Japanese and colonized Koreans in Tokyo and the segregation of the dominant Anglos and colonized Mexicans back at home in Klail City. Significantly, it seems that the Mexican-American soldiers’ experience of colonial and ethnic oppression at home gives them a framework for understanding the colonial and ethnic oppression they have witnessed in Japan.

At the same time, however, as soldiers in an occupying military, they have come to see Japan as their “home.” As Rafe narrates in his journals, after being dispatched from Japan to Korea at the start of hostilities, he and his fellow troops almost immediately begin “dreaming about ‘home’ in Japan” (*US* 81). After deserting the army, Sonny finds, as Rafe puts it, “increasingly good reasons” to call Japan “home” (*KLS* 100). In his postcards to his friends, Rafe remembers, he “dribbled bits and pieces of how he made it back to Yamato; Sonny always uses the poetic name for Japan, and he says he’s at home here” (*US* 158). Tellingly, what Sonny thinks of as the “poetic” name for Japan, “Yamato,” is the name of the dominant and ruling ethnic group in Japan. An outsider in Japan, Sonny remains unfamiliar with structures of racism and histories of colonialism in his new home. Rather, Japan is a place that American soldiers associate with modern comforts, leisure, and safety. Particularly in a city such as Nagoya, host to a U.S. military

base, U.S. soldiers out on “rest and relaxation” would have been a common part of the landscape of occupation. His act of desertion has severed his ties to the military, but Sonny still occupies a position of privilege as an American man making his home in postwar Japan.

Sonny’s relationship with his Japanese girlfriend constitutes perhaps his biggest reason to call Japan home. Hinojosa’s depiction of that relationship, and of the sexual relationships between Rafe and various Japanese women, illustrates the gendered nature of the power that American servicemen maintain in occupied Japan. Sonny’s girlfriend, Tsuruko, is a Japanese schoolteacher; when Rafe describes his visit to their home in “At Sonny’s and Tsuruko’s” in *Korean Love Songs*, he paints a domestic scene in which “Sonny, kimono-wrapped, pours the tea” while Tsuruko shows Rafe the gifts that Sonny has given her (104). She is not the first Japanese woman to make an appearance in *Korean Love Songs*. In fact, just before and after going to see Sonny and Tsuruko in Nagoya, Rafe visits his favorite brothels as a part of his “R&R.” He makes a stop in Honshu to visit “Shirley’s Temple of Pleasure Emporium,” and see a “good acquaintance” – that is, a prostitute for whom he has been a regular client – whose “love duties” for Rafe include massages and tea service in addition to the “usual bath and mat and bath” (92). Just after leaving Sonny’s, he travels to the “Pages of Wisdom geisha” and goes on to “call on” another prostitute, who also bathes, massages, and serves him (112). Rafe’s periods of “R&R” in Japan seem to be synonymous with his ability to access the sexual labor of women in Japan.

Such encounters were, of course, widespread during the U.S. occupation of Japan. According to historian Naoko Shibusawa, “As was typical of soldiers in conquering

armies, American GIs who wanted to procure sexual services could count on the desperation of women, including young war widows, in the defeated nation” (38).<sup>49</sup> Sex between women in Japan and U.S. servicemen took place under a range of auspices, from the government-endorsed “Recreation and Amusement Association” (composed of Japanese women “volunteers” who vowed to “defend and nurture the purity of our race” by acting as a “breakwater to hold back the raging waves” of U.S. troops’ sexual voracity) to the independently run “emporia” that Rafe visits to the frequent sexual assault of women on and near military bases (Dower 126). According to John Dower, many U.S. servicemen held a “characteristic colonial attitude” toward women in Japan, regarding them as “little more than available sexual objects” (138). But at the same time, as Shibusawa puts it, women who had sex with U.S. troops “helped, with their ministrations and their bodies, to mediate, attenuate, and manage the hostility the U.S. servicemen felt toward Japan” (39). That Rafe repeatedly (and euphemistically) describes the women he visits as “old friends” (92), for example, shows how the intimacy he experiences with these women colors his remembrances of Japan.

Does it matter that these particular GIs are Chicanos, as in Rafe’s recollection of his friend Cayo Díaz’s words—“And didn’t we make out better with Japanese girls because we were Chicanos?” Indeed, race did mediate American servicemen’s access to sex in Japan. In the early stages of the occupation, prostitutes in Japan were segregated

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<sup>49</sup> Hinojosa mentions this very phenomenon in the context of Texas and Mexico in an interview with Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz. Discussing the many mixed-race Mexicans with hyphenated Anglo surnames living in Texas, he notes that “most of these [came from] marriages between World War I soldiers and Texas Mexican women from Mercedes” (216). During World War I, U.S. troops were stationed in south Texas due to perceived threats from Germany regarding the so-called “Zimmerman Letter,” a secret telegram in which the German state offered to help Mexico regain its ceded territories in Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico if Mexico joined the German effort in the war.

into hierarchical “districts” reserved for U.S. officers, white enlisted men, and black enlisted men; later, as the sex industry developed over the course of the occupation, the “panpan girls” were lauded as “transcend[ing] racial and international prejudice” because many of them “consorted openly and comfortably with both white and black GIs” (Dower 133). Even the systematic sexual exploitation of women in Japan can thus be mapped onto a narrative of the racial liberalism of the U.S. military in the postwar period: American soldiers of all races could equally “make out” with Japanese girls, a dubious achievement in the annals of desegregation. However, Japan’s own racial others did not enjoy the same egalitarianism with regard to matters of sex and marriage. As John Lie points out, historically, ethnic minorities in Japan have faced extreme discrimination in the realm of marriage (5). At the same time, sex work has long been the principal occupation of women migrant workers, who are among Japan’s most vulnerable populations (Lie 11); many of the estimated fifty-five to seventy thousand women who worked as prostitutes in the immediate postwar era were women “of third-country origin,” that is, migrant women from Japan’s former colonial territories or Japanese ethnic minorities (Dower 132). Sonny’s Japanese sweetheart is eager to marry him, then, but her willingness to date and marry Sonny is less a marker of racial solidarity than a measure of Sonny’s status as an American in postwar Japan. Despite his apparent repudiation of his Americanness, his relationship to Japan is mediated by sex and power over women’s bodies.

Rafe’s relationships with the prostitutes he patronizes and Sonny’s relationship with his girlfriend fall on different ends of the spectrum of intimacy between American soldiers and Japanese women, but they each take place as a well-established part of the

postwar social order. Relationships between American soldiers and Japanese women were structured by the exploitation, power, and control that marked the U.S. military occupation of Japan. The fact that sex between GIs and Japanese women in general was marked by the gross power imbalance and domination of occupation may not have determined the content of any given individual relationship between a GI and a Japanese woman, but it did circumscribe the range of options available for such relationships.

If we are able to conceptualize different sites of empire together, as I have made a case for in this chapter, then we can see that Sonny Ruiz is neither simply rejecting a Texan brand of American racism by settling in Japan nor simply acting as an agent of U.S. empire in occupied Japan. Rather, he is engaged in a struggle between these two apparently contradictory roles, a struggle that reflects the overlapping histories of empire in the global Cold War. The decision by Rafe, Jehú, Charlie, and Sonny to join the U.S. army is one inflected by the colonial legacy of the Texas Mexican border, but as I have argued, that is not the only colonial legacy at issue in our readings of Hinojosa's work. Reading Sonny Ruiz as a neoimperial presence in Japan does not negate his own past as a colonized subject, nor does viewing Japan as an occupied nation after World War II discount its own legacy of colonial occupation across Asia in the half-century before that moment. Rather, I have argued in this chapter that the Korean War operates as a point of articulation, allowing us to contend with the multiplicity and heterogeneity of these discrete yet connected histories of colonialism and empire. Understanding these connections necessarily complicates our narratives of the racial legacies of U.S. settler colonialism and of the ongoing histories of U.S. empire in the Cold War era into the present.

## Chapter 3

### Going Color-Blind:

#### The Black Soldier in Toni Morrison's *Home*

What I am determined to do is to take what is articulated as an elusive race-free paradise and domesticate it.

Toni Morrison, "Home"

### I. Introduction

In an essay entitled "Home," drawn from a talk she gave in 1994 at a conference on race, Toni Morrison writes, "I have never lived, nor has any of us, in a world in which race did not matter...[but] I prefer to think of a-world-in-which-race-does-*not*-matter as...home" (3). For Morrison, using the term home "domesticates the racial project" (3). She explains that her writing has always been driven by the question of "how to convert a racist house" – the racist house to which we are all consigned – "into a race-specific yet nonracist home" (5). In a talk entitled "Color Blindness, History, and the Law," given at the same conference and anthologized in the same volume, the legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw discusses the ideology of color-blindness and the principle of formal



equality that underpins it. She argues that in the forty years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, the legal doctrine of color-blindness, usually celebrated as a hallmark of racial equality, has been deployed to legitimate rather than dismantle racial hierarchy. Arguing that “formal equality in conditions of social inequality becomes a tool of domination, reinforcing that system and insulating it from attack” (285), Crenshaw concludes her talk by urging her listeners to “understand the distributive consequences of legal ideology” (287).

Nearly twenty years later, Morrison published a novel that shares its title with her earlier essay: *Home*. Set in the early 1950s, the novel centers on Frank Money, a recent veteran of the Korean War, and his sister Ycidra, or Cee, a pair of siblings forced to navigate the racial architecture of the postwar United States as they separately leave their home in the fictional town of Lotus, Georgia and then make their way back together. Alternating chapters of third-person narration that follows different characters through the events of the novel are punctuated by short chapters of italicized first-person commentary in the voice of Frank Money, addressing and often challenging the narrator (“*Write about that, why don’t you,*” for example, or “*You can’t imagine it, because you weren’t there*”). Throughout the novel, these two narrative voices supplement each other in telling the story, and by the end, they are colluding to unlock the novel’s secrets. *Home* details Frank’s journey across the country to find and rescue his sister, who is on the verge of death, and their shared difficulty in reconciling with the home they left behind. Along the way, Frank must face his own struggles with the traumatic aftereffects of his experience fighting in Korea—effects that are expressed in disorienting episodes of color-blindness.

Early in the novel, for example, the narrator recalls the first time that the recently returned veteran Frank Money experienced a “break” after returning home from Korea. After returning to the U.S. from Korea, Frank has drifted for a year without a steady job or a permanent home. Fixated on memories of his best friends from home dying beside him on the battlefield, and on one particular image of a hungry Korean child shot point-blank by a U.S. soldier, he has alienated the people around him with his erratic and occasionally violent behavior. Boarding a bus near Fort Lawton in Seattle, his discharge papers in hand, Frank sits next to a brightly dressed woman:

Her flowered skirt was a world’s worth of color, her blouse a loud red. Frank watched the flowers at the hem of her skirt blackening and her red blouse draining of color until it was white as milk. Then everybody, everything. Outside the window—trees, sky, a boy on a scooter, grass, hedges. All color disappeared and the world became a black-and-white movie screen. He didn’t yell then because he thought something bad was happening to his eyes. Bad, but fixable. He wondered if this was how dogs or cats or wolves saw the world. Or was he becoming color-blind? (23).

In this incident, as in many more to come, color-blindness emerges as the somatic expression of Frank’s trauma. As the world around him transforms into a black-and-white projection, he speculates first that he is losing his vision, then that he is losing his humanity; the question that lingers, however, is whether he is “becoming color-blind.”

It is clear that Frank’s combat experience in Korea has left him grappling with the question of color. His direct memories of combat are also rendered in terms of red, white, and black: in private moments, he cannot help but see “a boy pushing his entrails back

in” on the battlefield and remember “stepping over [him]...to keep his own face from dissolving, his own colorful guts under that oh-so-thin sheet of flesh. Against the black and white of that winter landscape, blood red took center stage” (20). In this memory, too, a world of color stands out against a black and white screen, and the unforgettable scenes of “blood red” that Frank remembers from the battlefield here give us an unmistakable referent for the red that drains out of the black-and-white world around him on the bus back in Seattle. Moreover, if red is the color associated with communism, then Frank’s visually draining the world of red recapitulates the very logic that placed him in Korea: after all, the given rationale of the U.S. military presence and intervention in Korea in these years was to rid the world of communism. It also evokes the domestic environment of redbaiting to which he has returned.

That Frank’s memories of combat in Korea are ruled by the language of color also marks the particular place of the Korean War in the history of desegregation in the United States.<sup>50</sup> In July 1948, President Truman signed Executive Order 9981, declaring it to be “the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed series without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin,” to be implemented “as rapidly as possible, having due regard to the time required to

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<sup>50</sup> In a 2011 article on *Beloved*, Florian Bast contends that the significance of color has been overlooked in Morrison scholarship. He proposes that *Beloved* “negotiates issues of trauma using the color red,” and argues that red “constitutes a text in and of itself” in the novel (1070). He goes on to examine the use of red as a “highlighter” in the text, used to mark and amplify the trauma of slavery, and tracks the characters’ interactions with the color red throughout the text. Finally, he argues, by turning to the use of the color red to mark instances of trauma, Morrison “performs the inability to use everyday language to portray a traumatic event” (1082). This chapter similarly tracks the appearance of color in the novel, and I have found that in *Home* as in *Beloved*, the color red is associated with trauma and its resolution. A 2014 article by Melissa Schindler also briefly discusses Morrison’s use of color in relation to tropes of migration and homecoming in *Home*. She notes that red is a color associated with the Korean War and scenes of travel in the novel. However, my chapter departs from both Bast’s and Schindler’s work in linking color in the novel and its absence with issues of race and racism.

effectuate any necessary changes without impairing efficiency or morale” (Mershon 183). As the first war fought under the sign of Executive Order 9981, the Korean War helped to initiate the institutional desegregation of the military on a wide scale.

Color-blindness in *Home* is both the name of the postwar racial regime that sends Frank Money to Korea as part of the army and the primary symptom of the trauma he experiences while serving as a part of that army. Reading this novel against the history of the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces during the Korean War, I argue in this chapter that Morrison stages an encounter between pre- and post-45 racial regimes. She shows how these regimes haunt each other in the form of two ghosts: the zoot suited man, a ghost of past racial terror, and the child, a ghost of the contemporary regime of color-blindness. Moreover, I argue, this opposition between the pre-war and the post-45 racial orders becomes essential to the novel’s resolution. Ultimately, Morrison’s novel shows that the codes of color-blindness cannot heal past trauma: rather, it is recognizing the value of color that gives Frank and Cee resolution. Going to Korea to fight alongside white soldiers in an integrated army does not allow Frank to reckon with the past and lay it to rest; rather, it is coming back home and being immersed in color that does that. In this sense, I read *Home* in the tradition of *Beloved*: as Linda Krumholz argues, *Beloved* “challenge[s] the notion that the end of institutional slavery brings about freedom by depicting the emotional and psychological scars of slavery as well as the persistence of racism” (396). Similarly, I argue, *Home* shows us that the paradigm of color-blindness does not and cannot redress racism, but rather functions as a new and different system of racial harm that brings about new forms of trauma. It is Frank and Cee’s return home to a black community in Georgia—a “race-specific” home—that brings to light multiple

layers of trauma. With the restoration of color to the surrounding comes the attempted resolution of that trauma and the beginning of a process of shared reparation.

## **II. Color-blindness as a Racial Ideology**

Scholars of race in the United States agree that the post-World War II era marks a sea change in conceptions of race, which led to an official disavowal of racism by the state and the endorsement of color-blindness as a doctrine and policy, with desegregation as its centerpiece. Color-blindness names the legal doctrine that has governed post-1945 racialization in the United States, but the use of the concept of color-blindness as a metaphor for racial tolerance extends well before 1945. As is well known, in 1896, the Supreme Court ruled in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that racial segregation was constitutional, so long as segregated facilities were “separate but equal”; in his dissent, Supreme Court Justice John Marshall Harlan famously argued against the notion that one race or class was superior to any other, stating that “our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.” When the Supreme Court overturned separate-but-equal in the 1954 case *Brown v. Board of Education*, then, a “color-blind” interpretation of the Constitution prevailed, setting the new standard for the Court’s future rulings regarding racial discrimination. According to legal scholar Neil Gotanda in his article “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Color-Blind,’” the concept of color-blindness, which holds that the state does not and should not “see” race when making legal decisions, thus

“developed after the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments and matured in 1955 in *Brown v. Board of Education*” (2).

