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Abstract of the Dissertation

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The dissertation studies the prevalence of ghosts and haunting in contemporary Asian American fiction as a telling symptom of racial and transnational melancholia. Analyzing seminal novels from the past two decades by American writers of Asian descent, I argue that melancholia functions in these texts as a critical form of resistance to the untenable demands of national identity formation and cultural belonging. From Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* to Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* to Andrew X Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*, depictions of ghosts and haunting are prevalent across a striking range of recent Asian American texts, and the dissertation investigates why this trope is so potent a device for understanding Asian American subjectivities. Asian American racialization, I maintain, is a process deeply haunted not only by U.S. military intervention and imperialism in Asia but also by official historical narratives that foreclose or willfully forget minority histories in order to uphold a fictive national harmony. Through readings of Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003), Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1997), and Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002), this study advances recent scholarship on racial melancholia and loss by repositioning the melancholic psyche from a state of debilitating pathology to a richly productive site of resistance and critique. Taken together, these texts reveal a crucial anxiety at the heart of Asian America—an anxiety over an American amnesia that threatens to erase fraught histories of violence, war, colonization, and exclusion. Contemporary Asian American literature challenges such deliberate forgetting through the figure of the ghost. From the reverberating lessons of the Vietnam War, to the refiguring of Japanese internment in "indefinite detention," to the presumed triumph of the "Forgotten War" in Korea—a war that still has not ended—the clinging to loss that is characteristic of melancholia cannot simply be read in these texts as a debilitating helplessness born of racism and trauma, but must be viewed as a demand for political accountability and historical memory.

For George

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Introduction

Imposed Invisibilities and Haunted Subjects: Cultivating an "attitude of revolt"

> Silent Mother, you do not speak or write. You do not reach through the night to enter morning, but remain in the voicelessness. From the extremity of much dying, the only sound that reaches me now is the sigh of your remembered breath, a wordless word. How shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall I trace that wave?
>
> -Joy Kogawa, *Obasan*

> The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.
>
> -Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*

These two quotations, from Joy Kogawa and Avery Gordon, have both served as guiding lights for the work that follows. Kogawa's protagonist Naomi Nakane asks how she can attend to speech that remains wordless, voiceless, that may exist only in the realm of imagination and longing. Gordon's unorthodox sociological approach gives us a partial answer to how we might learn to listen to silences, how we might find ways of 'seeing' that which is invisible, "how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence" (Gordon 17). She writes:

> the ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition. (8)

Ghostly Matters challenges the artificial division between disciplines that separates literature ("fiction") from social science ("fact"). Gordon notes the ways in which the narratives that emerge from the social sciences are always only partial, contingent, ambiguous, and even

contradictory—that they are, in fact, fictions. Gordon turns to the fictive as a means of accessing that which institutional or official narratives inevitably leave out. It is the "ghostly haunt [that] gives notice that something is missing" (15). However, the fictive for Gordon is not simply literature, but "the ensemble of cultural imaginings, affective experiences, animated objects, marginal voices, narrative densities, and eccentric traces of power's presence" (25). It is precisely the realm of the fictive that, Gordon argues, the social sciences must exile in order to maintain authority over the production of social knowledge. *Ghostly Matters* is concerned with interrogating the gaps left by this inattention to the fictive, with tracing the barely visible, the there-but-not-there, the remnants that cannot or will not fit neatly into the normative narrative constructions of historical and social realities.

So, inspired by Gordon, I went in search of ghosts. From Maxine Hong Kingston's *Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* to Lois-Ann Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* to Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman*, depictions of ghosts and haunting are prevalent across a striking range of recent Asian American texts[1], and the dissertation investigates why this trope is so potent a device for understanding Asian American subjectivities. Asian American racialization, I maintain, is a process deeply haunted not only by U.S. military interventions and imperialism in Asia but also by official historical narratives that foreclose or willfully forget minority histories in order to uphold a fictive national harmony.

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* is likewise influential in shaping my approach to reading ghosts and haunting in recent Asian American fiction. Derrida argues that speaking of the ghost, to the ghost, and with the ghost is fundamentally concerned with justice and

[1] Other notable examples include Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker*, Wendy Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, Hualing Nieh's *Mulberry and Peach*, Andrew X. Pham's *Catfish and Mandala*, Rahna Reiko Rizzuto's *Why She Left Us*, lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms At Night*, and Kiana Davenport's *The Song of the Exile*.

responsibility—responsibility to those who are not here. This refers not only to those who are no longer here but also to those who are *not yet here*: the specters of the past and the future that continually haunt the present. The notion of disjointed temporalities is central to Derrida's conception of the spectral (he continuously returns to Hamlet's statement that "the time is out of joint" as a sign of haunting). The specter, "this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one," (5) exists outside of time, outside of the living present, creating a rupture of temporalities, a "sort of non-contemporaneity of present time with itself" (29). This is in part because the spectral is necessarily based on a structure of repetition or return: "a specter is always a *revenant*.[2] One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (11). Paradoxically, the first appearance of the specter is simultaneously a repetition. Thus the spectral moment is a disruption of the present not only by the anxieties of the past but also of the future: "It is a proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being. Once again, untimeliness and disadjustment of the contemporary" (123). This collapsing of temporalities is important to understanding how the writers and works I analyze deploy ghosts as a means of mediating, recovering, and revising American and Asian American histories. The novels studied here are fundamentally concerned not just with the ways in which the past continually haunts and shapes the present, but how the present might become a means through which we might remember and redeem that past and, by extension, the future. The specter confronts us with a pressing ethical responsibility to the pasts and futures of the world.

[2] Translator's note: "A common term for ghost or specter, the *revenant* is literally that which comes back" (224).

This conception recalls in many ways Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in which he considers the dangers of a historicism that would seek to banish the past to the past. He writes, "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again . . . For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). This threat of misrecognition, of forgetting, of allowing history simply to vanish, held especially devastating potential, of course, when Benjamin wrote it in the midst of the mass extermination of European Jews. Indeed, his "angel of history" appears bereft as he is dragged violently into the future: "His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of this feet. The angel would like to stay, *awaken the dead*, and make whole what has been smashed" (257, emphasis added). If Benjamin's angel of history is forever being dragged forcefully into a future to which his back is turned, can we think of the ghost as that which drags the past into the present, or the present into the past, as that which might "blast open the continuum of history" (262)?

Haunting History: Melancholia and Specters of Racialization in Contemporary Asian American Fiction studies the prevalence of ghosts and haunting in contemporary Asian American fiction as a telling symptom of racial and transnational melancholia. Analyzing seminal novels from the past two decades by American writers of Asian descent, I argue that melancholia functions in these texts as a critical form of resistance to the untenable demands of national identity formation and cultural belonging. This study advances recent scholarship on racial melancholia and loss by repositioning the melancholic psyche from a state of debilitating pathology to a richly productive site of resistance and critique. Through readings of Monique

Truong's *The Book of Salt* (2003), Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine* (2002), Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life* (1999), Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1997), and Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002), I argue that the Asian American ghost is a crucial trope for understanding not only the host of losses produced through processes of immigration, assimilation, and exclusion in Asian America, but also for challenging the structures of power that undergird U.S. global hegemony.

The haunting melancholia that characterizes much of contemporary Asian American fiction marks a crucial ambivalence at the heart of Asian American racialized subjectivities that resists, at once, fantasies of the "model minority" and happy multiculture at home, and ongoing U.S. imperialisms abroad**.** The works of fiction I analyze are centrally concerned with traumatic experiences of war, colonization, and displacement, as well as the heteropatriarchal violence that so often works in tandem with militarized nationalisms. Ghosts and haunting emerge in these texts, I maintain, as telltale signs of traumatic memory and melancholic attachment. Whereas Freud initially pathologizes melancholia, this project repositions the racially melancholic psyche as a powerful instrument of critique in contemporary Asian American fiction.

Ghosts and Haunting as Symptoms of Melancholia

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud argues that mourning is the process by which a subject successfully grieves and moves on from a loss through a withdrawal of the ego from the lost object and a subsequent reinvestment in a new object. This linear psychic trajectory from loss, to grief, to letting go is considered by Freud the "normal" way of processing loss which ends in completion, leaving the ego "free and uninhibited again" (127). Melancholia,

however, results when the subject cannot let go of the lost object, and is the result, Freud argues,[3] of "a morbid pathological disposition" (125). When a subject becomes melancholic, the libido is withdrawn into the ego rather than redirected to another object, establishing "an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (131, emphasis in original). This "shadow" becomes incorporated into the melancholic subject's ego, establishing itself as a loss-but-not-a-loss that haunts the subject.

This study extends recent work on racial melancholia, notably Anne Anlin Cheng and David L. Eng. In *The Melancholy of Race*, Cheng describes melancholic attachment as "taking in the other-made-ghostly," and David Eng and Shinhee Han similarly observe that by "identifying with the lost object, the melancholic is able to preserve it but only as a type of haunted, ghostly identification" (346). The preservation of the lost object is felt as a painful absence/presence that refuses closure. Cheng argues that Asian American racialization *in particular* occupies a ghostly position because of the centrality of the black-white color line in the structure of U.S. racial politics:

> The question of the racialization of Asian Americans is in some ways more apparently melancholic than that of African Americans in American history in the sense that the history of virulent racism directed against Asians and Asian Americans has been at once consistently upheld and denied. Shuttling between 'black' and 'white'—the Scylla and Charybdis between which all American immigrants have had to 'pass'—Asian Americans occupy a truly ghostly position in the story of American racialization. (23)

The racialized subjects in the texts I analyze are, on the one hand, haunted by the ghosts of an unattainable whiteness and an inability to "blend in" to the myth of the American melting pot.

[3] Freud later revises his understanding of melancholia in *The Ego and the Id*, arguing that the ego is actually constituted through the attachment to lost objects.

But these racialized subjects are also themselves made ghostly through their exclusion from a nation whose racist social structures are founded on a melancholic attachment that mirrors their own, as Cheng argues: "Racialization . . . may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (10). The nation cannot simply reject the racialized subject, as it needs that which it despises as an other against which to define its own ideal. Eng likewise considers immigrant experience as fundamentally melancholic and centered around loss:

> it is important to emphasize that the experience of immigration is based on a structure of loss . . . When one leaves a country of origin, voluntarily or involuntarily, . . . a host of losses both concrete and abstract must be mourned. To the extent lost ideals of Asianness (including homeland, family, language, property, identity, custom, and status) are irrecoverable, immigration, assimilation, and racialization are placed within a melancholic framework—a state of suspension between "over there" and "over here." ("Transnational" 16)

This in-between position of the racially melancholic subject is central to my analysis of the novels studied in this dissertation, and reflects the importance of the transnational frame for understanding and theorizing contemporary Asian American fiction that is fundamentally concerned with issues of war, displacement, and global migration, and the many intersecting ideologies (race, gender and sexuality, labor, colonialism) that shape them.