While the stated goal of color-blind racial ideology is to create “a racially assimilated society in which race is irrelevant” (53), Gotanda argues that in fact a color-blind interpretation of the Constitution “legitimizes, and therefore maintains, the social, economic, and political advantages that whites hold over other Americans” (2). Under a color-blind constitutional model, “the prescription for racial problems in American society is for the government to adopt a position of ‘never’ considering race” (7). But by reducing race to its formal definition, treating racial distinctions such as ‘Black’ and ‘white’ as merely formal categories (“neutral, apolitical descriptions, reflecting merely ‘skin color’ or country of ancestral origin”) and evacuating race of its historical, cultural, and social meanings, the “nonrecognition” of race has the effect of entrenching rather than redressing racial disparities (18). As such, Gotanda argues that color-blindness “ultimately supports the supremacy of white interests” (18) and ends up furthering the subordination of people of color. He cautions that the concept of color-blindness is “inadequate to deal with today’s racially stratified, culturally diverse, and economically divided nation” (68).

In “Color Blindness, History, and the Law,” Kimberlé Crenshaw also shows how color-blindness “has been deployed to do the ideological work of legitimating racial hierarchy” (281). Crenshaw argues that by the time of her writing in 1994, exactly forty years since *Brown v. Board of Education*, the law has come to endorse the narrative that *Brown* constitutes a fundamental break with white supremacy, a “celebratory narrative” about how *Brown* “marks the historical moment when African Americans were finally

granted full citizenship status” in America (280). But although *Brown* is popularly regarded as having overturned *Plessy*, she argues, “it would be a mistake to focus solely on the rejection of the formal doctrine [of separate-but-equal] while failing to uncover the continuity of *Plessy*’s social vision and its analytic,” which are in fact “reincarnated in color-blind jurisprudence” (284). In *Plessy*, the Court authorized segregation as the “symmetrical” treatment of black and white passengers on a train, and the fact of the inequality between the two kinds of cars was relegated to the private sphere, reflecting a vision of a “racial marketplace” in which “the state [could not] interfere to redistribute racial value” (283). The contemporary doctrine of color-blindness, she argues, endorses this notion of a “free market of race” (287). For Crenshaw, the heart of *Plessy* was “its admonition that the law could not be looked to in order to bring about social equality” (283); a lesson to be drawn from both *Plessy* and *Brown*, then, is that “formal equality in conditions of social inequality becomes a tool of domination, reinforcing that system and insulating it from attack” (285).

As Crenshaw, Gotanda, and other critical race theorists have demonstrated, the legal doctrine of color-blindness purports to legislate the public sphere of government action, in which race is not be considered, rather than the private sphere of individual freedom, in which race may be considered (Gotanda 8). But the concept of color-blindness has also taken hold in wider social understandings of race: as the sociologist Howard Winant writes, in recent decades, “the ironic view has emerged that we are now in a post-racial, color-blind world” (1). Winant attributes this view to what he calls the “racial break” of the post-World War II period. He argues that the “upsurge of anti-racist activity since World War II constitutes a fundamental and historical shift, a global rupture

or ‘break,’ in the continuity of worldwide white supremacy” (2). As evidence of this racial break, he points to: the racial dimensions of World War II and the anti-genocide position it generated; the social movements and revolutionary uprisings that followed the war, including the civil rights movement in the United States and anti-apartheid movement in South Africa; the scrutiny that the Cold War conflict placed upon the racial policies of superpower nations; and the mass migration of formerly colonized peoples from the global rural South to the metropolitan North (7). In this framework, color-blindness emerges as one symptom of the post-World War II racial break, which Winant argues was “at best a partial shift away from formally avowed white supremacy,” a shift that has now left us in a “racial interregnum . . . between the discredited but undead racial past and the much anticipated but far from realized racial future” (6).

In a recent critique of Winant’s theory of the post-World War II racial break, literary critic Jodi Melamed argues that rather than simply a “partial shift” away from white supremacy, the “break” of the World War II moment “instantiated a new worldwide racial project that . . . supplemented and displaced its predecessor: a formally antiracist, liberal-capitalist modernity articulated under conditions of U.S. global ascendancy” (4). For Melamed, the advance of this new racial project signaled a decisive move away from white supremacy, as the U.S. state newly came to embrace “official antiracisms” in its administrative workings. The result of this process of racial reordering, she argues, “was a new and old role for race as a unifying discourse,” as the narratives of liberal antiracism – “of reform, of color blindness, of diversity in a postracial world” – took precedence over prior narratives of the white man’s burden (8). Like Winant, Melamed takes World War II to be a breaking point for U.S. and global racial orders, but



she views the present racial order, which she dubs “neoliberal multiculturalism,” as less an interregnum than a new mode that must be assessed on its own terms.

The sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offers a slightly different periodization of color blindness in his analysis of contemporary racism, proposing that the new racial ideology he terms “color-blind racism” gained dominance in the late 1960s. “Whereas Jim Crow racism explained blacks’ social standing as the result of their biological and moral inferiority,” he argues, color-blind racism “rationalize[s] minorities’ contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations” (2). He contends that in the post-Civil Rights era, the “normative climate...has made illegitimate the public expression of racially based feelings and viewpoints” (11), resulting in a framework in which “most whites assert they ‘don’t see any color, just people’” (1). As he points out, this professed color-blindness is at great odds with the “color-coded inequality” that persists in the United States (2). For Bonilla-Silva, this inequality is “reproduced through ‘New Racism’ practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” (3). He points to the “slippery, apparently contradictory” language of color blindness as evidence of the dramatic changes in the “normative climate” between Jim Crow and the post-Civil Rights era (53).

These scholars of race thus point to different moments as the breaking point of the post-World War II racial break—World War II itself, the onset of the Cold War, *Brown v. Board*, the Civil Rights movement. The Korean War, which falls between World War II and *Brown v. Board*, does not factor into any of these analyses. The Korean War may not mark the arrival of desegregation on a national scale; indeed, as I will discuss below, desegregation was not evenly implemented throughout all of the units fighting in Korea,

much less throughout all levels of the U.S. military. Moreover, because the battlegrounds of the Korean War seem to be so far from home, the utility of Korea for assessing the transformation of the postwar racial order on a wider scale may appear limited. But as I argue in this chapter, the Korean War, the first war fought after Truman's desegregation of the military by executive order, is central to the development of color-blindness as a state and popular discourse. As I will show in the following section of this chapter, it was in the transnational, racially unfamiliar space of Korea, in the controlled environment of the military amidst the uncontrollable circumstances of war, that color-blindness was developed as a technique of racial management.

### **III. Desegregation and the Korean War**

As Sherie Mershon and Steven Schlossman point out in their study of racial desegregation in the U.S. military, the incorporation of blacks into the armed forces on terms of formal, legal equality in the period between World War II and the Vietnam War was one of the most sweeping – and contentious – changes in its history (xi). Such a “vast reordering of their internal race relations between 1940 and 1965,” they argue, was undertaken and achieved only “reluctantly and unevenly” by the leadership of the armed forces (xiii).<sup>51</sup> In fact, they claim that while it was black activism that brought desegregation to the fore as a necessary and plausible change, Truman's decision to end the formal segregation of the armed forces resulted less from a magnanimous desire to

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<sup>51</sup> Mershon and Schlossman, writing in 1998, note in a preface to the book that they wrote it as a study of the struggle to incorporate of gays into military in the 1990s, a framing of their work that speaks to the abiding importance of the military as an institutional benchmark for American policies on integration.

redress racism than from a need to “improve military efficiency” in order to better “serve the national interest” (xiii).<sup>52</sup> During World War II, they argue, military leadership came to realize that racial segregation was “inherently costly in terms of money, space, and time” (74) and “caused substantial waste of human talent through inappropriate personnel placement and the rejection of qualified people on racial grounds” (75). By the time President Truman assembled his “President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services” in 1949 to make recommendations on how to best implement Executive Order 9981, his advisers recognized that the Army could no longer “perpetuate inefficiency by failing to make full use of the talents and skills of its personnel,” a situation that could change “only if [the army] permitted the assignment of blacks to any unit—thereby initiating the dissolution of segregation” (209).

Despite Executive Order 9981’s proclamation of the principle of “equality of treatment and opportunity” for people of all races, the military was still very much segregated in practice when the Korean War began in June 1950. Given that the Army maintained “almost exactly the same racially segregated organizational structure that had existed in World War II,” the same “problems of inefficiency and morale” that derived from racial segregation promptly resurfaced during the first year of the war (Mershon and Schlossman 218). Because General MacArthur, commander of U.S. and UN troops in Korea, was against desegregation, the Far East Command was not formally desegregated until July 1951, a year into the war, when General Ridgway replaced MacArthur.

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, Truman’s decision did not emerge out of a vacuum; by 1948, the idea of desegregation had entered the public imagination. Mershon and Schlossman also point to a number of Supreme Court cases that “eroded the legal foundations of racial segregation” throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, including a 1944 ruling against racial discrimination in primary elections, a 1946 ruling against segregation on interstate railroad and bus routes, a 1948 ruling against racial restrictions on private real estate sales, and a 1950 ruling against segregation in graduate education at state universities (146).

Ridgway ordered “race-neutral policies” and abolished the all-black 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment when he assumed command.<sup>53</sup> However, even before this official change, some field commanders had begun combining black and white soldiers into the same units without waiting for orders from above, “impromptu innovations [that] were reactions to military necessity” (Mershon 223).<sup>54</sup>

The process of desegregating U.S. troops in Korea was thus neither rapid nor complete: the active desegregation of troops during the war did not end racial discrimination in the military or in society at large.<sup>55</sup> But scholars agree that the Korean War jumpstarted the active implementation of desegregation throughout the military in the ensuing years. Mershon and Schlossman argue that the apparent success of large-scale desegregation in Korea, “which began as a response to particular emergency conditions in the Far East,” showed officers in other Army commands in the United States and around the world that “implementing the Army’s nondiscrimination policies was not only feasible but also desirable” (219). In July 1953, fighting ceased in the Korean War; by 1954, according to Mershon and Schlossman, “the tradition of racial segregation had collapsed throughout the armed forces” around the world (219).

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<sup>53</sup> Before its dissolution, the all-black 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment had been viewed unfavorably as a unit whose soldiers were especially prone to desertion, or “bugging out.” For a detailed history of the 24<sup>th</sup> Regiment and its dissolution during the Korean War, see *Black Soldier, White Army: The 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment in Korea* by William T. Bowers, William M. Hammond, and George L. MacGarrigle, who show that institutional racism limited the “effectiveness” of the unit in Korea.

<sup>54</sup> Spontaneous decisions to desegregate combat units due to shortages during battle had happened before; for example, there were partially integrated infantry companies in Europe during 1944 and 45. This time, however, because of the change in larger policies, “the first racially mixed units in Korea generated widespread interest and affirmation and became models for subsequent change. They provided hard evidence that helped to convince skeptical officers of the viability and desirability of desegregation” (Mershon 224).

<sup>55</sup> After the Korean War, black soldiers continued to be systematically funneled into less desirable positions within the military and were largely kept out of leadership roles. See Mershon and Schlossman, chapters ten and eleven.

Discussing the desegregation of troops in the postwar period, historian Michael Cullen Green similarly argues that “a war was required to effect this revolution in military affairs” (140). He agrees that mass casualties of U.S. troops in Korea necessitated the rapid implementation of desegregation, but argues in addition that the military leadership “recognized that their orders to desegregate would be less difficult to carry out in Asia – where there were no off-base Jim Crow laws and few opportunities for black-white heterosexual intimacy – than in the United States or Europe” (140). According to his analysis, then, the desegregation of the U.S. military and U.S. military occupation and war in Asia were not merely contemporaneous, but were rather co-constitutive: war and occupation in Asia both forced and allowed for a more rapid desegregation of troops. Citing the large-scale recruitment of black soldiers in the postwar period, Green argues that “[the Korean War] and its enduring consequences sustained African Americans’ socioeconomic dependence on militarization, an empire of bases ... and foreign interventions” (137). In this way, desegregation helped to invest African Americans in the aims of the state and its military power: “Black military service abroad encouraged African Americans to...think of themselves first and foremost as Americans ... and to identify with their government’s foreign policy objectives in Asia” (2). As the military became an early adopter of desegregation, African Americans “increasingly viewed their nation’s armed forces a model for civilian society,” and thus, “by the time the Supreme Court declared *de jure* segregation unconstitutional in its landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, African American investment in the state’s overseas military expansion was largely secured” (2).

What the above scholarship shows us is that in desegregating the troops during the Korean War, the state officially took up the rhetoric of color-blindness at a strategic moment in its military expansion. It has been well documented that publicly disavowing racism was a strategic move for the United States in the early years of the global Cold War, and desegregating the military likewise served to project an image of the United States as a forward-moving democracy. But as we have seen, desegregating the troops did not serve to redistribute resources among racial groups in the interest of social justice, nor did it primarily aim to do so. Rather, desegregation was a method of more efficiently managing the human resources that constituted the armed forces during a period of rapid military growth. In other words, the U.S. military needed to desegregate in order to expand across the Asia Pacific and the globe. At the same time, the emerging rhetoric of color-blindness needed the Korean War in order to learn how to put desegregation into practice. Attempting to implement desegregation in the geographically and racially foreign space of Korea allowed for the limited application of the policy of “equal treatment and opportunity for all persons...without regard to race,” in the words of Executive Order 9981, in a contained geographical and institutional space, and as such, Korea became the temporary grounds on which the workings of a U.S. domestic policy to come – that is, the policy of color-blindness – could be tested and improved.

#### **IV. Navigating Color-Blindness in *Home***

In his critique of color-blindness, Gotanda briefly notes the difference between “color-blindness” and what he refers to as “literal” or “medical” color-blindness. For

example, he writes, using the technique of “nonrecognition,” which the legal doctrine of color-blindness advocates, is in fact “impossible”: “One cannot literally follow a color-blind standard of conduct in ordinary social life,” since one cannot *not* perceive race (18). Whereas the “medically color-blind individual” is someone who “never perceives color in the first place,” the “racially color-blind individual” perceives race and then attempts to ignore it (19). Here, Gotanda acknowledges the literal referent for the term “color-blindness” in order to point out the deficiency of the metaphor when it comes to racial matters.<sup>56</sup> In *Home*, Morrison presents an unexpected connection between these two definitions of color-blindness: the medical condition of color-blindness which afflicts Frank Money derives from the trauma he experienced as a soldier in the Korean War, a formative event for the state’s development and implementation of color-blind policies regarding race. One form of color-blindness begets another. This literalization of the metaphor of color-blindness allows us to examine the effects of the move to implement desegregation in the post-45 United States.

The narrator of *Home* recounts Frank’s initial episode of color-blindness as both confusing and frightening: as a “world’s worth of color” drains out before his eyes and the world becomes a “black-and-white movie screen,” the narrator asks the question, “was he becoming color-blind?” (23). Only when these episodes recur does he learn to associate the visual loss of color with other uncontrollable expressions of psychic

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<sup>56</sup> In fact, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, color-blindness in the medical sense “has been considered by many scientists to be a misleading name,” since it refers only rarely to the complete absence of color vision. The OED also defines color-blindness as not only the “disregard of differences in race,” but also the “inability to perceive, experience, or distinguish between certain perspectives, moral choices, emotions, etc,” a definition that is also applicable to the shell-shocked Frank Money in *Home*.

distress. As the narrator puts it after this initial instance, once he steps off the bus and watches the “grass [turn] green” again with relief,

he knew he wouldn't shout, smash anything, or accost strangers. That came later when, whatever the world's palette, his shame and its fury exploded. Now, if the signs of draining color gave notice, he would have time to hurry up and hide.