Where my work diverges from that of Cheng and Eng is in its concern with the productive potential of the melancholic psyche in literature. Freud unfavorably characterizes melancholia as an "attitude of revolt," a formulation I find telling and useful in this regard. This spirit of revolt, and the resistance to closure that defines it, is precisely what is productive in melancholia. The writers studied here emphatically keep open the "wound" of racialization, not

to wallow in loss, but to demand political accountability and historical memory. Both Cheng and Eng gesture toward this productive potential, but the primary emphasis in their work on melancholia is a conception of American racialized subjectivities in terms of "self-as-loss," as Cheng puts it. In "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," Eng and Han end their essay by turning toward the potential productivity of racial melancholia, arguing that it is "the ego's melancholic yet militant refusal to allow certain objects to disappear into oblivion" that may constitute a critical ethics of melancholia (365). I seek to position that potential not as an end point, but as a starting point for reconceptualizing how contemporary Asian American writers engage with issues of race, loss, and haunting in ways that move beyond an ethos of damage. This dissertation analyzes how recent Asian American writers have taken up the figure of traumatic racialization and a haunted Asian American subject and use that to critique notions of national belonging, American imperialism, model minority discourse, and other problematic historical narratives. This is not to say that the very real material and psychic losses suffered by Asian and Asian American populations are insignificant or should ever be downplayed simply for the sake of "accentuating the positive." To the contrary, each of the chapters which follows engages at length with the "host of losses" produced through painful processes of immigration, racialization, (post)colonialism, and war, as well as the heteropatriarchal violences which structure them.

Judith Butler's writing on the melancholia of gender likewise informs this study, as racial and gender identities are articulated in and through each other in important ways. The relationships of power through which these identifications emerge cannot be thought as distinct and isolated articulations, but must be considered in their entangled relationships to each other. In Butler's tracing of the constitution of gendered subjectivities, she argues that "gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as

a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire" (80). She further argues that "heterosexual melancholy is culturally instituted and maintained as the price of stable gender identities" (89). Put another way, the founding of gendered identity is inherently melancholic because the ego cannot grieve for the loss of the (forbidden) homosexual object of desire, and so preserves that unavowable loss within the self. While I draw on these psychoanalytic theories of melancholic race and gender as a means of tracing and explaining the functions and meanings of ghosts and haunting in Asian American literature, I should say that I do not view my approach to this literature as primarily a psychoanalytic one. I view melancholia as a useful explanatory frame for understanding why Asian American literature might constitute itself as *haunted*, but this dissertation does not take as its task providing an exhaustive genealogy of melancholia, nor do I wish to import the entire oeuvre of psychoanalytic theory into my close readings of the novels studied here.

Postcolonial and Heteropatriarchal Contexts

Just as race cannot be thought apart from gender (and vice versa), neither can be thought apart from the other intersecting ideologies of nation, sexuality, economics, culture, or any of the other multiple and heterogeneous workings of global power that come to define the literature examined in this dissertation. The postcolonial and heteropatriarchal contexts that inform these texts—and particularly those written by Korean American and Vietnamese American authors—are crucial to understanding recent Asian American fiction and its engagement with America's imperial histories in Asia. The United States' relationship with Asia in the twentieth century has been structured by a host of ideological assumptions that work to define Asians and Asian Americans in complicated and problematic—and often contradictory—ways. Part of the work of

the novels examined in this dissertation is to expose and subvert troubling colonial and neoimperial discourses that rely on damaging Manichean logics that define East and West oppositionally in various ways. Edward Said's formulation of "Orientalism" is instructive here, as he traces the ways in which "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience" (1-2). He argues that "Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3). Truong, Otsuka, Lee, Fenkl, and Keller each in their own ways trace how this Orientalist thinking has shaped not only Western perceptions of Asians and Asian Americans as enemy aliens, inscrutable foreigners, model minorities, and devious gooks at different historical moments, but also how these discourses have shaped Asian and Asian American self-perceptions as well.

In his studies of the deleterious effects of colonial domination on the psyche of the colonized, Frantz Fanon notes, "It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject" (2, emphasis in original). Through the construction and maintenance of Orientalist discourses that define Asia as backward and barbarous, exotic and hyper-sexualized, or robotic and excessively efficient, the "Oriental" has often been fabricated in the American racial imaginary as an essentialized "Other" against which to define American ideals—ideals of whiteness, of masculinity, of cultural virtue. Fanon notes how such racist ideologies come to deny the very humanity of the colonized, as the racial other is held in contempt as inhuman, as so excessively *other* as to belong to another species:

> This compartmentalized world, this world divided in two, is inhabited by different species. The singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic

> reality, inequality, and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality. Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. […] The ruling species is first and foremost the outside from elsewhere, different from the indigenous population, 'the others.' (5)

Structural inequalities—inequalities that are often *produced and maintained* in and through colonial domination—are recycled in a perverse tautology as evidence of the inferiority of the colonized. The forced conscription of Korean women and girls as sex slaves by the Japanese Imperial Army, for example, gets held up as evidence of the essential depravity and immorality of Korea, proof of its need for Japanese colonial administration and guidance.

Colonial discourses are also always already intertwined with discourses of gender and sexuality, as the preceding example of Korean sexual depravity suggests. This has been especially the case, it seems, in the dynamics of U.S. imperialisms in Asia, as American masculinist militarism dovetails with the ideologies of Orientalism. Fenkl and Keller's novels, for example, which center on military prostitutes in the South Korean "camptowns" around U.S. military bases, demonstrate how the relationships between American G.I.s and Korean women are structured around the particularities of Western attitudes toward Asia broadly, as "the Orient" is feminized through simplistic racial and ethnic assumptions. The relationship between the nations themselves is gendered through the Orientalist assumptions that underpin the U.S. intervention and occupation, as Korea is feminized as a helpless other in need of protection and salvation through the force of American masculine power. This feminizing of the Korean nation is enmeshed with the racist and sexist stereotypes of Asian women as exotic and submissive sex objects who are eager to cater to the sexual desires of Western men. In her study of the critical role of gender and sexuality in structuring international politics, Cynthia Enloe argues that

"[i]nternational politics has relied not only on the manipulation of femininity's meanings but on the manipulation of masculinity . . . Thus understanding the international workings of masculinity is important to making feminist sense of international politics. Men's sense of their own manhood has derived from their perceptions both of other men's masculinity and the femininity of women of different races and social classes" (199-200). This dissertation takes a cue from Enloe and investigates how the imbricated ideologies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and global politics have historically worked in tandem to produce the haunted Asian American subjectivities represented in the fiction analyzed here.

Traumatic Histories

From forced exile, to wartime internment, to sexual slavery and militarized prostitution, as well as less violent—though still often painful—experiences of migration and assimilation, the dissertation engages with a range of traumatic events that profoundly and indelibly shape the psyches of the characters in these novels. The psychological structure of trauma, centered around repetition and return, also holds particularly fruitful explanatory power when thinking about ghosts and haunting as signs of histories that refuse to be forgotten. As Cathy Caruth explains, "The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains that peculiar, temporal structure" (17). In the psychoanalytic explanation of trauma, that is, the traumatic event cannot be fully grasped at the moment of its occurrence, but is relived by the survivor as a compulsive repetition. Trauma functions as "the story of a wound that cries out" from the past, belatedly, as a sign of something lost or forgotten (Caruth 4). The "host of losses" represented in the texts

studied here similarly cry out, as these writers ask us as readers to bear witness to forgotten or silenced histories.

Trauma's effects are not contained, however, only in the psyches of those who have experienced the traumatic event. Grace Cho's *Haunting the Korean Diaspora* considers how the Korean diaspora in the U.S. is affected by the buried traumas of the U.S.-Korea War and constitutes a site of transgenerational trauma. The second generation, the children of Korean War survivors, Cho argues, tells "a collective oral history in which they felt affected by some inarticulate presence that had left its imprint on what seemed to be their normal everyday lives . . . This experience of the children of Korean War survivors—having been haunted by silences that take the form of an 'unhappy wind,' 'a hole,' or some other intangible or invisible force—reflects the notion that an unresolved trauma is unconsciously passed from one generation to the next" (11). This is in large part due to the first generation's reluctance to discuss their experiences of war, but beyond that, as Cho argues, is the deliberate forgetting in U.S. national narratives that have written the Korean War into history as the "Forgotten War." Cho's articulation of transgenerational haunting, or transgenerational trauma, particularly in relation to the Korean American population, demonstrates the ways in which American historical amnesia comes to function as a kind of secondary trauma. But what she also shows in the haunting power of transgenerational trauma is the persistence of forgotten histories, their refusal to be fully forgotten. It is no coincidence, in my view, that three of the five novels I consider here are written by Korean American authors. Much of the Korean American population is in the U.S. precisely because of U.S. military intervention in Korea and the occupation of South Korea (which many viewed as little more than a continuation of colonial rule of the Japanese, helmed by the U.S. instead) well into the 1970s. Further haunting this long and violent history of war

and colonization is the fact that the Korea War still has not ended, despite the implications of the dismissive labeling as the "Forgotten War" and the burying of this history that Cho so painstakingly recounts.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony* identifies literature as precisely the place where traumatic experiences might be mediated and recovered where normative history fails us, as it has in Cho's example of the "Forgotten War." Felman and Laub argue that "the consequent, ongoing, as yet unresolved *crisis of history*, a crisis which in turn is translated into a *crisis of literature* insofar as literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself" (xviii). As with Gordon's turn to the fictive as a site for filling in the gaps in social and historical narratives, Felman and Laub demonstrate the ways in which "art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*" (xx, emphasis in original). When history is used in service of ongoing processes of forgetting, it is often the fictive, the artistic, that seeks to recover—or perhaps, rather, to *un*-cover—that which has been hidden from view. Much of recent Asian American fiction does precisely this, giving voice to the marginalized and invisible, bearing witness to difficult histories of loss and exclusion, and imaginatively reconstructing narratives that have been foreclosed.

Asian American Cultural Criticism and Politics of Race

This dissertation is bounded by its study of specifically "Asian American" literature, but I should clarify that my use of this racial rubric is not, of course, meant to essentialize Asian Americans as a homogenous group, or elide crucial distinctions of national origin, gender, sexuality, class, or generation that exist within the widely diverse population of Americans of

Asian descent. That said, I am obviously also not of the mind that "Asian American" is an empty signifier that does not wield any explanatory power. I take my understanding of race from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, which suggests that race is neither essence nor illusion, but "an unstable and 'decentered' complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle" (55). Their theory of racial formation "emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the 'micro-' and 'macro-social' levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics" (4). Racial formation is a historically situated *process*, and while race has no *essential* content, it is a crucial element of the American social structure, is deeply embedded in cultural representations and, therefore, produces real *effects*. The usefulness of appropriating the category of "Asian American" is, thus, a political one. While there is certainly some danger of reifying the very category—"Asian American"—that I aim to contextualize and de-essentialize, the political value of strategic essentialism is still potent. Lisa Lowe, while contextualizing Asian American identity and culture as heterogeneous, hybrid, and multiplicitous, and warning of the pitfalls of a politics based solely on racial or ethnic identity, nonetheless notes the promise of theorizing and organizing *as* Asian Americans:

> The articulation of 'Asian American identity' as an organizing tool has provided a concept of political unity that enables diverse Asian groups to understand unequal circumstances and histories as being related. The building of 'Asian American culture' is crucial to this effort, for it articulates and empowers the diverse Asian-origin community vis-à-vis the institutions and apparatuses that exclude and marginalize it. (70-1)

"Asian American" is still useful for me as a category of analysis, despite the vast array of differences—of national origin and ethnicity, language, immigration status, generation and age, sexuality and gender, class, religion, and individual experience—that are evident across the writers and characters I analyze because, in spite of those differences, they have come into contact with U.S. ideologies and institutions which often treat them as if those differences do not exist. A coalitional politics that can unite around common experiences of injustice—a politics, I would argue, that much of Asian American literature is a critical part—while still remaining attentive to the inherent heterogeneities of the community, is a valuable and necessary project for countering social injustices across a range of political contexts.

In working to that end, the dissertation is, of course, deeply indebted to recent work in Asian American cultural criticism, not only Lisa Lowe but also, notably, David Palumbo-Liu and Robert G. Lee whose work in tracing the ever shifting significations of "Asian American" through legal, economic, political, and cultural discourses is invaluable to the contributions this dissertation seeks to make. Palumbo-Liu's *Asian/American* investigates the "uneven, complex, and multiple imbrications of Asians in America" and traces how central America's shifting imaginings of Asia throughout the twentieth century are to the formation of modern American identity. Palumbo-Liu shows the radical variability of racial and national identities across time, as "Asian," "American," and "Asian American" are articulated and rearticulated in and through their shifting relationships to one another. Race, then, is continually remade in the American imaginary in response to shifting ideologies and historical contingencies.

Robert G. Lee's *Orientals* similarly traces the ways in which historical changes influence the construction of the "Oriental" in American discourses of race, but Lee focuses in particular on the circulation of racial images of Asians and Asian Americans in popular cultural

representations. Lee "takes up popular culture as a process, a set of cultural practices that define American nationality—who 'real Americans' are in any given historical moment" (6). He traces six images—the pollutant, the coolie, the deviant, the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook—that "portray the Oriental as an alien body and a threat to the American national family" (8). Lee's analysis of the "model minority," in particular, is useful to my analysis here, as I consider both its circulation in the 1990s as depicted by Chang-rae Lee in *A Gesture Life*, as well as what I view as its early roots in Japanese American traumatic response to internment. The so-called "model minority myth" consists of a "mythic Asian American family, the imagined product of an ahistorical and reified Asian 'traditional' culture" (184). Lee demonstrates how "the model minority mythology substituted a narrative of national modernization and ethnic assimilation through heterosexuality, familialism, and consumption. By the late 1960s, an image of 'successful' Asian American assimilation could be held up to African Americans and Latinos as a model for nonmilitant, nonpolitical upward mobility" (8). The model minority myth, however, systematically ignores the reasons for this recent socioeconomic shift in the population, which is primarily attributable to selective immigration policies that favor highly skilled technical and professional labor, and instead relies on a reification of age-old stereotypes of the Asian as the economically efficient automaton. As Colleen Lye has demonstrated, the "model minority myth" can be viewed as simply a different form of "yellow peril" discourse rooted in American anxieties of economic competition with Asia (*America's Asia*).

Finally, Lisa Lowe's examination of the Asian American as the "foreigner- within" is crucial to my understanding of how Asian American subjectivities are so often constituted through ideologies of exclusion that produce a melancholic relationship to racial and national identity:

> A national memory haunts the conception of the Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship and sustained by the wars in Asia, in which the Asian is always seen as an immigrant, as the 'foreigner-within,' even when born in the United States and the descendant of generations born here before. (5-6)

Further complicating Lowe's analysis of the legacy of legal and cultural exclusion of Asians in America, is her demonstration of the contradictions of political citizenship for those subjects whose racialization has historically constructed them in opposition to American ideals of national belonging. She argues that "[i]n being represented as a citizen within the political sphere, however, the subject is 'split off' from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship" (2). In other words, histories that flatly contradict American ideals of equality, prosperity, assimilation, and social mobility, must be forgotten as the individual subject is transformed through this alliance with national culture—"the American feeling," as Lowe calls it—into the abstract citizen. Thus, the "abstract form of citizenship" is structured around a demand for historical amnesia. Lowe posits Asian American cultural productions as productive "countersites to U.S. national memory and national culture" (4) She argues that Asian American exclusion and incomplete or partial processes of assimilation circulate in Asian American cultural productions in ways that can open up new political possibilities for understanding racial and national subjectivities:

> Rather than expressing a 'failed' integration of Asians into the American cultural sphere, this distance [from the national culture] preserves Asian American culture as an alternative site where the palimpsest of lost memories is reinvented, histories are fractured and retraced, and the unlike varieties of silence emerge into articulacy. (6)

Positioned at the intersections of these various academic discourses—theories of haunting and spectrality, psychoanalytic approaches to melancholia, postcolonial and feminist theory, trauma studies, and Asian American literary and cultural criticism—*Haunting History* employs an interdisciplinary approach with the goal of contextualizing the persistent haunting at the center of so many recent works of Asian American fiction. What unites these texts, I suggest, is a common "attitude of revolt" rooted not solely in melancholic loss, but also in a deep sense of ethical responsibility to the past.

Chapter Summaries

In the first chapter "Melancholic Ghosts in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*," I argue that the ghostliness of the novel is a product of racial, sexual, and (trans)national melancholia that Truong emphasizes through protagonist Binh's status as both haunted and haunting. I examine the ways in which these melancholic formations interact with structures of queer diaspora and queer temporality, and act as forms of resistance and transformation, exposing and subverting the racial and gender hierarchies that work to discipline identities. Binh—a gay Vietnamese exile living in Paris and working as a live-in chef for Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas in the 1930s—is a profoundly melancholic figure whose subjectivity is forged at the intersections of race, class, sexuality, and colonial domination. Banished from his family and country for his homosexuality, Binh flees to Paris. Truong demonstrates the ways in which Binh is haunted by his expulsion from Vietnam and his invisibility as a colonial subject in "Mother France." Her descriptions of Binh's ghostly presence in Paris expose the contradictions of national identity, as he is paradoxically rendered invisible through his very markedness: "I am an Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate, easily spotted and readily identifiable all the

same." But Binh's racial melancholia is mirrored by a national melancholia, I argue, in which French culture and French "purity" are contradictorily maintained on the backs of (invisible) Asian colonial subjects and their (invisible) labor.

Chapter Two, "A Haunting Persistence: Internment's Specters of Trauma in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*" draws on Colleen Lye's concept of "Asiatic racial form" to argue that a particular Japanese racial form emerges from the imposed invisibility and strategic forgetting of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Otsuka's depiction of the evacuation and internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans emphasizes the myriad ways in which internees were deliberately rendered invisible to the rest of the nation, and this traumatic invisibility continues to haunt the characters long after the war and the internment have ended. Removed from their communities and packed into "ghost trains," the evacuees hear the armed guards on the train repeat "Shades down, Shades down" so no one outside the train can see what is happening. The imposed invisibility of internment, driven by racism and war propaganda, produces a racialized double consciousness in the internees that teaches them that they must hide themselves, become silent and invisible to avoid violence, even after the war. To object to their treatment, to break their silence, would be to become the enemy all over again. Thus, the criminalization of the Japanese American body, I argue, paradoxically produces the "model minority" in the postwar era.

In "Making and Un-Making the Model Subject: Transnational Melancholia and Spectrality in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*," I examine how the ghost of a Korean "comfort woman" that haunts the protagonist Franklin Hata illuminates the multiple ways in which Hata's melancholic subjectivity is conditioned. Ethnically Korean, Hata "passes" as Japanese and becomes a medical officer in the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II, overseeing the

military sex slaves known as "comfort women." After immigrating to the U.S. after the war, Hata comes to fully embody the stereotype of the Asian American "model minority," while still struggling with his memories of the brutalities of the war—and his own complicity in them. I argue that Hata gains significant privilege by "passing"— first as a Japanese, then as a Japanese-American "model minority"— but his excessive performances of nationalism and masculinity can only purchase that privilege through the victimization of others. In drawing critical linkages between the ache of racial melancholia, the violence of colonization, the trauma of war memory, and the complex webs of power and privilege that condition these social structures, I argue that Lee offers a sharp critique of the demands of national identity and cultural belonging. Lee interrogates the steep human costs of nationalism and its relationship to militarism and violence, and posits a counter-normative position of un-belonging.

This study's final chapter turns to the mixed race children of Korean women and American GIs to analyze the intersections of racial abjection and economic exchange during the U.S. occupation of South Korea in the Cold War era. "The Melancholy of Mixed Race: The Amerasian Child as Mediator of History," reads Heinz Insu Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* and Nora Okja Keller's *Fox Girl*, two novels that depict the 1960s "camptown" culture of South Korea and the ways in which the mixed race children produced in and through the camptown culture become overinvested symbols of U.S.-Korea relations. I argue that the mixed race child comes to circulate as a critical part of the camptown economy, in which impoverished Korean women—very often military prostitutes—view bearing the child of an American GI as a strategic means of access to social mobility and economic stability. I further consider how women's bodies become their primary—if not only—means of participation in an economy driven primarily by the U.S. military occupation. The Korean Amerasian child is produced and

conditioned at the intersections of racial hierarchy, gender hierarchy, U.S. global hegemony, and the broad devaluing of Korean life in the aftermath of the U.S.-Korea War. Thus, the Amerasian child becomes an overdetermined symbol of Korea's fraught history of colonization and war, a profoundly melancholic figure simultaneously bearing the weight of a painful history *and* a deeply uncertain future.