Thus, whenever a smattering of color returned, he was pleased to know he wasn't going color-blind and the horrible pictures might fade. (24)

Frank greets the return of color to his field of vision as a reassuring “no” to the question the narrator earlier posits. But in *Home*, Toni Morrison takes great care to show the extent to which life in the United States, far from going color-blind itself, continues to be dominated by color in the 1950s. As the novel unfolds and Frank continues his journey south to find his sister, he is forced to navigate the unabated color-consciousness of the postwar United States. In this way, *Home* stages the contradiction between the rhetoric of color-blindness and the realities of life reduced to black-and-white.

In fact, in *Home*, color emerges as a category paramount in shaping Frank's experience of the world, circumscribing the possible range of his movements and choices. It becomes clear from the outset of the novel that race, far from receding from importance, has structured Frank Money's life circumstances from the moment of his return back to the United States as a veteran of the Korean War. His time served in a desegregating army overseas has left him experiencing disorienting bouts of literal color-blindness at the same time that he is faced with racism in all of his encounters with white people and institutions. His experiences traveling across the country reveal to him a United States whose racisms differ in important ways from those he grew up with in rural



Georgia before the war. Frank's journey to find Cee becomes a journey of discovering the breaks and continuities of the post-45 U.S. racial order.

At the novel's opening, Frank is planning his escape from the psychiatric ward of the hospital in the Pacific Northwest where he's been involuntarily confined, less to receive care than to be sedated and incarcerated—or as another character wryly comments, “They must have thought you was dangerous. If you was just sick they'd never let you in” (10). When he escapes, penniless and shoeless in the middle of the night, he seeks shelter at a nearby black church whose pastor, Reverend Locke, plots out an itinerary of black churches along his route to help him reach his destination safely. Calling Frank “another one,” Reverend Locke laments the unhappy state of the many black veterans he has encountered, declaring that “An integrated army is integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better” (17). Locke also advises him not to sit down at just any lunch counter along the way: “Listen here, you from Georgia and you been in a desegregated army and maybe you think up North is way different from down South. Don't believe it and don't count on it. Custom is just as real as law and can be just as dangerous” (19). It is just after this bald enunciation of the dissonance between formal policies of desegregation (“law”) and the continuing material reality of racial violence (“custom”) that the narrator recalls Frank's episode of color-blindness on the bus after he has been discharged from the army base.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> After the Korean War, like World War II before it, black veterans, particularly in the South, were frequently harassed, attacked, and subjected to mob violence by racist whites. These attacks, and the outcry over these attacks by the NAACP and civil rights organizations, led to Truman's initial investigations of race relations and the military, which in turn led to Executive Order 9981. See Mershon and Schlossman, 161-167.

Even before this explicit articulation of the gap between custom and law by the reverend, however, the novel sets up both contrasts and continuities between past forms of racial terror and their present incarnations. In the novel's opening scene, for example, as Frank plots his escape from the mental hospital, he worries about being arrested for vagrancy once he has made it outside. "Better than most," the narrator informs us, "he knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes" (9). We learn that when Frank was four, his family and fifteen others were threatened by white men, "both hooded and not," and "ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the edge of town" in Texas (9). While most of the families, including his own, left town that night, one elderly man who refused to leave his property was beaten to death. It is this incident that makes the Money family refugees, forced to leave Texas on foot (Frank's sister Cee is born on the road), and brings them to resettle in Lotus, Georgia; it is this incident that gives Frank an intimate knowledge of the vagaries of racist police violence, whether "legal or illegal," "with or without badges," that he carries with him through adulthood. The novel thus stages a complex temporal and spatial continuity between post-45 and pre-war regimes of racial violence: although the racial terror and dispossession that the Money family survived in the South in the 1920s and '30s might seem far removed from Frank's life in the Pacific Northwest in the 1950s, Frank's formative childhood experience of racist vigilante violence gives him a special awareness of the policing of the geography of racial belonging that he must navigate and manage as an adult. At the same time, the power of the police – with or without badges –

to control the movements of communities and populations was being felt globally in this same moment: after all, Truman famously referred to the Korean War as itself a “police action.” The notion that “men...with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes” (9) must have resonated with Frank during his time in the Korean War, when he was part of an army subjecting millions of Korean civilians to precisely this situation.

Both the explicit connection that Frank draws between his present detention and his past eviction and the connection left unspoken between his own refugee past and the refugees he left behind in Korea demonstrate how racial logics and racist practices travel across time and space in *Home*. Morrison more directly stages the encounter between past and present forms and consequences of racist violence through the figure of a zoot-suited man whose apparition confronts Frank and his sister several times over the course of the novel. Frank first spots him on his train out of Seattle, when the small man wearing a “wide-brimmed hat,” a “pale blue suit [that] sported a long jacket and balloon trousers,” and white shoes with “unnaturally pointed toes” takes the empty seat next to him (27). The man quickly and eerily disappears, leaving no indentation in the seat, but he reappears in Frank’s bedroom during his overnight stop in Chicago. Frank regards the man as an unwelcome “dream ghost,” and wonders whether his repeat appearance is “a sign trying to tell him something,” perhaps about his sister (34). The narrator notes that he “had heard about those suits, but never saw anybody wearing one” (33), but it is left to the narrator to add that the zoot-suitors’ chosen costume “had been enough of a fashion statement to interest riot cops on each coast” (34). Here, Morrison relies on the reader to supplement this observation with its historical context: the zoot suit, popularly associated

with urban African American and Chicano youth subcultures of the 1930s and 1940s, became well known as a racialized symbol of rebellion and criminality.<sup>58</sup> The weight behind this historical referent is left unstated in the novel, in which the zoot suit, that symbol of minority youth rebellion, race riots, and oppositional masculinity, is simply glossed as outdated, even “comic,” through Frank’s eyes (34).

The only other appearance of the zoot-suited man, Frank’s “living ghost” (33), comes at the end of the novel, when Cee briefly spots what “looked to her like a small man in a funny suit swinging a watch chain. And grinning” (144). Frank has brought Cee out to a field at the edge of town to locate and re-bury the skeleton of a man whose death they had witnessed together years ago as children, a foundational trauma alluded to in the novel’s opening pages (“*we saw them pull a body from a wheelbarrow and throw it into a hole already waiting*”) (4). It is only after he has returned to Lotus with Cee that Frank is able to access the repressed memory of that burial scene. Once he remembers, he goes to his grandfather and other town elders to investigate what happened: he asks about the “dogfights” that used to happen at a local horse farm, and one of them replies, “More like men-treated-like-dog fights” (138). The men proceed to tell Frank a story about a boy and his father who were forcibly brought there from Alabama and made to fight to the death in front of a (presumably white) crowd who took bets on the outcome of the fight; the corpse in the wheelbarrow that Frank and Cee saw from their hiding place – the remains

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<sup>58</sup> The historian Kathy Peiss notes that while the zoot suit was a key element of Mexican American and African American subcultures, it also “appeared *across* the main fault lines of social difference in the United States—among Filipinos, Japanese Americans, men of Jewish and Italian descent, jitterbug-crazy middle-class boys, and even Mexican American women and working-class lesbians” (13). While the zoot suit has been viewed as a “symbol of disloyalty and disaffection of minority youth,” in contrast to the “soldier’s uniform, which stands for a militarized white American culture,” Peiss views this interpretation as a flattening of the multiple meanings of this “extreme fashion” (11).

that Frank and Cee have come to lay to rest decades later – was the boy’s father. Significantly, Frank’s grandfather Salem comments about these fights, “I don’t believe they stopped that mess till Pearl Harbor” (139). The specific relationship of the zoot-suited ghost to the man Frank and Cee bury is left ambiguous in the novel: as Colleen Lye writes in an essay on *Home*, the ghost is “unlikely to be a representation of the actual man” who was killed on that farm, but a clear connection between the two is that “they both signify a pre-World War II racial order.” That both the zoot-suited man and the man buried in Lotus haunt the narrative of the present suggests, however, that in *Home*, past racial forms do not stay cleanly in the past.

*Home* thus offers several clear-cut examples of what racism looked like in decades past: white mob violence, lynching, terror. But how do these examples frame race as it operates in a post-45 United States newly embracing the rhetoric of color-blindness? For one, Frank’s experiences and observations during his travels underscore the material realities of continuing color-consciousness in the postwar United States. He watches as a black couple on the train is kicked out of a department store and injured by a white mob throwing bricks; he befriends a black man whose son was maimed at the age of eight by a white policeman who faced no consequences for his actions; he finds that he must consult the black porter on the train to find a place where he can safely eat dinner and rest between train stops without being ejected or attacked for his race. Each of these examples of racial terror is described as routine, even humdrum, and each incident belies the notion that the present has progressed beyond a more-racist recent past.

If anything, it is Frank’s status as a veteran of the Korean War that occasionally affords him improved or exceptional treatment by the police. For example, in Chicago,

Frank goes shopping at the Goodwill store with a new acquaintance named Billy, and afterwards, in his new clothes, Frank feels “proud enough to take his medal from his army pants and pin it to his breast pocket” (36). Outside of a shoe store, though, Frank, Billy, and two other black men are subjected to a “random search” by the police, who stop and frisk them.

Of the two other men facing the wall, one had his switchblade confiscated, the other a dollar bill. All four lay their hands on the hood of the patrol car parked at the curb. The younger officer noticed Frank's medal.

“Korea?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Hey, Dick. They’re vets.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Look.” The officer pointed to Frank's service medal.

“Go on. Get lost, pal.”

The police incident was not worth comment so Frank and Billy walked off in silence. (36-37)

Frank and Billy are released just as unilaterally as they are detained. Being black men makes them automatic targets for everyday police harassment, but being visible as a veteran removes Frank from the category of the criminal in the eyes of these policemen, placing him in a different relationship to the state. His race is the reason why he is being harassed, but his association with the military – and the pride he takes in that association, which is what motivates him to display his medal – mitigates his perceived criminality and provides the police with another vector against which to assess him. Earlier in the

novel, Reverend Locke warned Frank not to expect the world around him to reflect his experience in the “integrated misery” of a desegregated army, and Frank and Billy’s unceremonious detainment, so ordinary it is “not worth comment,” is just one example of the customary color-consciousness Frank must navigate on his travels after returning from war. But the policemen’s recognition of Frank’s status as a veteran, and the special treatment it affords him and his friend, marks one way that Frank’s association with the military has affected his place in the postwar domestic order. Joining the military did not rescue Frank from racism: he finds no systemic benefit from having participated in the military’s experiment with desegregation. Even still, in this encounter, he is able to garner a material benefit – however meager or ignominious – of his visible status as a veteran.

Frank’s combat experience overseas thus materially affects his status back at home. But the effects of the war extended to those who stayed at home as well, particularly the novel’s female characters. Lily, for example, the woman romantically linked with Frank at the start of the novel, finds that racialized Cold War conflict infiltrates her everyday life in Chicago. When Frank meets her, she has temporarily taken a new job at a Chinese-owned dry cleaner’s, a line of work that alludes to an earlier historical formation of migration and labor between the United States and Asia.<sup>59</sup> We learn that she recently lost her previous job as a makeup artist because her employer, a

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<sup>59</sup> As Colleen Lye observes, “The story does contain hints of amicable black-Asian encounters; for example, Frank’s African-American girlfriend Lily receives a raise from her employer at Wang’s Heavenly Palace dry cleaners, but even this only underscores the structural divergence between black wage-workers and Asian American middleman minorities.”

local theater, was closed down due to anticommunist paranoia.<sup>60</sup> But it is in her attempt to purchase a home that she encounters the coldest racism: after she makes an offer on a house, the real estate agent turns her down and shows her an underlined passage that reads, “No part of said property hereby conveyed shall ever be used or occupied by any Hebrew or by any person of the Ethiopian, Malay, or Asiatic race excepting only employees in domestic service” (72-73). In a novel that so obviously stages the moment of transition to a post-45 racial order of color-blindness, the anachronism of this clause is striking. And yet at the same time that its outdated racial categories place the passage firmly in the past, the language of the passage also enunciates a finality and timelessness – no part of the property shall “ever” be used or occupied – that belies its anachronistic rootedness in the past. On the one hand, Lily’s frustrated attempt at buying a home marks another soon-to-be-surpassed relic of race relations before Civil Rights. On the other, though, Morrison deftly demonstrates in this brief encounter the inadequacy of the doctrine of formal equality to address entrenched practices of racism: after all, as the half-century since this moment has shown the contemporary reader, segregation in property ownership has persisted well past the lifting of clauses like the one Lily encounters.

Lily’s frustrated attempt to purchase a home also speaks to the gap between the relatively progressive treatment black soldiers received on military bases in Asia and the continued racism black civilians – by definition, disproportionately women – faced at home in the same time period. As the U.S. military occupation of Japan after World War

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<sup>60</sup> The play that shuts the theater down is an obscure work by the American writer Albert Maltz, who was blacklisted and jailed under McCarthyism. The work is titled *The Morrison Case*.



It took on a more permanent nature in the late 1940s, for example, soldiers who volunteered for longer stays were allowed to request the transfer of their wives and children to their bases.<sup>61</sup> Soldiers and their dependents were housed in suburb-style developments, complete with single-family homes, playgrounds, shopping centers, and the like, and provided with free education and medical care – amenities and privileges which were, of course, unavailable to the majority of black families in the United States. In this way, Michael Cullen Green notes, “young black men of modest or impoverished backgrounds...found themselves privileged occupiers” of Japan (54). In *Home*, Lily’s real estate agent tells her that she can only live in the home she desires to own as an “employee in domestic service” of a white resident; in contrast, black soldiers and their wives on U.S. bases in Japan at the same moment were hiring Japanese maids, servants, and domestic workers for their own homes.<sup>62</sup> In other words, the dream of home ownership denied to Lily in Chicago – one of many potential references for the “home” of the novel’s title – potentially resided in the growing network of U.S. military bases in Asia. But although she has been dating a veteran recently returned from Asia, Lily is no mere housewife: when Frank leaves to find his sister, she greets his departure as a welcome chance to redouble her focus on professional advancement. Along with her plan to purchase a home, she aims to open a dressmaking shop and become a professional costume designer for the stage, and with Frank gone, “[u]nobstructed and undistracted, she could get serious and develop a plan to match her ambition and succeed” (80).

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<sup>61</sup> See Green 50-52.

<sup>62</sup> According to Green, at the height of the occupation, “some 15,000 U.S. military families employed more than 25,000 servants” (49).

In fact, it is a crisis of gendered domestic work that sets the entire narrative of *Home* in motion: Frank is summoned to Georgia to rescue his younger sister Cee after receiving a letter from an unknown person that reads, “Come fast. She be dead if you tarry” (8). Over the chapters that follow, the narrator reveals to the reader that Cee has been hurt, perhaps mortally, by a white doctor for whom she was a live-in domestic worker in the suburbs of Atlanta. Cee had been living in Atlanta alone – she had moved there with a man who left her just after their hasty marriage – and was seeking work when she heard about a job working as a “maid-type person,” a “helper,” for a doctor and his wife – “nice people” – outside the city (57). The racial geography of city and suburb is clearly delineated: buses to the suburbs were “filled with silent dayworkers, housekeepers, maids, and grown lawn boys” who, once outside the city, “dropped off the bus one by one like reluctant divers into inviting blue water high above the pollution below” (109). At their employers’ homes, they would “clean, cook, serve, mind, launder, weed, and mow” (109). Unlike these transient laborers, however, Cee lived at her employer’s home, a requirement that she regarded as a benefit allowing her to live in a home “more beautiful than a movie theater,” with its cool air, velvet furniture, and silk sheets (61). But, as Lily’s attempt to buy a house shows, Cee’s residence in such a home hinges on her labor, rendering her vulnerable to the whims and demands of her employer.

There are immediate warning signs that Cee’s duties might fall outside of the purview of those of a typical domestic worker. At her job interview, Dr. Scott’s wife tells Cee that her husband “is more than a doctor; he is a scientist and conducts very important experiments,” which “help people” (60). When Cee meets the doctor, he asks her about her sexual history, and is “pleased” to hear that she was briefly married but never became

pregnant (64). The Scotts' other domestic worker, an older black woman named Sarah, tells Cee about another "helper" who had been fired for arguing about with the doctor about his practices; she explains that the doctor said he "wouldn't have fellow travelers in his house," to which Cee innocently responds, in a moment of foreshadowing, "What's a fallow traveler?" (62).<sup>63</sup> In her first days with the Scotts, Cee notices, and admires, that the doctor's primary clientele is poor people, "women and girls, especially," rather than the well-to-do white people from the surrounding neighborhood (64). She notices books in his office, the titles of which include *The Passing of the Great Race* and *Heredity, Race, and Society*, and "promise[s] herself that she would find time to read about and understand 'eugenics'" so that she can come to feel more at home in this "good, safe place" (65). Finally, after all of these warning signals, we learn that Dr. Scott has been experimenting on Cee and other women – working to develop and improve the speculum and other gynecological instruments, testing medicines, researching women's reproductive systems, performing abortions – and that Cee has become extremely ill as a result. It is Sarah who notices "Cee's loss of weight, her fatigue, and how long her periods were lasting" and sends off the "scary note" that brings Frank to Atlanta to take Cee away (112).<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> In the era of redbaiting and McCarthyism, a "fellow traveler" was someone suspected of sympathizing with Communist beliefs and objectives, even if he or she was not a card-carrying or professed member of the Communist party.

<sup>64</sup> This representation of Cee's forced sterilization is in accordance with other representations of "disrupted girlhood" in Morrison novels including *A Mercy* and *The Bluest Eye*, which, according to Susmita Roye in a 2012 article, "present a number of ways in which girlhoods are aborted" (214). In the article, Roye argues that "The disturbed girlhoods of Toni Morrison's disrupted girls most powerfully register her angry protest against a gender system that designates a woman a secondary rank and against a social system that effortlessly overlooks what befalls a poor (black) female child" (212-213).

Cee's vulnerability as an unmarried woman and her youthful ignorance of the meaning of terms like "fellow traveler" and "eugenics" eventually render her a "fallow traveler" under the doctor's predations. Her storyline in *Home* presents a companion narrative of race and the Cold War to Frank's story of returning from desegregated military service in Korea. Frank's employer during the Korean War is a state institution that has strategically adopted an ideology of formal equality in its policies regarding race, and thus, in the transnational militarized zone of Korea, black soldiers are integrated into white units in a limited practice of desegregation that would be replicated with fanfare and trepidation in historically white American institutions over the next decade. Cee's employer subscribes to no such theory of change. Rather, the ideology that drives his life's work is white supremacist on its face and, ultimately, genocidal. At the same time that Frank is serving as the subject of a national experiment with color-blind racial liberalism by serving in a newly desegregated army, Cee is the literal test subject of a doctor conducting his own unauthorized racial experiments. Where the desegregation of the military trumpets the arrival of a new, more enlightened moment after the postwar "racial break," the continuing practice of forced sterilization under the banner of eugenics provides a disquieting corrective to this narrative, reminding us of the continuities of racism amidst the arrival of a new era. Frank's time served in the military nearly kills him and leaves him with debilitating, traumatic flashbacks; Cee's victimization by Dr. Scott nearly kills her and leaves her weak, traumatized, and unable to have children. In their travels away from Lotus, Cee and Frank thus encounter two versions of what Morrison calls in this chapter's epigraph from her essay "Home" a "race-free paradise"—one apparently progressive, the other deeply sinister. That is, desegregation is one way to "get

rid of' race, and eugenics is another. But the exploitation of Frank's and Cee's bodies and labor by both of these systems brings about bodily and psychic trauma for these characters. The next section of this chapter examines how *Home* imagines the resolution of trauma for Frank and Cee through the language of color.

## **V. Restoring Color, Repairing Trauma**

Finally reunited, Frank and Cee complete the last leg of their journey back home together: he carries her, barely conscious, on the bus back to town and finds a cab willing to drive them twenty miles to Lotus. Earlier in the novel, Frank had described Lotus as “*the worst place in the world, worse than any battlefield*” (83), but now, returning there for the first time since Korea, and leaving Cee in the capable hands of Miss Ethel Fordham, an old family friend, he finds himself basking in a “feeling of safety and goodwill” (118). Describing Frank's return to Lotus, the narrator writes, “Color, silence, and music enveloped him.” Indeed, Morrison's description of life in Lotus at this moment of the Moneys' return is rich with color: “every front yard and backyard sported flowers...marigolds, nasturtiums, dahlias. Crimson, purple, pink, and China blue. Had these trees always been this deep, deep green?” (117). The sun, which “sucked away the blue from the sky,” “could not scorch the yellow butterflies away from scarlet rosebushes” (118). In the cotton fields, Frank watches “acres of pink blossoms...turn red,” precisely the color that he had previously been horrified to find draining from his field of vision (118); in a matchbox stored away over the years in a hole in the kitchen of

their old house, he finds Cee's baby teeth along with "his winning marbles: a bright blue one, an ebony one, and his favorite, a rainbow mix" (120).

Color envelops Frank in *Lotus*, too, in that his and his sister's return there is a return to a predominantly black community. Each of them had left *Lotus* to work in white institutions; each of them barely escaped with their lives. Back in *Lotus*, though, Frank finds that nothing could "ruin the pleasure of being among those who do not want to degrade or destroy you" (118).<sup>65</sup> Being back in her home community literally saves Cee's life: she spends two months confined to Miss Ethel's house, "surrounded by country women who loved mean" and "handled sickness as though it were an affront" (121). When she tells them that her sickness resulted from a white doctor's machinations, their "eye rolling and tooth sucking was enough to make clear their scorn" for the medical industry (121). But it becomes clear that these women "knew how to repair what an educated bandit doctor had plundered" (128). To combat the damage done by the "devil doctor," they put Cee under constant, watchful care and administer a variety of herbs and medicines to rid her of fever and infection. The final stage of Cee's healing requires her to be "sun-smacked, which meant spending at least one hour a day with her legs spread open to the blazing sun" to rid her of her "womb sickness" (124). This ordeal, along with the "demanding love" she has received from Miss Ethel, gives her a newfound strength: "Sun-smacked or not, she wanted to be the one who rescued her own self" (129). Cee, like Frank, had left *Lotus* at the first available opportunity, but once she is well enough to

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<sup>65</sup> In this sense, the novel insists on the importance of precisely the historical and cultural components of race that the framework of color-blindness refuses to acknowledge. Put differently, as Barbara Christian, discussing narratives of migration and shifts in geography in Morrison's first three novels, writes, "Segregation, enforced by law or custom, had restricted African Americans in material ways but it had also placed them in contexts where they could create and retain their own languages, stories, and music" (415).

leave Miss Ethel's home, she proclaims, "I ain't going nowhere ... This is where I belong" (126). Her newfound self-sufficiency and resolve are apparent to Frank when she returns to live with him: she puts herself to work learning to quilt, intending to eventually make quilts to sell to visitors and tourists to help support their household.

Cee thus emerges from her sickness with her health restored and self-confidence strengthened through communal healing, but even Miss Ethel's expert care cannot reverse the permanent damage done by Dr. Beau's operations: Cee is infertile. When Miss Ethel tells her this news, she needs time to process the implications. Initially upset with herself for having been "so stupid, so eager to please" (128), she comes to realize that she must now become "person who would never again need rescue" (129). She accepts that she will never have children and that she may never marry; she accepts that she will "have to invent a way to earn a living" (130). But when she first tells Frank the news, her grief overwhelms her. She tells him while sobbing, "I didn't feel anything at first when Miss Ethel told me but now I think about it all the time. It's like there's a baby girl down here waiting to be born. She's somewhere close by in the air, in this house, and she picked me to be born to. And now she has to find some other mother" (131). She continues:

"You know that toothless smile babies have? ... I keep seeing it. I saw it in a green pepper once. Another time a cloud curved in such a way it looked like..."

Cee didn't finish the list. She simply went to the sofa, sat and began sorting and re-sorting quilt pieces. (132)

As Cee heals, she is able to mourn the loss of her unborn child, or children: thanks to her newfound strength, she could “know the truth, accept it, and keep on quilting” (132).<sup>66</sup> But her description of the “toothless smile” she sees in the world around her triggers an unexpected reaction in her brother.

In fact, it is Cee’s haunting visions of the baby girl that bring together the novel’s disparate threads and ultimately bring about the resolution of the Money siblings’ tale in *Home*. Throughout the novel, Frank has returned to a disturbing memory of his time in Korea: one day, while guarding his post, he notices a Korean child scavenging for trash. He smiles as he watches her hand grabbing for food, and she returns to the site for days in a row. But one day, according to Frank’s initial account of the incident, recounted in first-person narration in the longest of the italicized chapter interludes, when a “relief guard” approaches her, she reaches out and touches his crotch in “what looks like a hurried, even automatic, gesture” (95). Frank reads the gesture as the handiwork of a corrupt adult who was “not content with the usual girls for sale and took to marketing children,” a disturbing consequence of war (96). The relief guard responds by immediately “blow[ing] her away” (95).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Cee’s vision of her unborn child marks yet another way that *Home* recalls Morrison’s *Beloved*, which, as Marianna Hirsch writes, is “a ghost story about a child who returns to reestablish connection” – about “the murdered/abandoned child, here a daughter, returning from the other side to question the mother” (97). Hirsch argues that *Beloved* “is not only about the child’s longing for a lost maternal object but about the immense loss experienced by a mother who is unable to keep her children alive and rear them: It is about maternal fantasies of reparation and recovery” (97). While the transmission of “unspeakable memories” in *Beloved* is, as Hirsch argues, “a peculiarly maternal one” (109), *Home* addresses the question of reparation and recovery through the representation of Cee’s unwillingly foreclosed maternity.

<sup>67</sup> In a 2014 article, Melissa Schindler points out that the Korean girl is associated with a “rotting orange” that she picks out of the trash, a poignant image “in a canvas largely devoid of adjectives of color” (86). Later, she notes, the narrator asks the reader, “What type of man thinks he can ever in life pay the price of that orange” (133).



Before this full description of this incident, the novel makes several weighty, oblique references to a Korean girl lurking in Frank's memories of the war. Early in the novel, before he departs on his trip to find Cee, he struggles with pictures in his mind of the victims of his anguish and hatred after his friends had died on the battlefield: he replays in his mind shooting women and children, an old one-legged man, and most of all, "the girl. What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her?" (22). Later in the novel, when he recalls meeting Lily for the first time at the dry cleaner's where she worked, he explains that he went to get his clothing cleaned because he had had a breakdown when he saw "a little girl vomiting water": "Blood ran from her nose. A sadness hit me like a pile-driver" (69). Seeing the girl triggers an episode similar to the one that left him institutionalized at the novel's opening: he rushes off feeling shaky and spends three nights sleeping on park benches, a "haunted, half-crazy drunk" (69). After he and Lily become an item, he attends a church picnic with her and is again triggered by the sight of a young girl, this time a "little girl with slanty eyes" who reaches for a cupcake at his table (76). Frank pushes the plate closer to her, and when she smiles up at him, he "dropped his food and ran through the crowd" (77). He stays out until dawn, and when he returns to Lily, she asks, "Was it something to do with your time in Korea that spooked you?" (77). He does not respond and simply tells her it won't happen again. Finally, in the chapter following Frank's description of the girl's death, as he thinks through the deaths of his friends in gory detail yet again, the narrator writes, "But before that, before the deaths of his homeys, he had witnessed the other one. The scavenging child clutching an orange, smiling, then saying, 'Yum-yum,' before the guard blew her head off" (99).

In each of these cases of remembrance, Frank links the Korean girl's death to his own suffering. When he actively thinks of her, he cannot help but think of his friends dying on the battlefield, and when he remembers his friends' deaths, his mind turns to the girl: he relives the horror of witnessing his friends dying on the battlefield, then remembers channeling his anger into the sanctioned retaliatory killing of his enemies ("There were not enough dead gooks or Chinks in the world to satisfy him"), and then finally fixates on the girl as one of these dead. But because her death predated the loss of his friends, this logic of compensation is disrupted ("What did she ever do to deserve what happened to her?"). She becomes the ultimate figure of the senseless violence of war, and thus, in both of the narrated instances in which he happens to encounter a visual cue that resembles her in some way, he loses control of himself: being reminded of the Korean girl's pain (the blood and vomit of the girl on the sidewalk) and innocence (the smile of the girl with "slanty eyes") sets him off, forcing him to take leave of civilian society as he relives the atrocities of a faraway war in his mind.

As Mary Dudziak notes in a short essay on *Home*, Frank's "nightmares and rage" reflect his utter isolation in a society in which "the experience of war itself is far away and largely inaccessible" for the non-veteran. She reads the novel as a tale of the "profound limits of empathy," in which "society's inability to fully empathize with the soldier" presents a parable, and perhaps a warning, about "the commonality of this profound human condition." Frank's memories of war entail that he cannot function normally in society, and even his loved ones cannot fully access or comprehend what has happened to him. But when it comes to the Korean child, the limits of empathy fold back onto the soldier himself. Indeed, Frank's narration of the girl's death is filled with

empathy for the child: he notes that she is “left-handed, like me,” and likens her to himself and Cee as children “trying to steal peaches off the ground under Miss Robinson’s tree” (95). He smiles when he sees her hand pawing for food among the garbage, and the relief guard also returns the girl’s smile—just before shooting and killing her. Frank’s tone of warmth and indulgence toward the child belies the brutality and senselessness of her sudden death. In this way, even as Frank is isolated in his torment, unable to respond to the outward reach of those around him, he struggles inwardly with the question: to what extent can he empathize with this victim?

Frank’s description of the relief guard, in contrast to that of his victim, is cold, distant, and uncertain: “*Thinking back on it now, I think the guard felt more than disgust. I think he felt tempted and that is what he had to kill*” (97). In these two sentences, the distancing mechanism – “I think” – is paired with the curious intimacy of “he felt.” The reason for this inconsistency is finally revealed when Cee mentions seeing the visage of her never-to-be-born child, a smiling baby girl, and in doing so unearths the truth for Frank:

*Then Cee told me about seeing a baby girl smile all through the house, in the air, the clouds. It hit me. Maybe that little girl wasn’t waiting around to be born to her. Maybe it was already dead, waiting for me to step up and say how.*

*I shot the Korean girl in her face.*

*I am the one she touched.*

*I am the one who saw her smile.*

*I am the one she said ‘Yum-yum’ to.*

*I am the one she aroused. (133)*

Here, Cee's baby ghost converges with the ghost of the dead Korean girl, revealing Frank to have been the "relief guard" that killed her. In this confession, the "I think" of Frank's earlier assessment of the guard has changed into an incantatory "I am": the one who saw her smile, yes, but also the one she aroused, and the one who killed her for it. Frank's reaction when Cee tells him that the doctor had rendered her infertile is a "fluttering in his chest" that accompanies the questions, "Who would do that to a young girl? ... What the hell for?" (132). That he immediately afterwards confesses to his own act of sexual violence against a young girl – "*I have something to say to you right now*" (133) – reveals the fluttering in his chest to be not just a sign of his anger or grief over what Cee has had to endure, but also a telltale response to the horrors he has inflicted on others. What is at stake for Frank at this point in the novel, then, is not just whether society can empathize with him, or he can empathize with his victims, but the extent to which he can empathize with, or forgive, himself.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Dudziak writes, "Frank's nightmares and rages would now have a name: post-traumatic stress disorder. Tying his violent outbursts to a medical diagnosis might earn a contemporary Frank our sympathy. But even if broken soldiers received better care and resources, they would still confront the same emptiness – the profound limits of empathy." Here, she speaks to the necessary point that soldiers who return from war face a lack of care, support, and understanding. But as Mimi Thi Nguyen points out, the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder – a phenomenon peculiarly tied to wars of American empire – "underscores the ways in which historical events of imperial violation, especially those brutal acts continually committed against racial, colonial others, are transfigured into unimaginable pain for their perpetrators" (116). She reminds us that PTSD emerged from psychiatrists' conjecture that soldiers, themselves "war victims," "might present disturbances identical with those of their victims" (114), and argues that "the genealogy of [PTSD] and, concomitantly, the sidelining of the dead that evinces this disorder buttress an imperial project that declares its own innocence" (115). Nguyen shows that the diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder for the "self-traumatized perpetrator" underscores the humanity of the soldier, even the soldier who commits heinous acts, against the dehumanization of the soldier's victims, whose pain and suffering are not considered. Her discussion of the post-traumatic stress disorder paradigm suggests that Dudziak's concept of the "limits of empathy" for the soldier with regard to Frank's predicament in *Home* is ultimately one-sided. In fact, the novel reveals Frank's "nightmares and rages" to be a response to the atrocities he himself has committed. Moreover, I argue that Morrison is just as concerned with the breakdown in empathy between Frank and the Korean girl – indeed, between the many perpetrators of violence in the novel and their victims – as she is with that between Frank and the society around him after the war.