Chapter 1

Melancholic Ghosts in Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*

In *The Melancholy of Race* Anne Anlin Cheng observes that melancholia "alludes not to loss per se but to the entangled relationship with loss" (8). It is precisely these entanglements with which this chapter is concerned. Monique Truong's 2003 bestseller *The Book of Salt* offers a telling case study in loss and melancholia in the diaspora, as the haunted protagonist Bình copes with his expulsion from family and country. *The Book of Salt* is narrated by Bình, a gay exile living in Paris and working as a live-in chef for Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas in the 1930's at their famed residence at 27 rue de Fleurus. The narrative continually shifts in time and place, shuttling between Saigon, Paris, and the sea, as Bình slowly recounts his life story, fragment by fragment. As his story unwinds, we learn that Bình was disowned by his abusive, alcoholic father—to whom Bình refers only as "Old Man"—when he learns that Bình has had an affair with the Frenchman Bleriot, the *chef de cuisine* at the Governor-General's house in Saigon where Bình works as a low-level cook. With nowhere else to go, Bình escapes to the "wide open sea" where he spends the next three years working as a galley cook before finally settling in Paris and finding his "Mesdames" Stein and Toklas. Bình works for the couple for nearly five years, from 1929 until their return to the United States in 1934, during which time he meets and begins an affair with Marcus Lattimore, a mixed-race African-American passing as white, who attends Stein's Saturday salons. *The Book of Salt* is a deeply haunted text, from the Old Man's voice that echoes in Bình's head as a constant reproach, to the ghostly figure of "the man on the bridge" (a fictionalized Ho Chi Minh) whom Bình longs to meet again, to Bình's own invisibility as he wanders the streets of Paris.

Banished from his family and country for his homosexuality, Bình is profoundly melancholic, holding on to the life he lost through memory and repetition. The elliptical narration, continually returning to Bình's life in Vietnam, demonstrates how fully his present is saturated by the past. Bình psychically preserves the moment of his expulsion from home by literally internalizing the voice of his disapproving father. Indeed, when Bình recounts the day his father disowned him, he repeats the phrase "I stand there still" (Truong 164). This refers, at once, to the momentary paralysis Bình experiences as his father berates and disowns him ("still" as in "motionless"), and to Bình's inability to move on emotionally from this traumatic scene of rejection ("still" as in "continued until now") (*OED*). Just as he is haunted by the violence and hatred of his father, Bình similarly relives the love and nurturing he received from his mother. Bình compulsively and longingly cuts the tips of his fingers while he cooks, transporting himself back to an early childhood memory in which his mother cradled him close to her body as she tended to his bloody fingers, soothing him with song, after he cut himself for the first time while chopping scallions with her. Bình's every moment in Paris is achingly bound up with his past. Haunted by a home and family to which he cannot return, Bình wills his own psychic return through these compulsive repetitions of the past.

Moreover, the novel itself is haunted—a literary project produced through Truong's conjuring of the dead. Her central figure, Bình, is a composite character based on two "Indo-Chinese" chefs, Trac and Nguyen, who worked for Stein and Toklas in Paris. In *The Alice B. Toklas Cookbook*, Toklas describes their "insecure, unstable, unreliable, but thoroughly enjoyable experiences with the Indo-Chinese" (186). Though Trac and Nguyen are the only two Vietnamese chefs Toklas names, she and Stein employed a "succession" of them while in Paris (187). While Toklas expresses a certain condescending affection for Trac and Nguyen—

"Gertrude Stein and I thought Nguyen delightfully Chinese"—she describes the Indo-Chinese men she and Stein employed as alternately liars, gamblers, drunks, womanizers, and drug addicts (188, 187). Truong's imaginative recuperation of the stories of these chefs decenters the privileged modernism embodied by Stein and Toklas and examines the marginal figures on which that privilege relies. In a 2003 interview, Truong describes what inspired her to write the novel: "I was, to say the least, surprised and touched to see a Vietnamese presence—and such an intimate one at that—in the lives of these two women. These cooks must have seen everything, I thought. But in the official history of the Lost Generation, the Paris of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, these Indochinese cooks were just a minor footnote" ("Interview"). *The Book of Salt* stands as a counter-narrative to the "official history of the Lost Generation" and interrogates the ways in which that history is predicated on the invisibility of figures such as Bình. Furthermore, just as the novel is haunted by the untold stories of Trac and Nguyen, the text is also haunted by its own future. Set in the 1930s but published in 2003, Truong's tale is inevitably inflected with our knowledge of what is yet to come in Vietnam. Truong herself fled Vietnam with her mother in 1975 when she was only six years old, seeking refuge from the "nightly bombings" ("Interview"). We are reminded of the ways in which colonialism never fully becomes "post" for Vietnam, a country still grappling with its long history of colonization and war.

In *The Book of Salt* we see the haunting losses that condition life in the diaspora, but Truong refuses to depict Bình's grief as one-dimensional, as an experience of loss that is only ever debilitating or pathological. In this chapter, I argue that the ghostliness of the novel is a product of racial, sexual, and (trans)national melancholia that Truong emphasizes through Bình's status as both haunted and haunting. I examine the ways in which these melancholic formations interact with structures of queer diaspora and queer temporality, and may act as forms of

resistance and transformation, exposing and subverting the racial and gender hierarchies that work to discipline identities. Truong's ghosts, I argue, become a critical means of resistance to the forced erasures and exclusions of minority subjects in normative histories. By interrogating the inherent violence at the intersections of colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity through the ghostly figure of Bình, *The Book of Salt* speaks from the margins to haunt the center, calls out from the past to disrupt a forgetful present.

Ghosts of Heteronormativity

Bình's melancholic subjectivity is forged through his forced exclusion from family and nation, as he is banished for his homosexuality. Bình relives this traumatic scene through his constant returns to the past, represented most starkly through the voice of his father, which acts as a continual reproach to Bình. The voice of Bình's father frequently echoes in his mind, breaking through his consciousness to shame and belittle him: "'Well, well, well. It looks like I was right all along. Whores do become cooks on boats. You pathetic piece of shit. I knew you would amount to nothing, but I would have never guessed that you would amount to even less'" (Truong 83). So echoes the Old Man's voice in Bình's head after the first time he has sex with Marcus Lattimore, a man who attends Stein's Saturday salons, and who stuffs Bình's coat pocket with a thick roll of bills. Bình's melancholic attachment to the father, which entails the incorporation of the lost object into the ego, "transforms all possible reproaches against the loved object into reproaches against the self" (Eng 1276). These constant castigations continually bring Bình back to the moment of his forced exile from Vietnam and from his family by his father. Sara Ahmed has detailed the entangled relationship between queer shame and melancholia, in which the queer subject identifies with and internalizes repudiations of queerness

and "takes on the 'badness' as its own, by feeling bad about 'failing loved others'" (Ahmed 107). Thus, the only way Bình can maintain an attachment to his father is through this internalization of the Old Man's repudiation. This internalized law of the father acts as a constant reproach to Bình for his sexuality, and reveals the ways in which the queer subject is always already a haunted subject. In a culture structured around compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormativity functions as an unattainable ideal that cannot be assimilated into queer subjectivity. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler notes the melancholic identification that underlies culturally devalued homosexual desire, in which homosexuality is preserved through its very prohibition.[4] Bình thus becomes a melancholic subject through the internalization of heterosexist imperatives that both deny and reinforce his desires in his ambivalent attachment to the law of the father. The shaming voice of the Old Man serves as a key example of this paradoxical preservation of homosexual desire in its very denial. The Old Man repudiates Bình's homosexual desires by banishing him from the family, but implicit in his reprimand is an acknowledgment of the inevitability of Bình's desires: "I was right all along"; "I knew you would amount to nothing" (Truong 83). The Old Man's rendering of Bình into "nothing" demonstrates not only Bình's psychic preservation of his father's rejection, but also the transformation of Bình into a ghostly absence in the heteropatriarchal family. Bình's invisibility, his "nothing"-ness, is not a simple erasure, but a haunting reminder to the family and the community of the consequences of transgression.

[4] "The prohibition on homosexuality preempts the process of grief and prompts a melancholic identification which effectively turns homosexual desire back on itself. This turning back upon itself is precisely the action of self-beratement and guilt. Significantly, homosexuality is not abolished but preserved, though preserved precisely in the prohibition on homosexuality" (Butler 142).

Indeed, as much as Bình is haunted by the ghost of his father and the cycle of shaming that he has incorporated, he himself haunts through his very present absence. Cast out of the family, Bình's absence is felt as a "seething presence," a hole in the family that cannot be acknowledged, cannot be grieved. The "ungrievable loss" of homosexuality becomes a haunting presence within the founding of heterosexual subjectivity, as that which cannot be avowed and thus cannot be grieved and assimilated (Butler). In 1929, several years after his flight from Vietnam and shortly after he has begun working for Stein and Toklas, Bình, in a moment of loneliness and fear, writes his first and only letter home to his brother Minh, the eldest son. Working as a sous chef at the Governor-General's house, Minh was a mentor to Bình and got him the job working in the kitchen alongside him. Bình describes the letter to his brother as lengthy but dull, "crammed with details only my oldest brother would be interested in," but he ends on a note of pain and longing: "'My Mesdames may be going home. I do not want to start all over again, scanning the help-wanteds, knocking on doors, walking away alone. I am afraid'" (8). Years after his departure from home, Bình—worried that his American employers may be returning home because of the stock market crash of 1929—attempts to rebuild a connection with his brother Minh and, thus, with his lost family and nation. Nearly five years pass before Minh replies, but he "offered no explanation for his delay in writing except to say that everything at home had changed. He wrote that it would have been better for me to hear it all in person. What he meant was that paper was not strong enough to bear the weight of what he had to say but that he would test its strength anyway" (8-9). Minh's reply, five years deferred, illustrates how Bình has continued to haunt his family years after his banishment. His sole letter home hangs over the family for half a decade, unanswered but not forgotten. Importantly, Bình's mother, too, "wanted to be there to welcome her youngest son back to her kitchen and back to

her house," but has no power to defy the Old Man's expulsion of Bình from the family home (198). The mother's longing demonstrates the ways in which the haunting loss of her favorite son, as well as her unattainable desire for reunion, are both predicated on a violent heteropatriarchy that demands either obedience or exclusion from both family and nation.