Frank's revelation moves him from the position of a witness to that of a perpetrator, forcing him to contend with not just his sorrow at having lost his best friends, but also his guilt at having taken an innocent life. "*I hid it from you because I hid it from me,*" Frank claims before sharing his realization. "*My mourning was so thick it completely covered my shame*" (133). At the start of the next chapter, the narrator writes that Frank spent that night "churning and entangled in thoughts relentless and troubling. How he had covered his guilt and shame with mourning for his dead buddies. Day and night he had held on to that suffering because it let him off the hook, kept the Korean child hidden" (135). Here, the narrator takes up Frank's own language to explain his prolonged forgetting and sudden remembering: mourning what he witnessed in Korea (the death of his beloved friends) was more psychically manageable than facing up to what he did there (killed a child point-blank).

By this point, just pages from the novel's conclusion, the Korean girl has already become an extraordinarily capacious symbol, standing in for his sister's now-impossible child as well as Frank's and Cee's own childhoods. Once the brutal truth of the circumstances of her death revealed, she also becomes imbued with vast explanatory powers for the narrative that has preceded this moment: we know now why Frank struggled so mightily upon his return, and why he was so spooked by the sight of young children during his initial months back, and why he was so reluctant to talk to Lily or anyone else about his time in Korea, and why he was so evasive in expressing grief over his friends' deaths in Korea. For Frank, learning the extent of the trauma that Cee suffered at the hands of the doctor unlocks this repressed memory of the suffering he inflicted on the Korean girl. Articulating his culpability in turn unlocks for him the

memory of another unspoken and unresolved, if apparently unconnected, trauma: his and Cee's childhood witnessing of the burial of the anonymous man at the horse farm, the victim of the "men-treated-like-dog fights." Immediately after Frank admits that he was the one who shot the Korean girl, he springs to action to investigate the particulars of his fuzzy memory of that night. And so it is at this moment, just after learning that Cee is infertile and confessing his killing of the Korean child, that he talks to his grandfather and learns about the makeshift burial of the man who died at the hands of his son in a forced fight to the death. Frank's psychic linking of these two apparently unconnected traumas brings the novel full circle: it closes by returning to the site where it began, now plainly depicting what was presented as a jumble of confusing images in the scene that framed the novel in its opening chapter.

After finding out where the man was buried and why, Frank asks Cee to come with him to the site of the old horse farm, which has since burned down, and he requests that she bring the multicolored quilt she has just finished making. Cee sewed the quilt while convalescing under the watch of the neighborhood women, who make quilts to sell to tourists; it thus represents not just her healing, but her newfound community as well as her potential future financial autonomy in Lotus.<sup>69</sup> It represents her first attempt at quilting, and is thus relatively crude; at the same time, "Sloppy as the quilt was, she treasured its unimpressive pattern and haphazard palette," which the women chose together (142). They bring the quilt to the site where Frank remembers seeing the man

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<sup>69</sup> As Janice Barnes Daniel describes in "Function or Frill: The Quilt as Storyteller in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," the patchwork quilt, along with other metaphors related to sewing and weaving, is a frequent trope in feminist literary criticism. See her article for an analysis of Morrison's use of the quilt as narrative device in *Beloved*.

being buried and perform a ritual of reburial.<sup>70</sup> When they unearth his skeleton, Frank arranges the bones on the quilt, which becomes “a shroud of lilac, crimson, yellow, and dark navy blue” (143).<sup>71</sup> Together, they wrap his bones in this “crayon-colored coffin” and place it into a grave that Frank digs underneath an old sweet bay tree (144). The tree itself is damaged, split down the middle, but as Frank testifies in his last words to the reader, it, like he and his sister, is “*Hurt right down the middle / But alive and well*” (145). The natural world around them mirrors the vibrancy of the quilt’s colors: Frank puts up a grave marker underneath the tree that reads, “Here Stands a Man,” and “he could have sworn the sweet bay was pleased to agree. Its olive-green leaves went wild in the glow of a fat cherry-red sun” (145).

Echoing the scene of Frank and Cee’s homecoming to Lotus, the narration in these final pages explodes with color. In particular, the combination of military green and cherry-red reappears here as an unlikely testament to Frank’s psychic wellness: where the color red appeared throughout the first two-thirds of the novel as a visual marker of violence, death, and trauma – recall that Frank’s first episode of color-blindness announced itself with the draining away of red – it here marks, for the first time, a happy

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<sup>70</sup> Morrison has depicted ritual healing elsewhere in her work, most notably in *Beloved*. Linda Krumholz writes that in *Beloved*, “ritual processes also imply particular notions of pedagogy and epistemology in which—by way of contrast with dominant Western traditions—knowledge is multiple, context-dependent, collectively asserted, and spiritually derived. Through her assertion of the transformative power of ritual and the incorporation of rituals of healing into her narrative, Morrison invests the novel with the potential to construct and transform individual consciousness as well as social relations” (396). Similarly, Lynda Koolish argues that in *Beloved*, the characters’ “struggle for individual wholeness becomes a struggle for ancestral healing” (173), and that in order to achieve psychic wholeness, the characters must “come to accept [their] memories” (174).

<sup>71</sup> The image of wrapping the bones in a cloth (“Together they folded the fabric and knotted its ends”) also evokes the Korean *pojagi*, a traditional Korean wrapping cloth made of fabric scraps used to carry and transport items. Like the quilt, the *pojagi* has been used as a metaphor for storytelling and women’s work; for example, Elaine H. Kim and Eui-young Yu employ the metaphor of the *pojagi* and emphasize its importance as an art form made by ordinary women to introduce their collection of Korean American oral histories, *East to America: Korean American Life Stories* (xviii).

moment for Frank. If Frank's trauma was most dramatically allegorized in his episodes of color-blindness, the warmth and saturation of color in this scene demonstrates his, and Cee's, hard-fought wellness. He and Cee have buried a skeleton, but they are also symbolically laying to rest the several ghosts that have haunted this novel: it was Cee's vision of her unborn baby that triggered this pilgrimage and ritual, along with Frank's reinterpretation of that vision as the child he killed in Korea. In this midst of the burial ceremony, too, Cee sees the zoot-suited ghost who had dogged Frank on his journey across the country. I argued earlier that the zoot-suited man and the man buried outside of Lotus represent a pre-World War II mode of racism and racialization: white mob violence, legal and extralegal police terror. The siblings' visions of the baby girl, in contrast, invoke a post-45 genealogy of racial violence: atrocities committed by desegregated troops against racialized foreign populations in imperial wars, the systematic sterilization of women of color and the exploitation of their labor. These ghosts of the pre-45 and post-45 converge in Frank and Cee's ritual. For Frank, the temporary debilitation of color-blindness has ended; for the United States in the early 1950s, the career of color-blindness as policy and doctrine is just beginning. But in *Home*, Morrison suggests that if color-blindness is a denial of the social, historical, and cultural realities of race, then it cannot repair the damage done by past racisms. Literally burying the skeleton of the past in color, *Home* refuses the terms of color-blindness. In its stead, the novel makes the case for revaluing race-specific histories, communities, and experience—or as Kimberlé Crenshaw might put it, for redistributing racial value.



## Chapter 4

**“June, from the war”:**

**Rescuing the Refugee in Chang-Rae Lee’s *The Surrendered***

### **I. Introduction**

About halfway through Chang-Rae Lee’s *The Surrendered*, the main character June, now an older woman living alone in New York, thinks back on the years when she was still getting settled in the city. She had emigrated there from Korea as a war bride, but soon found herself raising her son Nicholas as a single mother. She recalls a time in his youth when, because he “kept asking about where she was from and what other Korean people were like,” she would take him to eat at Korean restaurants in the ethnic enclave of Palisades Park, a town in northern New Jersey near Fort Lee (238). They would take a taxi there from Manhattan, and on the ride back home, “Nicholas would fall asleep while half-holding his nose because of the sewer-smelling radish *kimchee* and dried cuttlefish beside him” (238). These trips were not sentimental opportunities for cultural connection or ethnic affirmation. Rather, at these dinners, June found that “her own spirit would dampen and sour” and her son “would hardly say anything and would pick at his quarter-eaten bowl of *bibim bap*,” and the groceries they brought home would “mostly rot before [she got] around to preparing” them (238). On what would prove to be

their final trip out to Palisades Park, Nicholas “asked if he could stay in the taxi while she shopped and even ate”; when she asked him why, he replied, “*Because you get so angry when we’re there*” (238). At this, June “instructed the [taxi] driver to take them back to Morningside Heights,” where she made them peanut butter sandwiches for dinner instead (238). Accepting the failure of these field trips, June decided that “whatever nostalgia she was hoping to conjure for [Nicholas] had long been obliterated,” and that “there was nothing she wished to latch on to” in these excursions (238).

June’s attempts to forge a connection to the Korean immigrant community are unsuccessful, but this alienation from other Korean immigrants does not result from an easy embrace of American assimilation. Rather, June, who was orphaned when her entire family was killed in the Korean War, seems to want to connect with others who share her background of violence and survival. She seems to value, for example, her relationship with the young superintendent of her Manhattan apartment building, Habi, a survivor of “tribal conflict” in the Congo (34). June gets to know Habi after her husband passes away; he helps her carry groceries to her apartment and she sometimes invites him in for tea. She asks him about old scars on his face and hands, and in response he “simply said he was orphaned when he was young” and tells her it was a “very difficult period” (34). He asks her in turn about the scars on her own hands – scars that she usually conceals from others – and she tells him simply that they were burned in an accident, choosing not to disclose the details of the “difficult period” in her own childhood. He “nodded somberly, but without the cloying concern that others might proffer, and said nothing more” (34). These exchanges seem to elicit a feeling of unspoken understanding, private yet open, far removed from the pain and rage that mar June’s visits to Koreatown.

Both the distance June feels from the larger Korean immigrant community and her affinity with a refugee whom she perceives as sharing her background reflect the unorthodox nature of June's immigration story in *The Surrendered*. As a child, after her entire immediate family is brutally killed during the Korean War, June grows up in an orphanage run by American missionaries and is made available for adoption, unsuccessfully, to families in the United States; some years later, she immigrates to the United States as the wife of an American GI, Hector, in order to gain citizenship. June's hidden refugee past thus intimately ties her to two practices directly tied to the aftermath of the war that hold exceptional status in U.S. immigration history: transnational adoption and marriage between U.S. soldiers and foreign women.

It was not until the passage of the landmark Immigration Act of 1965 that racially restrictive quotas on immigration from Asia were lifted, allowing for the first time for the mass immigration that would lead to the settlement of immigrant enclaves like the one in Palisades Park, New Jersey. The shape and character of these immigrant communities were determined in part by the preferences named in both the 1965 Act and the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act that preceded it – preferences for immigrants with specialized occupational skills and for those with familial ties to existing U.S. citizens. Together, the McCarran-Walter Act and the Immigration Act of 1965 defined postwar American immigration policy. In historian Mae Ngai's assessment, they “ended the policy of admitting immigrants according to a hierarchy of racial desirability and established the principle of formal equality in immigration” (227). But in the decades before the 1965 Immigration Act made the heteronormative family the cornerstone of Asian American immigration, special provisions were created for the “nonquota” immigration of Asian

war brides of American soldiers and of Asian orphans adopted by American families. It was thus the privileging of the family, in conjunction with the violence of war and military occupation, that also expedited the immigration of women and children from Asia throughout the 1950s and beyond, through the practices of transnational adoption and GI marriages. But the adoptee and the war bride have been largely left out of traditional accounts of Korean immigration. Indeed, as sociologist Grace Cho observes, the war bride has been viewed as a “subject with a hidden or shameful history” (36).

In *The Surrendered*, June and her son Nicholas represent just one of the many family units that cohere around the figures of the war bride and the war orphan. There is June’s original family in Korea, torn apart by the war and killed off before her eyes one by one until she is left utterly alone. There is the makeshift family that she comes to rely on at the orphanage in the 1950s, with the American Reverend Tanner and his wife Sylvie standing in as idealized parental figures for June and the other orphans; then, there is the reality of the Tanners’ own marital discord, complete with cheating, lying, and drug abuse hidden from the children. There are the Stolzes, the American couple – Lee’s fictional version of the real-life Holts, the white couple from rural Oregon who laid the foundation for transnational adoption from Korea in the 1950s – that wants to adopt an entire brood of Korean children, including June, who shockingly refuses their offer. And finally there is June own brief marriage to the GI, Hector, and the son that it produces, all three estranged by the novel’s current moment of the 1980s. These unconventional families define the contours of the novel’s fictional world and, together, trace a trajectory for the Korean American war orphan and war bride over the second half of the twentieth century.

This chapter argues that *The Surrendered*'s depiction of the family formations created by the adoptee and the war bride disrupts the standard narrative of Korean American immigration. It examines how the newly transnational reach of both the institution of marriage and the practice of adoption in the 1950s enabled the first wave of postwar Korean immigrants, beginning a decade before the immigration reforms of 1965 that would place the heteronormative family at the idealized center of Asian American immigration. At the same time, I show that the privileging of the heteronormative family has facilitated the disappearance of the war orphan and the war bride, producing these figures as unstable and illegible within our dominant understandings of both the immigrant and the refugee. My aim in this chapter is thus to consider, following David Eng, how the war bride and the transnational adoptee might be considered "proper subject[s] of Asian America" (107). What kinds of different conclusions might we draw about Asian American racialization and citizenship if we place these figures at the forefront of our analyses? How do Lee's representations of the practices surrounding transnational adoption and GI marriages in *The Surrendered* intervene in the stories we tell about immigration, the family, and post-1965 multiculturalism?

I begin the chapter with an overview of the crucial, and under-studied, place of Korean war brides and adoptees in Asian American histories of immigration and citizenship. In this opening section, I show that the family histories of war brides and adoptees prefigure the privileging of the heteronormative family as the foundation of Asian American immigration after 1965. Next, I turn to the novel's depiction of June's childhood at an orphanage in Korea after the war, reading a series of scenes that show how emerging institutions and codes of transnational adoption work together to produce

the war orphan as a subject of U.S. intervention. In this way, I show, the novel disrupts the given liberal story about adoption as a humanitarian practice, overturning the power dynamic of need and rescue that characterizes humanitarian intervention. Finally, the chapter turns to June's attempt late in the novel to reunite her only extant family – herself, Hector, and their son Nicholas – at the site of the birthplace of humanitarian discourse itself, a chapel in Solferino, Italy. This rendering of the afterlife of the war orphan/war bride and her fractured family in the United States across the decades following the war marks the novel's recognition of violence of the Korean War as the condition of possibility for past and present modes of Asian American citizenship.

## **II. Producing the War Orphan and the War Bride**

Between 1875, when the Page Law forbade the entry of Chinese women to the United States, and 1945, when the War Brides Act permitted GIs stationed in Asia to marry and bring their wives back to the United States, immigration from Asia was dominated by single male workers. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, Asian American immigration patterns underwent a decisive transformation. In the postwar era, for the first time, immigration law was changed in such a way as to give preference to women and children under the rubric of familial reunification. As sociologist Yen Le Espiritu argues, prior to World War II, “America’s capitalist economy wanted Asian male workers but not their families” (17), and thus immigration policies “treated Asian male workers primarily as temporary, individual units of labor” (9). After the initial repeal of Chinese exclusion in 1943, however, a 1946 act permitted Asian

spouses and children of U.S. citizens to enter the country as nonquota immigrants, and the War Brides Act of 1945 allowed GIs to marry and bring Asian wives, otherwise racially ineligible for admission, to the United States. As these measures brought an unprecedented number of Asian women and girls to the United States, Asian immigration in the postwar period became “overwhelmingly female” (54).<sup>72</sup> Historian Mae Ngai views these reforms as particularly significant in that they “laid the basis for Asian family immigration, which had been a near-impossibility under the exclusion laws” (233).

An additional piece of legislation that neither Espiritu nor Ngai addresses is the 1953 Refugee Relief Act, which issued orphan visas to Asian children, primarily girls, being adopted by American families. As Catherine Ceniza Choy argues, these early adoptees’ racialized integration into American families is also “part of the diversity of family formations in Asian-American history: bachelor communities, picture brides, military brides, transnational households, and post-1965 family reunification” (164). The preference given to Korean orphans, who were newly being viewed by middle-class white Americans as “potential family members,” as historian Arissa Oh puts it, allowed adoptees to circumvent the racial and national origins quotas that would have otherwise kept them from entering the United States: as Oh shows, 4,190 children from Korea immigrated to the U.S. between 1955 and 1961, a number far greater than the annual quota of 100 allotted to Koreans in the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act. Indeed, Oh argues that American’s “acceptance of [adopted Korean children] as legitimate citizens (and

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<sup>72</sup> Espiritu notes that the War Brides Act of 1945 was amended in 1947 to include veterans of Asian ancestry, a change that allowed 6,000 Chinese American soldiers and veterans to marry women in China – or reunite with their wives who had previously been barred from immigration – and bring them back to the U.S. before the act expired at the end of 1949. Most Japanese, Korean, and Filipino brides, in contrast, married non-Asian men. See Espiritu 54-55.

potential citizens) helped to erode some of the anti-Asian racial thought behind the national origins quota system” which would be dismantled in the 1965 Immigration Act (37). She concludes that adopted Korean children “were instrumental to the larger refiguring of Asianness that occurred in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s” (46).<sup>73</sup>

The development of institutions of transnational adoption in Korea rested upon the figure of the “orphan” on the one hand and the ideal of the normative American nuclear family on the other. As Eleana Kim argues, “legal norms, social conventions, and cultural representations in the Euro-American West reinforce the idea that children who are adopted are orphans in need of immediate rescue,” and orphans are often construed as the “ultimate figure of global humanitarianism” (263). She explains that in adoption procedures, “much bureaucratic and emotional labor is directed toward the severing of networks and connections in order to produce an ‘eligible orphan,’ who is then free to be exchanged and transformed through Euro-American models of kinship into someone’s as-if genealogical child” (11). This severing of prior familial and social relations – often characterized as the “clean break” needed to facilitate a “smooth” adoption – constitutes the “[prerequisite] to rendering a child adoptable” both symbolically and legally (11). In other words, before the adopted child could be transferred from the legal status of “eligible orphan” to the more privileged category of “immediate relative,” as mandated in

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<sup>73</sup> See Oh 36-41 for a detailed overview of the legislative changes that allowed Korean adoptees to enter the United States in the postwar period, including the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which made 5,000 visas available to children from Europe affected by World War II; the 1953 Refugee Relief Act, which she notes was also originally intended to address problems in Europe; the Act of September 11, 1957, also known as the Refugee-Escapee Act, which allowed entry for an unlimited number of “alien orphans” adopted by U.S. citizens for two years; and the Act of September 26, 1961, which made nonquota visas permanently available for foreign-born adopted children.



1961 legislation governing the entry of adoptees, came the necessary process of making the child into an orphan (Oh 41).

That nearly all children placed for inter-country adoption have had existing parents and relatives in Korea, however, has not suspended widespread credence in the narrative that adoption is a humanitarian practice that rescues “orphans.” During the postwar period, the idea of placing needy Asian children under the care of white middle-class American families took hold in the developing Cold War rhetoric of U.S. global dominance.<sup>74</sup> Arissa Oh calls the ideology that supported these new feelings about Asian orphans “Christian Americanism,” or “a fusion of Cold War patriotism and vaguely Christian values” (35). According to Oh, the “constant narration and re-narration of the journey from wretched Korean waif to beloved American son or daughter” positioned adoption as a practice that “resonate[d] with Christian Americanist Cold War imperatives” (36). Similarly, Eleana Kim suggests that during and just after the war, Korean children functioned as what she calls “tranquilizing conventions,” helping Americans to understand the war and “converting what might have been viewed as postwar occupation into a humanitarian intervention” (76). Laura Briggs characterizes this enduring narrative as the story of “children who will die without ‘us’ – middle-class

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<sup>74</sup> The notion that Americans could adopt Korean war orphans as an act of humanitarian rescue had entered popular consciousness before the Korean War. As Christina Klein discusses in *Cold War Orientalism*, the symbolic adoption of needy war orphans became a popular practice, trope, and fundraising tool for American missionaries working in Asia starting in the late 1930s. She argues that the rhetoric of “moral adoption” represented the Cold War as a “sentimental project of family formation” that would allow everyday Americans to feel connected to global politics (159). In this way, as she points out, transnational adoption became a “story that Americans in the 1950s liked to tell themselves” in addition to a lived social practice (174). Laura Briggs similarly argues that beginning in the 1930s, Americans “learned a way to feel about foreign children” (158), mediated by images of suffering women and children. In her analysis, the iconic image of the “Madonna and waif” became “part of the architecture of Cold War liberalism, which constructed an overseas role for the United States that was at once compassionate and interventionist” (135).

white families in the United States – who need the home and emotional investment that only ‘we’ can provide” (130).<sup>75</sup> And as David Eng argues, in return for this care, the adopted child must then “[help] to consolidate the *affective* boundaries of the white, heteronormative middle-class nuclear family” (108).

Whereas the “orphan in need of rescue” provides an idealized figure for the practice of transnational adoption, the figure of the “war bride” evokes a different set of associations.<sup>76</sup> As sociologist Grace Cho argues, the “*yanggongju* [Western princess],”

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<sup>75</sup> Such a narrative of rescue ignores that the practice of transnational adoption was largely brought about due the lack of social welfare and legal protocols in a chaotic post-war South Korea. As Eleana Kim notes, “Between 1951 and 1964, the number of abandoned children at orphanages increased from 715 to 11,319—a remarkable figure that suggests, as Richard Weil notes, that the ‘presence of efficient foreign adoption facilities encouraged the abandonment of children’ (1984: 282). It could well be argued that orphanages (which were largely funded by Western relief organizations), and, later, state-subsidized adoption agencies, functioned as a surrogate welfare system and a conduit for foreign exchange” (32). As Kim points out, there were no laws or policies governing domestic, much less international, adoption in postwar Korea. U.S. and European aid organizations thus moved into Korea in the midst of not just a humanitarian crisis but a “legal and social policy vacuum”; for example, Holt International Children’s Services, founded in 1955, quickly developed a “vertically integrated system of orphanages, baby homes, medical services, and adoption administration” that operated independently of Korea’s virtually nonexistent welfare system (74). For this reason, one might argue that transnational adoption has harmed women and children in Korea as much as it has “aided” them: as Kim puts it, the institutionalization of transnational adoption “not only retarded the development of domestic adoption and child welfare policies, but also provided a quick-fix solution that has been complicit in the social disenfranchisement of Korean women” (25). According to Kim, social welfare in Korea today is in fact “largely based on the models provided by Western humanitarian organizations after the war, and it was profoundly influenced by American social work consultants who designed programs and trained women in the field” (56). Many scholars and activists working on issues regarding transnational adoption in Korea have linked the ethical failures of the adoption industry to the systemic lack of social and financial support for Korean unwed mothers and linked the struggle for justice for adoptees to advocacy for unwed mothers and alternative family structures in Korea. See for example the work of TRACK [Truth and Reconciliation for the Adoption Community of Korea], an advocacy group for adoptees and unwed mothers in South Korea.

<sup>76</sup> Of course, the figures of the war bride and the orphan are not unconnected: transnational adoption in Korea began as a way to manage the problem of mixed-race children resulting from sexual encounters between Korean women and American soldiers. These children, often abandoned by their families due to the dual stigmas of illegitimacy and miscegenation, were among the first sent from China, Japan, and Korea to the United States for adoption (Kim 51). Their adoptions were promoted by organizations such as the Welcome House, founded by the writer Pearl S. Buck, who “[could not] bear to see Americans, or even half-Americans, growing up ignorant and at the lowest level of Asian society . . . Do we, their fathers’ people, not owe them something?” (Briggs 152). Chang-Rae Lee’s 1999 novel *A Gesture Life* tells the story in part of an older Asian American man who adopts a mixed-race Korean child. For a discussion of that novel’s treatment of transnational adoption as well as a broader analysis of transracial adoption in the U.S., see Mark Jerng’s *Claiming Others: Transracial Adoption and National Belonging*. For discussions of mixed-race adoptees, see essays by Choy and Oh (2005).

the “woman who provides sexual labor for the U.S. military,” is “a figure built out of layers of collective trauma” dating back to the earliest days of the U.S. military occupation of Korea (4). The Korean War created the conditions for sexual encounters between American soldiers and Korean women, encounters that Cho shows “were not motivated simply by personal desire and romance,” but rather were “thoroughly implicated in the power dynamics of U.S. military dominance, the material destruction of war, and the whitewashing of violence through the narrativization of the United States’ role in Korea as benevolent” (13). Because the Korean war bride could be embraced as a beloved “GI bride” only to the extent that her past as a “Yankee whore” was erased, she argues, the story of the arrival and assimilation of the GI bride “makes sense only through a willful forgetting of the everyday life of the [U.S. military] camptown and of the violent and intimate history shared by Korea and the United States” (130). Indeed, immigration to the United States through the institution of marriage has “[represented] an opportunity for the Korean woman who is associated with military sex work to shed the stigmas of the past by legitimizing her sexual labor” (14). Consequently, despite the fact that war brides and the family members they later sponsored for immigration constitute “about half” of all Koreans in the United States, Cho contends that their stories are often omitted from accounts of Korean immigration and discourses about Korean Americans due to unresolved wartime traumas as well as shame and secrecy surrounding sex work (23).

Like the adoptee, then, the war bride is a “pioneer of Korean migration” to the United States (Cho 14). Yet each of their stories has been obscure within larger histories and understandings of Korean American immigration, a lacuna reflected in the scholarly discord over the very status of these figures. For example, Arissa Oh points out that

Korean adoptees are absent in histories of refugee orphans as well as in histories of refugee law and policy, a “historiographical disappearance” that she argues “reveals how these Korean refugee orphans have been reimagined as little immigrants. Indeed, the fact that Korean orphans are typically described—if they appear at all—as an early group of immigrants in Asian American and immigration histories shows how thoroughly their refugee roots have been erased from our historical imaginations” (35). But the adoptee garners only rare mentions in canonical accounts of Asian American and immigration history. David Eng observes that “the figure of the transnational adoptee has until very recently been noticeably absent in diaspora and immigration studies, in Asian and area studies, and in ethnic and queer studies” (94), and Catherine Ceniza Choy agrees that Asian American historiography “has not incorporated the history of Asian international adoption in the documentation and analysis of the Asian-American experience” (164). The adoptee is thus paradoxically claimed as neither a refugee nor an immigrant. Meanwhile, Grace Cho shows that the war bride does not appear in the sociological literature on immigration, which generally classifies Koreans as part of the ethnically diverse post-1965 wave of immigration, overlooking that the “main impetus” for Koreans’ arrival came before 1965, namely in the war that “set migration in motion” (12). For Cho, understanding the genealogy of the war bride must lead us to reconsider the boundary between forced and voluntary migration: she urges us to view the war bride as not just another immigrant, but a “displaced subject” of war (14). The war bride, too, sits between the poles of immigrant and refugee.

How can we account for the multiple and overlapping erasures and silences that have surrounded adoptees and war brides? In order to understand and address these

archival erasures, I argue, we must critically examine the very structure into which these figures and their contested histories have disappeared: the normative family. Of the adoptee, David Eng writes, “The movement of the transnational adoptee from ‘over there’ to ‘over here,’ and from public charge to private family, individuates her while simultaneously working to encrypt colonial histories in the domestic space of intimate family and kinship relations” (103). The war bride, Grace Cho writes, “operates as a figure for the disappearance of geopolitical violence into the realm of the domestic” (14). Whereas the immigrant family has been hyper-visible as the primary framework for understanding post-1965 Asian America, the Asian diasporic family formations that preceded and indeed prefigured this model, including marriages between American soldiers and their Asian wives and adoptive American families and their Asian daughters and sons, have been both invisible and incomprehensible according to our dominant narratives of the immigrant and the refugee. As Cho insists, the happy story of the immigrant – of “the Korean war bride who shows gratitude toward her hospitable new family and country, who later brings the rest of her Korean family to the United States so that they, too, can enjoy America’s gifts” – “can make sense *only through exclusions*” (14, my emphasis). By dwelling in these exclusions, we can begin to apprehend a fuller picture of Asian American immigration, racialization, and citizenship in the postwar period.

As a novel whose protagonist is a Korean War orphan who eventually immigrates to the United States as the war bride of a GI and ends up raising a mixed-race child as a single mother, *The Surrendered* is clearly invested in bringing to light the subjugated histories of war brides and adoptees within the larger story of U.S. participation in the

Korean War. That June, who partially grows up in an orphanage, grows up to be a Korean woman raising a child fathered by an absentee GI also marks a peculiar way in which the novel's plot comes full circle, given that transnational adoption is a practice that has capitalized on the stigma attached to unwed mothers and interracial children. Over the course of the novel, we see June travel from being an orphan, the supposed beneficiary of the system of transnational adoption, to being a single mother, the category most often dispossessed by that same system. In other words, over time, she cycles through the various positions historically associated with Korean transnational adoptees and war brides. In this way, *The Surrendered* unambiguously writes the adoptee and the war bride into our narratives of Korean immigration. At the same time, in my reading, the novel problematizes that simple gesture of inclusion, delineating the distance between figures of war like the adoptee or the war bride and the conventionally understood figure of the immigrant associated with post-1965 multiculturalism. If, as I stated above, the war bride sits between the poles of refugee and immigrant, then how can we read June's disidentification with the category of immigrant and her later turn toward what could be thought of as a refugee genealogy? This chapter turns next to this character's trajectory in *The Surrendered*.

### **III. Rescuing the Orphan in *The Surrendered***

From the beginning of *The Surrendered*, June presents herself as an unconventional orphan. For example, several months after their arrival at the orphanage, the American missionary Reverend Tanner and his wife Sylvie decide to have new

photographs taken of all of the orphans to include in their adoption files. The existing photos, in Tanner's estimation, are "lugubrious, stern portraits, joyless and hard, and didn't show off a single one of the children well," and he is confident that new, happier photographs "would get them all placed" (156-157). Reverend Tanner and Sylvie find that they need to coax the children into smiling for the photographs, with Tanner eliciting their laughter by making funny faces and playing tricks behind the camera. But June, the last child to be photographed, refuses to smile for her picture, "not even offering the slightest smile, any break of the lips" (158). Despite the Tanners' attempts to convince her to "look happy and friendly for her file," they "ended up taking the image of June that any of them who cared to remember her might someday see in his mind, that iron gaze that was hers alone" (158). June's refusal to smile for the camera puts her at odds with the logic that makes the humanitarian enterprise of the orphanage function smoothly. As we have seen, her insistent singularity – "that iron gaze that was *hers alone*" – grates against the logic of exchangeability that the open market of the orphanage demands. Unwilling or unable to act the ideal orphan, June is marked as an unadoptable child.