Truong further critiques the violent exclusion of women from structures of power through Bình's relationship to his mother and the trauma that is seemingly passed down through the generations. Bình describes his mother as someone who is largely a victim of circumstance, who lacks control over her life. Her father died when she was very young—a loss from which her mother never recovers—and she and her mother live in poverty, barely subsisting on the modest charity of an uncle. Her mother, still grieving the loss of her husband, fantasizes about joining him in death, and arranges a marriage for Bình's mother when she is only twelve years old, so that she can be rid of the girl and proceed with her plan. At fourteen, Bình's mother goes to live with the Old Man, who treats her cruelly and considers her nothing more than a vessel through which he'll produce sons. By the time she is eighteen, she has given birth to her fourth son, Bình, and begs the midwife to remove her uterus as an act of mercy. " 'No more pounding, no more collapsing belly, no more breasts swollen with milk,' my mother had begged" (172). Nicolas Abraham conceives of transgenerational trauma as a "phantom," and argues that "what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (287). Bình attempts to fill in these gaps, to give voice to his mother's story by narrating her life, but he offers the reader details he could not possibly know, including what she was thinking in the moment before her death, when Bình himself is thousands of miles away. When Bình narrates his mother's story, he comes to inhabit her consciousness, asserting "she thought" and "she felt" throughout his storytelling. Occasionally inserting an "I imagine" within his mother's narrative—"There

was only a small part of her earlobes, *I imagine*, that felt remorse"—Bình draws attention to the constructedness of his mother's story, of, in fact, her inability to tell her own story (Truong 199, emphasis added). Bình maintains his attachment to his mother through this construction of her life story, pieced together through the seen and unseen, the spoken and the unspeakable of his mother's past. He links their lives through their common experiences of violence, keeping alive their profound connection.

Bình's memories of his mother haunt him throughout the text, and their histories become literally written on his body, as this unassimilated loss results in the repetitive cutting of his hands that recall his first memories of his loving mother pressing him to her body and tending to his bloody fingers after the first time he cut himself while cooking with her. As Bình slices through his hands, he remembers:

> I remember, yes, a caress, a slight sensation, and when my hands are shaking it feels like a tickle. In the beginning I preferred the blade newly sharpened, licked against a stone until sparks flew, white and blue. Now I know that such delicacy would only deny me that part that I savor most, the throbbing of flesh compromised, meeting and mending. And sometimes when it is deep enough, there is an ache that fools my heart. Tricks it into a false memory of love lost to a wide, open sea. I say to myself, "Ah, this reminds me of you." (74)

Bình's blood recalls not only his childhood memory, but also his mother's own painful memories. The "sea of red" (72) that Bình describes echoes the "wide, open sea" that separates them as well as links their histories through their common experiences of violence. The "red mud" (73) of Bình's wound connects him to his mother and the "blood caked to the inside of her legs" after the Old Man rapes her for the first time, as if "he is trying to push through to the other side" (166). These family memories continue to extend back in time as Bình's mother recalls (or, rather, Bình recalls his mother's recollection) her bleeding earlobes when her own mother

pierced her ears and inserted two small jade earrings—her dowry—on the last day she saw her mother. The ghost of Bình's mother and the blood that connects their stories expose the violence through which patriarchal domination is purchased. Bình and his mother become connected through this blood, through the violence of their exclusion as degraded others. Indeed, Bình is dubbed by his fellow Vietnamese as *lai cái* which means "mixed with or partially a female" (133), and it is their mutual experience inhabiting feminized—and therefore devalued—bodies that binds them together.

Though Bình—unlike his mother—is able to flee the violence of the Old Man's home and spend years on his own at sea and then in France, his exile from Vietnam and subsequent move to what he imagines to be the gay paradise of Paris do nothing to affirm his homosexual desire. Despite the stories Bình hears from the chauffeur he worked with in Vietnam that fascinate him—"'Men with men. Men with men who behaved like women. Women who behaved like men with women who behaved like women, et cetera. The mutations of your condition are endless'"—his residence in Paris does not inaugurate him into a community that can avow his desires but, rather, works to further exclude and alienate him (Truong 128). Through Bình's position as a servant in the home of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas, famed lesbian partners and hosts to the artistic and literary elite of Paris, Truong reveals the fault lines that separate Bình by virtue of his racial, national, and class identities. Bình concedes that the French are more relaxed about sexuality than the Vietnamese, but notes the other rigid hierarchies that govern his existence. After he is fired from his job cooking at the Governor-General's house in Vietnam because he has been having sex with the head chef Bleriot, Bình observes: "Madame [his boss] is a snob but not a prude. She did not care about the relations of two men, just as long as they were of the same social standing and, of course, race" (132). The

same racial and class hierarchies restrict Bình in Paris and, in fact, come into even sharper relief by his proximity to Stein and Toklas.

Racial Melancholia and Imposed Invisibilities

Bình is utterly invisible in the Stein/Toklas residence—and in Paris more generally—and describes the governing structure of his life in Paris as "Repetition and routine. Servitude and subservience. Beck and call" (Truong 154). Bình constantly describes his presence in the house as ghostly, as there-but-not-there as he goes about his tasks in the "imposed invisibility of servitude" (37). To the guests who attend Stein's Saturday salons, Bình is no more than an object, a mere part of the surroundings that make up the posh atmosphere of the Stein/Toklas residence: "Always discreet, almost invisible, I imagine that when the guests look my way they see, well, they see a floor lamp or a footstool. I have become just that" (149). Bình similarly describes the experience of inhabiting Paris as an outsider, in which he is paradoxically rendered invisible through his very markedness:

> [My body] marks me, announces my weakness, displays it as yellow skin. It flagrantly tells my story, or a compacted, distorted version of it, to passersby curious enough to cast their eyes my way. It stunts their creativity, dictates to them the limited list of whom I could be. Foreigner, *asiatique*, and, this being Mother France, I must be Indochinese . . . To them my body offers an exacting, predetermined life story . . . Every day when I walk the streets of this city, I am just that. I am an Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate, easily spotted and readily identifiable all the same. (152)

Bình inhabits the streets of Paris only as a type—outsider, foreigner, generic colonial subject—and the "flagrantly" told story is not his own, but the immediately legible story of "yellow skin," a story of marginality manufactured by a white center. Bình's ghostly invisibility is produced

through his racial objectification in "Mother France," as the knowing colonial gaze "predetermines" him as an indiscriminate Other. Just as he blends into the surroundings of Stein and Toklas's posh Paris home, indistinguishable from any of the other objects that mark their wealth, Bình similarly vanishes before the eyes of (white) Parisian passersby. Bình, simultaneously erased as an individual and made hyper-visible as a generic outsider, is a ghostly presence haunting the streets of Paris, both there and not there. His experience is one of profound racial melancholia, in which the unattainable whiteness necessary for his acceptance haunts him. As Eng and Han argue, "To the extent that ideals of whiteness . . . remain unattainable, processes of assimilation are suspended, conflicted, and unresolved. The irresolution of this process places the concept of assimilation within a melancholic framework" (Eng and Han 345). Furthermore, Bình's melancholia is compounded by his status as a Vietnamese exile; he maintains unassimilable attachments not only to his new "home" France and its racist social structure that continually denies him full entry, but also to the (home)land that has expelled him where he could get lost "in the crush" of a busy Saigon marketplace, where he "was above all just a man" (Truong 152). Bình thus maintains a precarious relationship to both his "home" nations—his native Vietnam and the "Mother France" that "owns" him—in which he belongs to both and neither, disrupting any notion of national identity or fixed national belonging.

This racial melancholia runs two ways, however, and just as Bình is haunted by the ghosts of unattainable whiteness and his inability to "blend in," he himself is made ghostly through his exclusion from a nation whose racist structures are purchased through a melancholic formation that mirrors his own. As Anne Anlin Cheng argues in *The Melancholy of Race*, "Racialization . . . may be said to operate through the institutional process of producing a

dominant, standard, white national ideal, which is sustained by the exclusion-yet-retention of racialized others" (10). The nation cannot simply reject the racialized subject, as it needs that which it despises as an Other against which to define its own ideal. Truong illuminates this contradictory structure of "exclusion-yet-retention" through Bình's status as cook for Stein and Toklas who forever keep him outside "that perfect circle that is at the center of every home," as well as for the hotel restaurant in French Indochina (Truong 103). In Vietnam, Bình's training as a cook is classically French, and he must be warned against letting any Vietnamese influence taint his cooking. Bình's brother Anh Minh, the model colonial subject and sous chef to Bleriot, warns him:

> [T]he *chef de cuisine* at the Continental Palace Hotel in Saigon—a man who claimed to be from Provence but who was rumored to be the illegitimate son of a high-ranking French official and his Vietnamese seamstress—had to be dismissed because he was serving dishes obscured by lemongrass and straw mushrooms. He also slipped pieces of rambutan and jackfruit into the sorbets. The clientele was outraged, demanded that the natives in the kitchen be immediately dismissed if not jailed . . . (42)

Here the implicit fear of contamination, of "obscuring" French culture, is collapsed into the fear of miscegenation, of diluting the French bloodlines with inferior Asian heritage, as suggested by the rumors that the chef is the "illegitimate son" of a lowly native. The colonial administration in French Indochina—from the 1880s until Vietnam gained independence in 1954—created a rigidly stratified social system that assumed Western superiority over Asian barbarism, and we see this racist essentialism in the dismissal of the chef. The clientele's disgust at the use of Vietnamese ingredients—lemongrass, straw mushrooms, rambutan, and jackfruit—demonstrates the colonials' contempt for all things native and reiterates the rigid racial hierarchy that orders

the colony. This violent expulsion, however, bumps up against the realities of colonial domination, in which French culture and French "purity" are contradictorily maintained on the backs of (invisible) Asian colonial subjects and their (invisible) labor.

We see these politics of racial exclusion again through Lattimore, Bình's lover, his "Sweet Sunday Man," an African-American émigré and victim of the "one drop rule" that was the haunting legacy of American slavery. Passing as white in Paris, Lattimore suffers from the same internalized shame and racial melancholia as Bình, who calls Lattimore a "gray sketch of a life" (Truong 151). Haunted and haunting, Lattimore's presence disrupts the present as his dubious past creeps into the world of Stein's salon. "Is Lattimore a Negro?" Stein bluntly asks Bình, who Stein and Toklas have been loaning out to Lattimore on Sundays (189). Stein and Toklas's brazen racism in this scene reveals the gaps and cracks in the modernism and progressivism that the two women supposedly represent. It is Bình and Lattimore, then, who become aligned as racial others in the salon, despite the class lines that divide them as servant and guest:

> I entered the room with a tray of sugar-dusted cakes for all the young men who sit and stand, a hungry circle radiating around GertrudeStein. After years of the imposed invisibility of servitude, I am acutely aware when I am being watched, a sensitivity born from absence, a grain of salt on the tongue of a man who has tasted only bitter . . . I felt a slight pressure. It was the weight of your eyes resting on my lips. I looked up, and I saw you standing next to a mirror reflecting the image of a wiry young man with deeply set, startled eyes. I looked up, and I was seeing myself beside you. I am at sea again, I thought. Waves are coursing through my veins. I am at sea again. (37)

In this striking image in which Bình sees his mirror image standing next to Lattimore, Truong creates a "racialized space and time that [Bình] and Lattimore share" (Eng 1489). It is in this

moment in Stein's salon that we see most clearly the complex intersections of the racial and sexual politics circulating across four continents. Separated by virtue of their class positions, Bình and Lattimore become linked through their shared histories of racial and sexual exclusion and—perhaps more importantly—through their mutual ability to recognize this affiliation without being detected by the others at the salon. Bình's ability to see himself beside Lattimore indicates a subversive reading practice that undermines the racial, sexual, and class hierarchies that construct and constrain his life. Bình is able to use his own "imposed invisibility" productively in order to reposition himself alongside his supposed superior, destabilizing the social order of Stein's salon. We see how Bình's invisibility produces a critical "sensitivity" that allows him to see others while not being seen; it is what allows him to conduct his illicit affairs with both Bleriot and, later, Lattimore under the noses of his employers without being detected. Bình is able to use his own ghostliness to his advantage in the Stein/Toklas household—and, indeed, in Paris more broadly—allowing him to know more about others than they know about him. As Bình drifts about the home, unseen, in the "imposed invisibility of servitude," he reappropriates that invisibility both to gain power through his knowledge of his employers, as well as to navigate and fulfill his own desires.

These four central figures comprise a cluster of characters in exile, through which Truong interrogates questions of nationhood and belonging in the tenuous position of the diaspora. Eng considers the potential of diaspora as a "function of queerness—queerness not just in the narrow sense of sexual identity and sexual practices, but queerness as a critical methodology for evaluating . . . racial formation across multiple axes of difference and in its numerous local and global manifestations" (Eng 39). We see these varied links and crossings through the multiple significations of the four exiles that occupy the center of the novel. Bình is forever in between

places—banished from French Indochina for his transgression of class boundaries, banished from Vietnam[5] and his family for his sexuality, and excluded from France due to his race and class position. Lattimore, a ghost of slavery, brings to the present the mass forced movements of black bodies during the slave trade through the traces of violence that still remain in him, that "drop of blood, which made her [Lattimore's mother] an exile in the land of her birth" (Truong 112) and subsequently makes Lattimore an exile as well. But Lattimore's class position allows him to "pass" as well as to line Bình's pockets with cash and manipulate him in order to steal one of Stein's manuscripts. Stein and Toklas, themselves sexual exiles of a sort, occupy a racial and class position that gives them power over both Bình and Lattimore, and Stein frequently asserts her (masculine) power over other women, dismissing them as "merely 'wives'" (184). Through this dismissal of her female guests, and her relegating them to the kitchen while she talks with the male guests, we see how Stein herself relies on the language of heteropatriarchy to assert her dominance. Her labeling of the women as "merely wives" echoes her demand to know if Lattimore is a "Negro," and demonstrates the ways in which Stein and Toklas's privileged status requires the interpellation of racial and gendered others. Furthermore, Stein and Toklas—unlike Bình and Lattimore—are expatriates by choice and, as the novel ends, they are returning to the United States. Truong complicates Stein and Toklas's status as outsiders, as they position themselves as normative against the exclusion of racial and class others. Through these fraught relationships of racial, sexual, and transnational power, Truong exposes the ways in which the simplistic binaries—East/West; heterosexual/homosexual; past/present; center/margin—fail to map onto each other neatly. As these boundaries are continually traversed throughout the novel,

[5] I refer to French Indochina and Vietnam separately for what they signify in these two incidents. I refer to French Indochina because it is in the official space of the French colonials that Bình is fired from his job; I refer to Vietnam because it is in the space of the family home that Bình is disowned. Indeed, these in many ways seem to be very separate spaces for Bình as well, a point to which I will return.

Truong reveals the porousness of these demarcations and their inability to speak meaningfully to the characters' experiences.

Ghosts of the (Queer) Diaspora

The placelessness of Bình throughout the novel is one of the primary ways in which Truong challenges notions of national boundary and validates the exilic subject as a powerful site of critique. Though Bình is certainly intimately tied to his past in Vietnam, it is not a tidy longing for lost origins that Bình experiences. His relationship to his "motherland" is fraught with contradictions and tensions, not least of which is the continued occupation of the country by France and the sharp divisions not only between colonizer and colonized, but between and among the Vietnamese people as well. This troubled relationship to the past and to home, Gayatri Gopinath argues, is the productive potential of queer diasporas:

> If conventional diasporic discourse is marked by this backward glance, this 'overwhelming nostalgia for lost origins, for times past,' a queer diaspora mobilizes questions of the past, memory, and nostalgia for radically different purposes. Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history, what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles. (4)

Bình's story, flowing fluidly between Vietnam and France, is anything but a nostalgic longing for a perfect past. His memories are painful and violent, stamped into his psyche and relived as the repetitive injury of trauma. From his own expulsion, to his mother's life of sacrifice and loss, to his brother's naïve dreams of being accepted by a racist and exploitative colonial class, Bình's backward glance refuses to preserve a pristine scene of national belonging but, instead, his haunting diasporic placelessness works to rupture and subvert fixed notions of nation and

identity. Bình refers to the past as "a borderless country in which I so often find myself," as a space in which his affiliations remain contingent and open-ended (Truong 23).

Truong negotiates these boundaries in part through the form of the text itself, which drifts fluidly from place to place. Bình's experiences in Paris inevitably lead him back to memories of Vietnam, his melancholic attachments keeping both places present to him simultaneously. Truong reinforces these themes of being both here and there, of being neither here nor there, through the repeated imagery of seas and bridges. Adding to Bình's position as always in-between, we learn that he spends three years at sea after his exile from Vietnam and before he finally settles in Paris. Bình's elliptical narrative shifts not only between the two countries he knows, but also in the vast expanse of sea that both connects and separates them. His constant returns to the sea—and the tales he hears from the pseudonymous Bão—echo the references to the "mud red sea" that connects him to his mother's pain, as well as the overwhelming feeling of being "at sea" when he recognizes something of himself in Lattimore. This queering of place, this assertion of fluidity, allows Bình to keep open all these various attachments and detachments as he slips between the boundaries of belonging.

The bridge in Paris where Bình meets the fictionalized Ho Chi Minh in 1929, shortly before he begins working for Stein and Toklas, recurs throughout the novel as the place to which Bình always returns. Bình continually hears echoing in his mind when he returns to the site, "What keeps you here?" the question the man on the bridge asks of him when they meet (85). It is a question that doesn't have to be answered, a question that is ultimately rendered meaningless by the in-betweenness of the bridge itself, that "connected us to neither here nor there" (92). Gopinath asserts the "potential [of queer diasporas] to foreground notions of impurity and inauthenticity that resoundingly reject the ethnic and religious absolutism at the center of

nationalist projects" (7). The ambivalence and the fluidity with which Bình forges his relationships to nationhood, belonging, and identity (indeed, we never even learn his "real" name—"real names . . . are never exchanged during such encounters") subvert any claims to fixity or essence, queering the complex relationships between race, place, and desire. As Bình and the stranger stand on the bridge in Paris, the stranger muses: " ' Bridges belong to no one . . . A bridge belongs to no one because a bridge has to belong to two parties, one on either side. There has to be an agreement, a mutual consent, otherwise it's a useless piece of wood, a wasted expanse of cement" (92). Through this frame of queer diaspora, we can see how Bình forges his identity in the queered liminal space of both/neither represented by the bridge, and in his continued refusal to claim a fixed or "authentic" place of belonging. Not fully welcome in Vietnam or France or that "perfect circle" at the center of the Stein/Toklas household, Bình resists the allure of a stable home(land), and in the process creates a decentered subjectivity that powerfully critiques the contradictions and exclusions necessary to absolute belonging.

Queer Temporalities

Just as Truong challenges and queers concepts of diaspora and national belonging, she similarly complicates notions of time in the novel, rejecting linearity, progress, and closure and embracing circularity, ambiguity, and openness. Bình's narration of his story is elliptical and at times disorienting, dropping threads of stories and returning to them chapters later, reanimating the story just as it is about to be forgotten. This constant looping in the novel works to disrupt the usual linear way of conceiving of time and history as consecutive steps from one point to another. Truong explores the ways in which time cycles through memory and varied experiences; the ways in which alternate temporalities run along side each other, intersect with

one another; the ways in which the past is never past but always blasting its way through to the present. Truong weaves Bình's meandering placelessness with a similarly winding experience of time. When Bình first boards the boat when he begins his three years at sea he muses:

> Aboard the Niobe, I held the red pouch that my mother had so firmly pressed into my hand, and I thought about the days' worth of water between us. Then I thought about the weeks, months, years, decades of water to come. Time for me had always been measured in terms of the rising sun, its setting sister, and the dependable cycle of the moon. But at sea, I learned that time can also be measured in terms of water, in terms of the distance traveled while drifting on it. When measured in this way, nearer and farther are the path of time's movement, not continuously forward along a fast straight line. When measured in this way, time loops and curlicues, and at any given moment it can spiral me away and then bring me rushing home again. (Truong 190)

Bình queers conventional conceptions of time here, rejecting notions of linear continuity that map time as points along "a fast straight line." By bending the straight line into "loops and curlicues," Bình resists the very logic of "straightness" and instead conceives of time as a complex and fluid movement in which the past is irrevocably intertwined with the present. Through this queering of time, Truong asserts the multiplicity of temporalities and their uneven textures, the various ways they come to be felt by the body—as cycles of the moon, as distance traveled, as departure and arrival, as remembering and forgetting. Elizabeth Freeman has argued the value of theorizing queer temporalities, of the ways in which bodies are made and lived through varying experiences of time. She calls for a reimagining of "queer" "as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see[ing] the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality)" (Freeman 159). Truong achieves this "queering" through the interconnectedness of time and place in the

novel, forging a non-linear, counter-normative, transnational time in which every moment Bình experiences, every memory he recalls becomes entangled with the rest of the narrative.