As June's story unfolds, however, we find that she does not think of herself as unadoptable as such; she wants to be adopted, but only by Sylvie, to whom she cathects almost immediately after arriving at the orphanage. She is not alone in this wish. It is known to everyone at the orphanage that Reverend Tanner and Sylvie are planning to eventually bring an unspecified number of children back to Seattle with them, and all of the children want to be among those chosen. Hector, the former GI working as a handyman at the orphanage, thinks he knows what draws the orphans to the kind and charismatic Sylvie; in fact, he finds that even he is susceptible to the fantasy of a future

with Sylvie, to the feeling that he “might like to be adopted away, too” (151). But what June wants from Sylvie is not what “any orphan” wants. After secretly reading Sylvie’s diary and learning that Sylvie herself is an orphan who lost her family in a war, June comes to view her relationship with Sylvie as “not just [a bond] of mother and daughter but that of comrades who by the curse of war had been sentenced to be alone” (326). She imagines herself in the future – in their “resumed lives” once they leave the orphanage – as “Sylvie’s secretary and housekeeper, her girl-in-waiting, her handmaiden, someone she could use and count on at any moment of the day or night” (327).

In fact, the narrator explains, June has always been ill-equipped to act as a properly needy orphan: rather than grooming herself to be chosen by a family that will take care of her, she finds herself angling to figure out how take care of Sylvie and thus to be needed in a different way. That is, she imagines not a mother-daughter relationship of unconditional love between Sylvie and herself, but a relationship in which she becomes indispensable to the Tanners by figuring out how to provide what they need. After June reads Sylvie’s diary and finds out that she has been unable to bear children of her own, she feels that she can

begin to understand what [the Tanners] were doing in Korea, certain there must be reasons besides goodness and charity for them to have come to a place as awful as this. They could not possibly be there only to give of themselves. They were hoping for something, too, and in the tireless device of her mind she was figuring how she could give them what they wished. It was finally within her power. (326)

Here, June perceives that the Tanners’ humanitarian mission is not a one-way gift, but a two-way transaction, and she intends to use this knowledge to her benefit. She



understands that the Tanners' choice to come to the "awful place" that is Korea to work with orphans was never purely selfless. If she can mold herself to fill the gap they are looking to fill, then she will win the prize of being taken back to America with Sylvie.

June's inversion of the dynamic of need and care that characterizes the humanitarian mission is one that Reverend Tanner cannot abide. In an argument with Sylvie one evening after an incident with June, Tanner apologizes to Sylvie for "[losing] control," telling her that he "can't stand [June's] speaking to us like that" (163). When Sylvie responds that June is "only a child" who "doesn't know what she's saying," he replies,

"Oh please, darling! She's smart as a whip. Nothing is an accident with her. When she said she would be sure to 'take care' of us it made me crazy. Her arrogance is astounding."

"But you couldn't have been meaner," she said to him, her voice low and hard.

"To tell her that we would *never* need her." (163)

According to Tanner's script – the standard script of transnational adoption – the American missionary "takes care" of the Korean war orphan. When June attempts to flip that script, he lashes out in anger and disbelief, giving utterance to the unspoken power dynamic at the heart of every exchange between missionary and orphan: *you need me, but I will never need you*. He is "astounded" by June's calculation and manipulation, but he cannot imagine that she is actually empowered to "take care" of him or his wife in any real way.

Later in his argument with Sylvie about June, Tanner explains that part of why they cannot adopt June is precisely her unmalleability. As he puts it, "The fact is, the girl

has already grown up. She's who she is now, through and through. She's not going to change" (164). Because he sees her as already fully formed, he believes her to be impervious to all of the Tanners' benevolence, unable or unwilling to be molded and thus unfit to be one of his charges. When Sylvie protests that he doesn't know "what she's been through" ("If you did you wouldn't talk like this," arguing that June's particular circumstances should be taken into account in judging her character, he answers,

"I don't know what happened to her. That's true. But I know plenty about some of the others, as do you. None of them has a more profound story than any of the rest. Not in sum, at least. They all have nothing, and we agreed that we would start with them from this point on. It's all we can do. There are thousands of needy children in this country. Maybe tens of thousands. And we're only helping the orphans! We were warned by our colleagues, remember? What was their saying? 'So many pretty stones in the river, but you can't pick them all up'? How right they were—so many of them, right here with us. But you chose the stone that's razor sharp." (165)

When Sylvie demurs in response, "She chose me," Tanner accuses her of encouraging June "over all the others," and Sylvie ends the conversation by declaring, "No one else is going to adopt her. They won't and you know it" (165). Tanner sees all of the children at the orphanage as interchangeable, by definition: they all have an equally profound story of loss, and they all equally have nothing, and they are all equally worthy of care. But June is different. Because she does not assent to her own interchangeability as an orphan, she is less worthy of being, and ever less likely to be, adopted. In Tanner's view, June's cathexis to Sylvie is inappropriate, deluded, and distracting, and it marks her as an

improper object for his benevolence. Sylvie and her husband agree that June is unadoptable in her present state, but whereas Sylvie wants to give June the attention she seeks because of her difference, Tanner is concerned only with rehabilitating June into a better kind of orphan.

Later in the novel, however, Reverend Tanner realizes that there is something that June can provide for him after all. He makes a special request of June, and it is only after this exchange takes place that June's behavior changes. In a one-on-one conversation, Tanner asks June to keep Sylvie company and to let him know if she ever seems to be "particularly unwell," which June interprets as a request for her to report to the Reverend about Sylvie's illicit activities—namely, her drug abuse and her ongoing affair with Hector (328). But before she fully agrees, June has a request of her own for Tanner. She asks if he and Sylvie still want a family of their own, and he responds cagily that they are "still thinking about that" (330). She replies, "There are so many children here ... You must meet so many children on your visits," and he answers, "Yes, I do. So many. All worthy and good. Really every last one of you" (330). Upon hearing these words, June "took his implication whole; she went back to her chores with the conviction that Reverend Tanner had made a bargain with her," a bargain to adopt her if she did what he asked (330). After this conversation, she follows and watches Hector and Sylvie during their trysts as per the Reverend's requests. But along with this, she "[begins] to practice her new way": in English class and Bible study, she "[surprises] him with a new enthusiasm and the demeanor of a girl who was respectful and demure" (378). She decides to "show him her restraint," to show him that "she was a worthy girl at core, exactly the kind of hard soul he must be here to save" (378). Her change in outlook

represents not an awakening, but a “differing form of the same capacity for self-discipline and self-direction she’d always possessed and counted on,” a capacity she was now “applying...to self-reform,” a “jubilant feeling” (378). Tanner’s secret bargain with June transforms her into an exemplary Korean orphan.

The terms of June’s transformation are perhaps starkest in a scene late in the novel, when the Tanners announce that the children are to be photographed one more time. At first, as in the earlier photography scene, June refuses to participate, “for there was no reason for her to do so, she was already spoken for” – that is, already spoken for by the Tanners – but she then decides she “ought to take every chance to better herself, as much as stay in line” (384). But rather than being photographed, it turns out that the children are to meet an American couple, Mr. and Mrs. Stolz of rural Oregon, who had traveled to Korea in order to adopt up a group of orphans. When it is June’s turn to be introduced to the Stolzes, a demure, well-behaved young woman is on display. Reverend Tanner notes that she is “self-possessed and highly independent,” and when they ask her whether she can speak English, she “answered that she spoke it well, surprising and impressing them” (385). June explains that her father had been highly educated and attended a top university in Japan – notably, the first time we ever hear June speak about any member of her family to anyone at the orphanage – and elicits “approving nods” from the Stolzes (385). The old June shows herself briefly when the Stolzes attempt to take her photo and her “instinct [is] to put her hand over the lens,” but her newfound discipline overcomes that unbecoming instinct (385). Far from the sullen orphan that “no one else is going to adopt,” June shows herself to be intelligent, mature, attractive, and friendly, and after this initial meeting, the Stolzes decide to adopt her. As a fourteen-year-

old, they reason, she will be old enough to help them with the five younger children they will be bringing back to Oregon, and her excellent English skills will also make her a useful translator.<sup>77</sup>

When the Stolzes come to June's room to deliver the good news, however, they encounter a different child. Mrs. Stolz envelops June in a hug, and Mr. Stolz declares, "You have a family again" (388). Even before they speak, June is reduced to a "fallen pile of child, sobbing and shaking," in their eyes a sure sign of her joy and relief at finally being chosen for adoption (387). Indeed, one of the only sentences June utters in their encounter is, "Nobody chose me before," to which Mrs. Stolz coos, "We're all the more fortunate, then!" and promises that June will "be safe and sound with us. You'll always have our love and support" (388). Mrs. Stolz is stunned and confused, then, when June suddenly breaks out of her embrace, forcibly pushes her away, stomps on her husband's foot, and runs away.

What the Stolzes cannot understand is that even as they are announcing themselves as June's new family, her mind is fixated on her own existing familial ties. Early in the novel, just before the death of her twin siblings, we see a younger June asleep on the roof of a train car and dreaming that her mother and sister are still with her. In her sleep, she "could still believe that all of them would eventually reunite," since she

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<sup>77</sup> In this scene, we see that June's adoption is contingent on her domestic and intellectual labor – taking care of the other children, translating and teaching English – as well as her affective labor, thus evoking David Eng's important work on transnational adoption and the affective labor of the adoptee. He writes: "...the consumption of the transnational adoptee by parents in the global North completes the ideal of newly emergent multicultural families as a supplement to capital precisely through the exploitation of the child's affective, rather than wage, labor. In other words, while Third World women from the global South have traditionally been exploited for their wage labor in the manufacturing sector, their emotional labor and care work in the domestic sphere, and now their reproductive labor as birth mothers, the exploitation of the transnational adoptee is largely an emotional affair. She helps to consolidate the *affective* boundaries of the white, heteronormative middle-class nuclear family" (108).

never actually witnessed her mother's and sister's deaths or found their remains, nor did she witness the deaths of her father and older brother (26). She holds out hope, "despite the surety of her instinct," that, for example, her older brother is "hiking north through the hills with the Communists, beleaguered but alive" (26). This is the "waking picture in her mind," the picture of her own reunited family (26). Although we never see June talk or even think about her family during her time at the orphanage, the Stolzes' sudden interest in adopting June seems to reawaken that picture of her family. Like the Stolzes, her parents were "country people," and when the Stolzes come to her room to tell her they have chosen to adopt her, a "tide of longing unexpectedly washed over her" (387). It is this longing for her dead father, mother, sisters, and brothers, not relief at being matched up with a new family, that renders June "not mature or resolute or strong in the least but a fallen pile of child, sobbing and shaking" (387). When the Stolzes try to "choose" June, they cannot replace the "waking picture" of June's family in her mind; rather, they reanimate it.

June's persistent attachment to her own family disrupts the normal process of adoption. Her enduring cathexis to Sylvie poses a similar problem. As we know, June has already "chosen" Sylvie as her family, and she fully believes that she will be imminently returning to the U.S. with the Tanners. After meeting the Stolzes, June is hurt and confused by Sylvie's failure to let the Stolzes know that she is already, in her own words, "spoken for" (385). She wonders, "Did [Sylvie] know what the old couple was here for? ... Was she hoping that someone like them would take her? Relieve her of this burden?" (387). As we have just seen, when the Stolzes do come to take her away, June is emotionally overwhelmed by the memory of her family, but it is Mrs. Stolz's unwitting

invocation of Sylvie that finally triggers June's physical outburst. Just before this incident, the Tanners had announced that they would be leaving soon, an announcement that June greeted by preparing her things for departure. While taking stock of her belongings, she takes special care with a butterfly-shaped tortoiseshell hair clasp that Sylvie had given her as a gift. She liked to use the clip to "remind herself to keep her hair and face and fingernails neat and clean, to be polite, even smiling and pretty, just as the younger girls who had been adopted before had been polite and pretty, so eager to please" (384). Here, we see June negotiating the reigning codes of adoptability at the orphanage. Secure in the knowledge that "her time here was truly ending, that her life was about to begin anew" (384), she disciplines herself into the kind of orphan who gets chosen for adoption: pretty, polite, accommodating. The hair clip is a sign of this conscious decision to change her behavior to align with what is expected of her. This transformation pays immediate dividends: out of all of the children at the orphanage, June is the Stolzes' first choice. But at the end of their encounter in June's room, as Mr. Stolz photographs his wife hugging June, Mrs. Stolz compliments June on her hair clasp. She strokes June's hair and says, touching the clasp, "What a lovely thing... You know, it's the first thing I noticed when I saw you. I thought it made you look so beautiful and graceful" (389). For June, this comment on the hair clip, a beloved gift from Sylvie, is the last straw. She breaks away from Mrs. Stolz's embrace, stomps on Mr. Stolz's foot, and literally runs away from the Stolzes as fast as she can. June's brutal rejection of the Stolzes marks another refusal by June to abide by the script of adoption. The adoptee is not allowed to choose her adopter or to say no. June's attempt to engineer her own adoption by the Tanners and her rejection of the Stolzes marks the culmination of her unadoptability.

After the Stolzes' departure later that evening with six other children, June mulls over what to tell Sylvie about what happened. She decides that if asked, she will explain to her that

despite the woman's kindness and the very fine life she described, June had realized just in time that she was not meant to go with them. She would not be a part of any other family again. In a different lifetime she would have her parents back, her older brother and sister would be healthy, the twins happy and whole; but in this one she had been paired up, she and Sylvie aligned like twins themselves, if by one of them not quite acknowledged. (391)

Needless to say, for June, there has been no "clean break" to facilitate her smooth adoption. She remembers her own family, and she has already chosen Sylvie as her new family. But just as June reveals herself to be an unfit adoptee, Sylvie has come to realize that she is, in the end, unfit to be an adoptive parent. Although she and Tanner have not explicitly discussed the matter, she knows that they will be returning to the United States alone. She had "always assumed that they would take four with them, or five, or ten, as many as they could. But now they could return childless, which, she could now begin to see...was a mercy for all" (405). The time Sylvie has invested at the orphanage has transformed her understanding of mercy: she now believes that electing not to bring any children to the United States is the merciful choice.

In the novel's final scenes at the orphanage, we see a more mature June reflecting on her fate and that of the other remaining children:

June watched the other children, and she thought how their numbers were thinning... because of their character, or young age, or plain luck, and that those



who remained would be only less fortunate, and grow older, simply settle ever deeper into the fixed molds of their selves, the selves that had already been passed over. (436)

This passage highlights the “passed over” subjectivity of the unadopted orphan, unlucky but not unworthy. By the time it becomes clear that the Tanners will not be adopting any children from the orphanage, June has settled into the idea of being passed over as well. But even when the Stolzes announced that they wanted to adopt her, her first words were, “Nobody chose me before.” Min, a young disabled boy who is one of the smallest orphans at the orphanage, also remains among the orphans yet to be adopted at this point.<sup>78</sup> From his point of view, the case for each of them is clear: he tells June that he knows that there is little chance of his being adopted—“not when there are so many others with nothing wrong with them” (439). When June responds, “There’s nothing wrong with me,” he counters, “You can say it ten thousand times over, but it’s not going to make it true. You’re the way you are. Everybody knows it. The way you’ll always be. You’re trouble, just like me” (439). He recognizes that from the perspectives of the orphanage and prospective adoptive families, there is too much “wrong” with each of them, physically or otherwise, for them to be desirable as adoptees.

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<sup>78</sup> Ironically, Min’s disability occurred at the hands of his caretakers at the orphanage in an accident early in the novel, and it is precisely this disability that renders him unadoptable. His story thus serves as a parable of humanitarianism’s dynamic of rescue and harm: as Laura Briggs puts it, this dynamic entails a belief in the idea that “only US intervention could solve the problems that US intervention had wrought” (“Mother” 187). The irreversible harm that Min suffers at the hands of his intended protectors leaves him in a permanent state of dependency. The injury that the orphanage causes him is material, marked on his physical person in his missing toes and the associated limp that will dog him for the rest of his life. But, Lee’s novel suggests, the orphanage inflicts less visible but no less damaging forms of harm on the other children as well as their caretakers.