After Bình's encounter with the stranger on the bridge, he thinks of the evening as an experience that is somehow "lost" to time: "Time that refuses to be translated into a tangible thing, time without a number or an ordinal assigned to it, is often said to be 'lost.' In a city that always looks better in a memory, time lost can make the night seem eternal and full of stars" (Truong 99). Bình remembers vaguely "a kiss on the mouth," "a hand on the hips," "a moan" and these become the signifiers of time—time not as the turning of the hands on a clock, but time as that which is felt on the body, as well as "the moments in between" (99). Bình here describes time as something utterly intangible, and something that can be returned to again and again ("I returned to the bridge alone. I always do") (100). Time becomes for Bình not a fleeting moment, but a feeling—a feeling of desire which refuses narration.[6] Of his tryst with Blériot, he says, "the space between our bodies began to disappear. Effortlessly we began to touch. Men like Bão always think that *this* is when the story really begins. But there is no narrative in sex . . . There is no beginning and there is no end, just the rub, the sting, the tickle, the white light of the here and now" (63). Bình queers his own sense of time through this refusal of narration; time becomes something felt—a sting of desire that can be remembered, relived, but not narrated or given over to history. This refusal of narration is a refusal of fixing a given experience within the constraints of linearity and completion that would banish it to the past ("there is no end"). Thus Bình's queering of time and narrative here becomes another means through which Truong challenges notions of normative history.

[6] Judith Halberstam has similarly described queer temporality as "the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage – reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death . . . It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and in to normativity" (Halberstam 182).

The refusal of narration, however, can be problematic in some ways, if it becomes a means of erasure and forgetting. Part of Bình's ghostly invisibility in Paris is this very refusal of the dominant culture to allow him a narrative. Granted, Bình writes his own narrative, but the imperative of exclusion that dictates the race and class hierarchies that oppress Bình become a means through which to foreclose Bình's story and put him under erasure. Describing the painful experience of interviewing for jobs as a domestic servant in Paris only to be rejected over and over again because of a past the French deem "suspect," Bình explains, "I am forced to admit that I am, to them, nothing but a series of destinations with no meaningful expanses in between" (18). Similar to the automatic pigeon-holing of Bình as an "Indochinese laborer, generalized and indiscriminate," the refusal of narration here is not a productive or transformative reworking of time, but a deliberate forgetting, a forced erasure of Bình's troubled past (and present and future) under colonial domination. Though there is this danger in the refusal of narration, there is also a potential remedy in the figure of the ghost.

Truong's ghosts, traveling through time and space, disrupting historicity and national boundary, challenging binaristic conceptions of identity, and subverting hierarchical structures, reveal the ways in which ghosts and hauntings are sites not only of loss and melancholia, but of resistance and transformation. Gordon writes,

> To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects. To impute a kind of objectivity to ghosts implies that, from certain standpoints, the dialectics of visibility and invisibility involve a constant negotiation between what can be seen and what is in the shadows. (18)

Truong's Bình began as a footnote in *The Alice B. Toklas Cook Book*, an afterthought, an inconsequential detail in the life of an icon. By interrogating that gap, by creating a story for

those lost to history, *The Book of Salt* exposes the ways in which absences can be felt as profound presences, that silence can speak meaningfully in unexpected ways. Bình radically transforms his own melancholic ghostliness, his "imposed invisibility" under the social hierarchies of colonial domination, into a productive process of redefining the foundations of identity and belonging. By disrupting the binary logics of heteronormativity, racial otherness, and diaspora, Truong suggests the productive potential of the psychic negotiations inherent in melancholic attachments that keep open our relationship to the past. In an interview about the novel, Truong describes how her own experience as a refugee of the Vietnam War influenced her writing:

> The departure, the loss of home, that act of refuge seeking have everything to do with the themes playing themselves out in *The Book of Salt*. There are no military conflicts in my novel, there are no soldiers, there are no weapons. I suppose it is no coincidence that the first long distance flight of my imagination as a writer would take me to a time in history when Vietnam was more or less at peace. When you are a child of wartime, peace is the all consuming fantasy. Also I think as a child of wartime, one of the questions that stays with me and that I've tried to answer for myself by writing this novel is what if there was not a war, what then would make a person leave the land of their birth behind? ("Interview")

Truong's explanation of how her own experiences as a refugee shaped the novel is itself deeply melancholic, and her desire to reimagine Vietnam as peaceful is a telling window into the trauma of war and displacement. Truong's "all consuming fantasy" of a peaceful Vietnam—and her mediation of that fantasy through fiction—acts perhaps as a way of mourning the loss of nation, family, and belonging that characterizes much of the Vietnamese American population. With *The Book of Salt*, Truong brings something new to the study of melancholia and loss, powerfully repositioning it at the nexus of queer theory, postcoloniality, and Asian diaspora studies.

Chapter 2

A Haunting Persistence: Internment's Specters of Trauma in Julie Otsuka's *When the Emperor Was Divine*

> I think that, for many Japanese-Americans, the war is just an episode they'd rather forget, because of the shame and the stigma they felt at being labeled "disloyal." And after the war so many families just wanted to get on with their lives, rather than dwell on the pain or the loss.
>
> -- Julie Otsuka, *Indiebound* interview

Julie Otsuka's 2002 novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* is suffused with the specters of loss and trauma produced through the internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. The novel, which follows one nameless Japanese American family interned in concentration camps during the war, is attentive to the multiple iterations of silence and invisibility that characterize not only the family's experience of internment, but their postwar American life as well. Haunted by the evacuation and internment, and the violent racialization of Japanese as enemy aliens, Otsuka's characters live in a shameful silence and imposed invisibility that comes to define their experience of race and American identity. The young boy—only about seven years old at the time of the evacuation—remembers the ubiquitous desert dust that invaded their internment camp barracks, in a telling example of traumatic invisibility:

> Always, he would remember the dust. It was soft and white and chalky, like talcum powder. Only the alkaline made your skin burn. It made your nose bleed. It made your eyes sting. It took your voice away. The dust got into your shoes. Your hair. Your pants. Your mouth. Your bed.
>
> Your dreams.
>
> It seeped under doors and around the edges of windows and through the cracks in the walls.
>
> And all day long, it seemed, his mother was always sweeping. Once in a while she would put down her broom and look at him. "What I wouldn't give," she'd say, "for my Electrolux."

> One evening, before he went to bed, he wrote his name in the dust across the top of the table. All through the night, while he slept, more dust blew through the walls.
>
> By morning his name was gone. (64)

The boy's memory of the relentless dust that erases his name from the table demonstrates at once the painful invisibility these families feel as they are removed from their homes and hidden in remote deserts, and the erasure of identity as each family is reduced to an identification number pinned to their collars.

But Otsuka emphasizes not only the dust's relentlessness, but also its searing whiteness. The white dust that makes one's "skin burn" and "took your voice away" speaks directly to the feelings of racial abjection produced through internment and the systematic criminalization of the Japanese racialized body. In the boy's memory we see at once the pain of this inescapable whiteness, but also its allure: the dust is "soft and white and chalky, like talcum powder," a silky, scented powder meant to soothe the skin. But the boy's desire for the soft comfort of the white dust is immediately rejected: "the alkaline made your skin burn." The passage metaphorizes the boy's pain at being in his own "yellow" body—the burning skin and stinging eyes antithetical to the powerful and unattainable whiteness that surrounds him and indicative of a painful racial melancholia. The image of his mother "always sweeping" to contain the dust, to clear their home—or, rather, their barrack—from the pain of the stinging white dust suggests the incessant labor—emotional and often physical—required to exist in a country that wishes to erase them. Further, the mother's longing for her Electrolux vacuum cleaner (which one of her neighbors steals from the family's home after the evacuation) conjures the image of an American Dream shattered, of belonging denied and replaced with the stigma of imprisonment. The great plumes of white dust that the family must continually work to contain serve as a stark metaphor for the

ongoing processes of Japanese racialization amidst "Yellow Peril" panic—an inescapable whiteness that terrorizes and constrains the definitions of American (and un-American) racial identity.

In this chapter, I argue that Otsuka's novel demonstrates how a particular Japanese racial form emerges in the U.S. as a result of the imposed invisibility and strategic forgetting of internment. The internment—and concomitant "Yellow Peril" depictions in mass media—signals a criminalization of their ethnicity and creates a racialized double consciousness in which Japanese Americans come to experience their Japaneseness as a racial problem to be managed, contained, and rendered invisible, even after the war. Japanese American racialization during this period is fundamentally conditioned by the demands of invisibility and accommodation. The very criminalization of the Japanese American body, I argue, paradoxically produces the "model minority."

In interviews about *When the Emperor Was Divine*, Julie Otsuka explains that her story of an unnamed Japanese American family—the main characters are referred to only as "the woman," "the girl," and "the boy"—interned in concentration camps during World War II was "almost an accidental book" ("Conversation"). "I had never planned to write a novel about the camps . . . But images of the war seemed to keep surfacing in my work, so clearly the camps were something I needed to write about" (Otsuka, "Interview"). Otsuka's interest in the internment of Japanese Americans is deeply rooted in her family's history—her grandfather was arrested by the FBI the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and her mother (eleven years old at the time), uncle, and grandmother were interned for three and a half years in Topaz, Utah ("Conversation"). She recalls sifting through a box of old letters and postcards her grandfather had written to his wife and children during the war, and describes it as like reading a story, "but a

rather one-sided story . . . a story with many gaps and holes. Also, the letters were censored, so I knew that there was a lot that wasn't being said" ("Conversation"). She recalls that her mother and grandmother did not talk much at all about the war or their time in the camp: "I don't know if [my mother] just chose not to tell me or if she really doesn't remember" ("Conversation"). Despite Otsuka's lack of first-hand experience, and despite her family hardly ever speaking of the internment, "images of the war seemed to keep surfacing," pushing her toward writing about the camps "almost accidentally," almost against her will.