The night of this conversation, June and Min of them sneak out of their bunks to sleep in the orphanage's chapel, where they light a fire in the stove to keep warm. Min brings the footlocker containing his belongings to the stove and begins to throw things in. June follows suit, until she has burned up everything she owns save for a special book that Sylvie gave her. She offers it to Min, who replies that he doesn't want it. After some hesitation, she asks Min to put the book in the stove, then immediately regrets it and fishes it out with her bare hands, badly burning the skin on her hands and arms. As they throw a large kerosene lamp into the stove, they huddle together, and June says to him, "We don't need anyone ... We're going to stay here now" (444). The lamp in the stove creates an explosion and a conflagration that consumes the chapel. The Reverend, Sylvie, and Hector all run into the chapel to save June and Min; June drags Hector out of the wreckage as the walls cave in. They are the only two to emerge from the fire.

In this final scene at the orphanage, although June and Min may have been "passed over" for adoption for the flaws they cannot change or correct, they prove that they can enact their own rejection of the orphanage by literally destroying it. Affirming that they do not "need anyone" or "want anything," they first burn up the things that have been donated to them at the orphanage, then burn down the chapel that the Tanners and Hector worked so hard to erect in order to better carry out the orphanage's mission, and finally attempt to annihilate themselves in the fire. In a final reversal of the script of humanitarian intervention, it is June, the orphan girl, who rescues Hector, the GI who initially found her starving on the side of a road and brought her to the orphanage. In this way, the novel completes the series of inversions that characterizes June's tenure as an orphan: she takes care of the caretakers, refuses their gifts, rejects her prospective

adoptive family, and ultimately burns down the institution responsible for saving her life, all apparently without regrets. Having sabotaged her future as an adoptee, June must find another path. In the concluding section of this chapter, I turn to June's unexpected choice to resurrect a narrative of humanitarianism at the end of her life, as she dwells upon the conditions that have produced her as a figure of war.

#### **IV. "This is our place": Relocating the Refugee**

After June immigrates to the United States under circumstances not detailed in the novel – all we learn is that she marries Hector in order to gain legal status, and that he fathers a child with her before they separate and lose touch for decades – she finds a way to make a life for herself and her son in New York. She eventually remarries an American man and sells antiques at a store she owns in Manhattan, earning a good living; as I noted in the opening of the chapter, she maintains a deliberate distance from the Korean American immigrant communities in the New York area. But, in a dramatic gesture appropriately epic given the scale of this novel, when she is diagnosed with cancer after the death of her husband, June hires a private detective to locate Hector for her so she can enlist him in a search of their now-adult son Nicholas, who has disappeared somewhere in Europe. As it happens, June's private investigator finds that Hector is living and working in the growing Korean immigrant enclave of Fort Lee, New Jersey, just across the river from upper Manhattan. Hector works as a janitor in a run-down Korean mall for a Korean entrepreneur named Jung, whom Hector finds to be "the most slothful of their kind, a man who was, literally, born in a roadside ditch during the

war but didn't remotely know or care a thing about it now" (102). That Hector has taken a menial job working at a modest Korean mall marks an irony not just of world history, as he notes, but of his own personal history too: thirty years before, Hector had stayed in Korea to work as a janitor and handyman at an orphanage run by American missionaries. Now, in New Jersey, he is cleaning up after the next generation of Koreans. His former status as a liberator has been reduced to a simple epithet—"GI," "Joe," or "Rambo." The Korean Americans who populate New Jersey in the 1980s are, for the most part, recent immigrants like Hector's boss, largely unconcerned with a war they cannot remember. But Hector connects the dots: even if Jung doesn't "care a thing" about the war, Hector knows that the Korean immigrants of Fort Lee have ended up in the United States in large part because of the war that he helped to fight.

But it is not so odd that Hector, the working-class white veteran from upstate New York, has chosen to settle in the Korean immigrant community in northern New Jersey. Like many GIs and veterans, he is himself an erstwhile member of an Asian American family, after a fashion, through his short-lived marriage to June. But June does not share his bemused take on the war's disappearance from the American cultural memory. In fact, when the private investigator she has hired locates Hector, she instructs him to identify her as "June, from the war" (81). Hector's response – "*June, from the war*. As if he could forget from where" (81) – indicates that June's name and memory for Hector are in themselves so evocative of the war that no such identifier is necessary. Indeed, June's very name indexes the war itself: June is the month when the war began in 1950, and June 25, the date when the war began, is often used metonymically by Koreans to refer to the war itself. It is clear that "June, from the war" has no desire to efface her roots.

In fact, it is a relic of her refugee roots that sends June and Hector on their voyage to Europe to find their son Nicholas. June suspects that he has gone to Solferino, a town in Italy that has a special significance to her. In their quest to find Nicholas, June and Hector travel to Solferino, this historic site of the Battle of Solferino, the decisive final battle in the Second Italian War of Independence in which allied French and Italian forces defeated the Austrians, contributing to the eventual unification of Italy. The tale of that battle is told in a book in June's possession, *A Memory of Solferino* by J.H. Dunant. Filled with horrific descriptions of the wounded and dying on the battlefield, *A Memory of Solferino* offers, according to the narrator, an "account of the aftermath of a battle between two immense armies totaling 300,000 men, fought on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, 1859, one army comprising the allies of France and the other the allies of Austria," written from the viewpoint of Dunant, a "a young French-Swiss banker who was traveling in northern Italy" when he happened upon the bloody battle (140). For Hector, who reads the book while working at the orphanage after the war, these descriptions "[match] any number of his memories from the war" (141), memories he's "dying to forget" (143). For Sylvie Tanner, the descriptions of the wounded also serve as a reminder of past violence she has witnessed. Inscribed "*To our steadfast daughter. May you be an angel of mercy,*" the book was initially a gift to Sylvie from her late parents, missionaries in Manchuria who were killed before her eyes by Japanese imperial soldiers (249). For the young June, the book constitutes a memento of her intense attachment to Sylvie during and after her stay at the orphanage. Stealing the book from Sylvie before leaving the orphanage, June re-inscribes it decades later for her son – "*To Nicholas, my dearest wayfarer. May you find great treasure and riches*" – who in turn steals it from her when he leaves home as a

teenager (450). By the novel's end, the tattered, charred book has survived a fire, passed from Sylvie in Manchuria to June in Korea to Nicholas in New York and Italy, and finally become a guidebook of sorts for June as she and Hector search for her estranged son in the town of Solferino itself.

June first discovers *A Memory of Solferino* in her early days at the orphanage. When Sylvie assigns June the coveted task of cleaning the Tanners' cottage, June notices *A Memory of Solferino* on Sylvie's nightstand. Other books come and go, but that one – “the only book, besides the Bible and a hymnal, they had brought with them from the States” – always remains, piquing her curiosity (247). June asks Sylvie to read it aloud to her, but Sylvie refuses, telling her that the book is “not like poetry, or a children's story, something to be enjoyed; it was an account of war, and she said that June didn't need to read about it” (247). But June observes how Sylvie handles the book “with indeed a kind of enjoyment, a certain somber savoring,” and eventually steals it to read on her own (247). Because she is only just learning to read English, she must struggle through the text, particularly the sections that give dry historical background. But once the narrative of the battle begins, she becomes engrossed. She lingers especially on the discussions of the “unspeakable fate of the wounded” that haunted the author, who was distressed at “their privation and ‘perfect torture’ because of the grave lack of food and water and medical supplies, most of the caretakers being laypersons like himself or the local townsfolk, all willing to aid the survivors but frightfully incapable of doing so” (248). She reads about how “[all] the churches in the area surrounding the town called Solferino were filled with miserable soldiers, the air of their sanctuaries fouled with the stench of the dead and dying” (248).

Even after she is forced to return the book to Sylvie, who notices its disappearance after a few days, June continues to read the book to herself whenever possible. As she reads, June

couldn't help but imagine that it was Sylvie Tanner who was the witness and author of the book, as if she had seen with her own eyes the fierce fighting and wretched wounded in the churches, had toiled to alleviate the suffering without the aid of medicines or clean bandages or food. (249)

This is perhaps the most explicit parallel that Lee draws between the suffering depicted in *A Memory of Solferino* and the situation of the survivors of warfare in his own book.

Sylvie, of course, does toil to alleviate the suffering of the dozens of war orphans under her care; she has witnessed fierce fighting, and she cares for the wretched wounded in the church she and her husband build for that very purpose. In this way, she clearly sees herself as extending the humanitarian mission that Dunant calls for in his book. For June, gaining an understanding of Solferino as a historical background only augments her view of Sylvie as a heroine and savior, the steadfast "angel of mercy" that Sylvie's parents entreat her to be in the book's inscription.

Months later, in the chaotic period when the Tanners are preparing to leave Korea for the States, Hector sardonically addresses the question of Sylvie's benevolence during a fight:

"You've taken pity on all of us, haven't you? ... Before you came this place was no better or worse than any other orphanage in this damned country. Which was just fine for the kids and the aunties, and even for me. There's enough food and a roof and no more killing, and so what else is there to want?" (415)

Here, Hector lambasts the limits of her magnanimity: beyond food, shelter, and safety from physical harm, he implies, lies more. Her “pity” may have materially improved the lives of her charges, but it has had unintended emotional consequences as well. When Sylvie helplessly responds that she “[wants] to take every one of them” (416), Hector unexpectedly brings *A Memory of Solferino* into the picture:

“Then take them!” he said ... “Did you think you could come and go so easily? Is this what happens in that precious book of yours? I want to know. I thought it was about showing mercy to the helpless, to the innocent. But I think that book of yours is worthless. In fact, it’s worse than that. It’s a lie. It’s changed nothing and never will.” (416)

In the hundred years since the Battle of Solferino, he continues, “How many people got slaughtered...? Got ground up to nothing? How many went up in smoke?” (416). For Hector, the problem is not just the failure of a lofty humanitarian ideal, but Sylvie’s fixation with and perpetuation of the lie of that ideal in the present. Comparing the book’s account of the Battle of Solferino to his experiences in Korea and the wars that have taken place in between the two, he finds that the humanitarian ideals that were first enunciated after Solferino have not relieved the pain he sees and feels a hundred years later in Korea. The distance between the originary moment for humanitarian aid in 19<sup>th</sup> century Solferino and Sylvie’s impossible attempts to reenact that moment in 20<sup>th</sup> century Korea collapses in face of the failure of both to achieve their supposed goals.

*A Memory of Solferino* is a meaningful text not just in these characters’ lives, but also for the construction of the novel as a whole. What remains occluded in the circulation of this book across the decades and continents that span Lee’s novel is



precisely the world-historical significance of both the battle and the book in question. We don't learn of the similarities between the historical contexts of the Battle of Solferino and the Korean War, both nationalist struggles for unification fought in the shadow of encroaching imperial neighbors. Nor do we ever explicitly learn that Dunant's proposals in *A Memory* for the creation of a neutral organization to protect and assist the wounded in war and the institution of an international principle to serve as the basis for such a voluntary relief corps would lead to the founding of, respectively, the International Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions.<sup>79</sup> (Dunant's two crucial questions that lead to the founding of the Red Cross and the creation of the Geneva Conventions are as follows: first, whether it would be possible "to form relief societies for the purpose of having care given to the wounded in wartime by zealous, devoted, and thoroughly qualified volunteers" and second, whether military authorities could formulate "some international principle, sanctioned by a convention and inviolate in character, which, once agreed upon and ratified, might constitute the basis for societies for the relief of the wounded in the different European countries" ("From the battle").) In other words, while the novel dramatically stages the significance of the book for Sylvie, Hector, June, and Nicholas' personal lives and relationships, its historical importance for the form of modern warfare itself – and for our conceptions of national sovereignty and the universal human subject – is obscured. Despite his inclusion of such a historically and politically overdetermined text in his novel, Lee resists any reading of *A Memory of Solferino* that would explicitly draw out its historical or political threads in relation to his own narrative. Rather, he

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<sup>79</sup> See the documents "Solferino and the International Committee of the Red Cross" and "From the Battle of Solferino to the eve of the First World War," both available on the website of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

emphasizes the circulation of *A Memory of Solferino* as a privileged object invested with intense affective meanings and histories.

Lee's embedding of *A Memory of Solferino* within his novel invites a kind of comparative eye across several axes, for example, Europe and Asia, past and present, soldier and civilian. By centrally locating a past European narrative of war and survival inside his own story of the Korean War, Lee could be said to participate in a pattern that Rey Chow has named "Europe and Its Others," a hierarchical form of comparison in which the outcome of comparison is always predetermined to privilege European thinking and writing over their non-European counterparts. According to this logic, she argues, the rationale for comparison "hinges on the conjunction *and*," which "signals a form of supplementation that authorizes the first term, Europe, as the grid of reference, to which may be added others in a subsequent and subordinate fashion" (77). Because of this subordinated status, non-European histories, cultures, and languages are doomed to "remain, by default, undifferentiated – and thus never genuinely on a par with Europe – within an ostensibly comparative framework" (77). Lee's novel does engage in a form of asymmetrical comparison between Europe and Asia. but in my view, he reverses the terms of Chow's framework. For Lee, the Korean War and its aftermath are the main story; the story of Solferino remains an obscure, though weighty, referent. The details of the historical context of Solferino remain hazy, and to the extent that Lee makes the Battle of Solferino a predecessor to and interlocuter for the Korean War, he does so to point out its failures. In this case, it is Korea that is the first term, the grid of reference that subordinates and gives meaning to Solferino. At the same time, Dunant's naming of specifically European countries in his vision of an "international principle" of

humanitarian aid in *A Memory* raises the question of the true universality of the conception of human lives in need of protection that his book enshrines. If the vision for these “international” institutions in their inception was limited to Europe – and, by extension, to white bodies – then what happened when that vision was forced to accommodate nations beyond Europe? How would his humanitarianism account for the suffering of non-European peoples of color in war, as in the Korean War?

*The Surrendered* largely stands as a document of the failure of the modern regime of humanitarianism inaugurated by Dunant’s Solferino in the context of the Korean War and other episodes of state violence that surrounded it. It also retells the story of the Korean failure to achieve national unification in the face of the geopolitical interests of its (neo)imperial protectors, rivals fighting the first “hot war” of the Cold War across the landscape of the peninsula at the cost of millions of lives. To the extent that Lee makes the Battle of Solferino a predecessor to and interlocuter for the Korean War, he does so to point out the utter failures of both to achieve a humanitarianism that succeeds in helping those in need. At the same time, by making Solferino the ending place both for June and for the reader of the novel, *The Surrendered* enacts a return of the violence of the Korean War to the grounds of Solferino, at once paying homage to and indicting the mission which it birthed.

At the end of the novel, Hector and June stand inside *la chiesa dell’ossario* in Solferino, the chapel of bones consecrated in 1870 as a reliquary of the fallen soldiers of the Battle of Solferino, gazing upon the “grinning, grimacing dead” (468). At this point, June, afflicted with stomach cancer, is on the verge of death. After they enter the chapel, June, her vision faltering, says to Hector, ““It must be beautiful. Is it beautiful?”” In

response, Hector whispers, “*It is beautiful ... This is our place*” (469). All the drama of the novel, it seems, has finally culminated in bringing them – the war orphan and the savior GI, the war bride and the American husband, the rescuer and the rescued – here together. By figuring the resting place for the fallen soldiers of Solferino as the place where Hector and June both belong – *our place* – Lee brings the disparate remnants of Cold War violence to Solferino. If the Cold War entailed an outsourcing of violence to the grounds of Asia, then Lee’s novel plots a return of the suffering that resulted from that violence to the 19<sup>th</sup> century European source of the Geneva Conventions, the Red Cross, and the ideal of humanitarianism in wartime. But, as Hector protested decades before, it’s changed nothing: the survivors of Korean War violence belong there in the chapel alongside the bones of the war dead of the Battle of Solferino. One might read Hector and June – and the novel – as bearing witness in Solferino to the continuing need to alleviate the suffering of victims of war, to bring Dunant’s ideals to fruition even today. But I believe the novel instead asks us to read Hector and June as dwelling in the failures of humanitarianism in the Korean War and its aftermath. As a child, June burned down the institution whose humanitarian mission could never have saved her. Now, on her deathbed, she stands in another humanitarian chapel, bearing witness with the former GI who proclaims, “*This is our place.*”

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