The haunting power of silence and forgetting is a common theme amongst Japanese American writers and artists grappling with the after-effects of internment on the generations that preceded them, and the ways in which those effects/affects come to be felt by the children and grandchildren of internees decades later.[7] The silence and forgetting cannot erase the trauma of internment; the wounds resurface in a kind of transgenerational haunting of Sansei[8] cultural productions. Sometimes this forgetting is willful, an attempt to "get on with their lives, rather

[7] Rea Tajiri's 1991 experimental documentary *History and Memory: For Akiko and Takashige* imaginatively reconstructs her family's memories of the camps. She describes the experience of *feeling* that history within her, even though it predated her birth:
"I began searching for a history, my own history, because I had known all along the stories I had heard were not true and parts had been left out. I remember having this feeling growing up that I was haunted by something, that I was living within a family full of ghosts. There was this place that they knew about. I had never been there, yet I had a memory of it. I could remember a time of great sadness before I was born. We had been moved, uprooted. We had lived with a lot of pain. I had no idea where these memories came from, yet I knew the place." Similarly, Rahna Reiko Rizzuto, in her memoir *Hiroshima in the Morning*, reflects on her inspiration for writing her first novel, *Why She Left Us*, part of which is set in an internment camp in Colorado:
"My mother could not remember the camps, so I invented them for her. That's how my first novel began. I made them up, pulling from a mixed bag of the photographs that could be taken, from the questions that the man with the year book at the internment camp 'reunion' had asked […] I pulled from dreams. . . I recreated my mother's memories before she began to lose her own, and now she too cannot remember what is real. I have been left with fragments of my own creation, with fictions" (Rizzuto). Kerri Sakamoto, Japanese Canadian author of *The Electrical Field* (1998) and *One Hundred Million Hearts* (2003) expresses similar sentiments about growing up "in the shadow of internment":
"No one talked about internment—not the history books at school and certainly not my parents at home. There was a collective silence among Japanese Canadians that had to do with a sense of shame, a sense that somehow they were to blame for their incarceration . . . I grew up in the shadow of internment. I felt that history cast itself over the present because it remained perpetually unspoken." ("A Conversation with Kerri Sakamoto")

[8] Third-generation Japanese Americans

than dwell on the pain or the loss," as Otsuka explains; sometimes it is merely the passage of time, the intervening decades that have rendered those memories increasingly remote and foggy; and sometimes this forgetting is political, as internment gets rewritten as "relocation," or a regrettable yet understandable mistake made by an otherwise heroic nation at war. Yet, in spite of these multiple forgettings and invisibilities, the internment refuses to be forgotten. The next generation finds ways to remember around that "collective silence," as images and memories "keep surfacing," painfully and inexplicably.

Historical Context

Prior to the evacuation and internment, about 2,000 Japanese nationals were arrested by the FBI in the days immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and imprisoned for the duration of the war in camps run by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Most of these individuals were community organization leaders, Shinto and Buddhist religious leaders, Japanese language school teachers, and other prominent figures within Japanese American communities, and were arrested under a blanket presidential warrant which did not specify any reasons for the arrests (Chan 123). The mass evacuation and internment of approximately 120,000 mainland Japanese Americans[9] began with the President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, which allowed for the creation of special military zones by the U.S. War Department "from which any and all persons may be excluded as deemed necessary or desirable" (qtd. in Chan 125). Though Japanese Americans were not specified in the order as the group targeted for exclusion, the order was the direct result of

[9] Japanese Americans in Hawai'i, who made up about 37 percent of the territory's population and over half of the total Japanese American population in the U.S. and the territory of Hawai'i, were not evacuated or interned en masse during the war—a testament to the dubiousness of the claims of "military necessity" of the mainland evacuation and internment (Takaki 379).

months of internal administration debate over the potential threat of Japanese in the U.S. and was understood to apply specifically to Japanese Americans (Takaki 391).[10] Despite multiple intelligence reports that had determined that the Japanese Americans posed no military threat to the U.S., many top military officials and Roosevelt cabinet members pushed for mass evacuation (Ng 18). Though "military necessity" was the official rationale given for the evacuation and internment, this logic was widely questioned at the time. As has been well documented by historians Ronald Takaki, Wendy Ng, and Sucheng Chan, the guise of military necessity for the internment of Japanese Americans was merely a cover for mounting anti-Japanese sentiment in the West that placed heavy pressure on political figures to target the population in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor.

In April of 1942, a curfew was put in place for Japanese Americans on the west coast and the military posted evacuation notices stating that "all persons of Japanese ancestry, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above area by 12 o'clock noon, P.W.T., Thursday May 7, 1942" (qtd. in Takaki 392). In some areas, evacuees were given as little as 48 hours notice of the evacuation (Roxworthy 6). Evacuees were allowed to bring only what they could carry and were thus forced to sell almost all of their possessions, often far below value because buyers knew the Japanese had no choice.[11] They were sent first to temporary "assembly centers" at fairgrounds and racetracks for one to four months before being transferred to one of ten

[10] Roosevelt's later actions confirm this tacit understanding of the order as applying only to Japanese. When the War Department began discussing the possibility of applying Executive Order 9066 to Italians and Germans, Roosevelt wrote to Secretary of War Henry Stimson that this was "primarily a civilian matter except in the case of the Japanese mass evacuation on the Pacific Coast." The Japanese, Roosevelt explained, were "strangers from a different shore" (qtd. in Takaki 391-2).

[11] Estimates of material losses in Japanese American property, homes, and businesses as a result of evacuation and internment range from about $200 – 400 million (Roxworthy 3).

permanent "relocation centers" in isolated areas in the west and southwest.[12] The internment camps were located in areas deemed by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to be "at a safe distance" from military outposts (Ng 37).

The camps were constructed based on the army model, with barrack housing made from wooden planks and tar paper. Each camp was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and had a watchtower staffed with armed guards. Barracks were divided into several small rooms, each measuring approximately 20 by 25 feet, with one family occupying each one no matter the size of the family. Internees shared communal bathroom facilities with no privacy partitions, a source of great distress for many. Internees were permitted to leave the camps only under strictly limited circumstances.

One of the greatest controversies during internment was the army's decision early in 1943 to begin drafting Japanese Americans for a segregated combat team. The WRA, in conjunction with the U.S. army, administered a "loyalty questionnaire" to all Japanese Americans—citizens and non-citizens alike. The questionnaires contained only two questions; men were asked: "Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States in combat duty, wherever ordered?" and, "Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attacks 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?" Women were asked, "If the opportunity presents itself and you are found qualified, would you be willing to volunteer for the Army Nurse Corps or the W.A.C.?" and the second question for women was similar to that asked of the men (Chan 130). The questionnaire opened up sharp divides in the camps, with many eager to "prove" their

[12] Camps were located in Topaz, Utah; Poston, Arizona; Gila River, Arizona; Granada, California; Heart Mountain, Wyoming; Jerome, Arkansas; Manzanar, California; Minidoka, Idaho; Rohwer, Arkansas; and Tule Lake, California.

loyalty to the U.S. through service, while others were understandably offended by the implication of disloyalty inherent in the demand for forswearing allegiance to Japan—a country many of internees felt no strong connection to in the first place. Others, embittered by their wrongful imprisonment by the government, resented being asked to serve a country that would treat them so unjustly. Sucheng Chan notes that prior to the draft registration, only about 3,000 internees had applied for repatriation or expatriation to Japan, mostly Issei[13] and Kibei,[14] but "as a result of the tensions engendered by registration, by the beginning of 1945 more than 20,000 persons—almost 7,000 foreign-born and over 13,000 American-born—had done so" (131). However, the vast majority answered the questionnaire "yes-yes." Approximately 25,000 Nisei served in the military during World War II, including the segregated 442nd Regimental Combat Team, comprised mainly of former internees, which became the most decorated unit of its size during the war[15] (Chan 134).

Finally, on December 17, 1944, Public Proclamation 21 was issued, rescinding the mass exclusion orders. However, those who had been deemed "security risks," like the so-called "no-no boys" who resisted the loyalty questionnaire that would subject them to the draft, as well as those arrested by the FBI and deemed "enemy aliens," were not immediately released. Despite the end of the exclusion order, about 44,000 Japanese Americans were still living in internment camps when the war ended eight months later in August 1945. Some because they had no place to go after losing their homes when they were evacuated, others because they feared the violence they might face on the outside (Chan 139). The process of resettlement was a challenging and painful transition for internees, as they faced rebuilding their lives after crippling losses, both

[13] First generation Japanese immigrants
[14] American-born Japanese who returned to the U.S. after receiving their education in Japan
[15] The 442nd received seven Presidential Distinguished Unit Citations, 18,000 individual decorations, including a Congressional Medal of Honor, 47 Distinguished Service Crosses, 350 Silver Stars, 810 Bronze Stars, and more than 3,600 Purple Hearts (Chan 134).

material and otherwise. Many filed claims with the government for compensation for their property losses, but only a small percentage received compensation, and those who did were typically paid a paltry amount compared to their actual losses (Ng 108-9). It was not until 1988 that the U.S. government offered an official apology for internment, conceding that it was driven by "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership," and established a fund for a $20,000 redress payment to be paid to each surviving internee. Altogether, 82,219 people received the full redress payment.

Invisibility and Silence as Symptomatic Japanese Racial Forms

When the Emperor Was Divine is divided into five sections, each narrated from a different perspective. The first section, "Evacuation Order No. 19," narrated in third person from the perspective of the wife and mother, referred to only as "the woman," is set in the spring of 1942 in Berkeley on the eve of the evacuation. The second section, "Train," is narrated in the third person from the perspective of "the girl," and takes place four and a half months later on the train from the "assembly center" at Tanforan Racetrack—where the internees were housed in the horse stalls—to an internment camp in the Utah desert. The third section, "When the Emperor Was Divine," is the longest, focusing on the perspective of "the boy," and takes place during the family's nearly three and a half-year long internment. "In a Stranger's Backyard" catalogs the family's return to their Berkeley home and their subsequent reunion with the father, who had been imprisoned as an enemy alien in a labor camp since shortly after Pearl Harbor. This section, narrated in the first person plural "we" by the two children depicts the family's uneasy re-entry into civilian life and their attempts to cope with the changes wrought by war and the internment. The brief final chapter, "Confession," is narrated by the husband/father in an

angry, aggressive tone in which he "confesses" to every possible crime imagined by his imprisoners. He defiantly calls out the laundry list of racist stereotypes and assumptions that fueled his and his family's unjust imprisonment for nearly four years. The final chapter, a scant four pages, is radically different in tone and style from the rest of the novel, a point to which I will return.

Otsuka's novel could be considered a case study in silence, absence, and invisibility as the characters, who in many ways are oddly isolated from each other, despite their living in close quarters in the camp, grapple with their open-ended internment and their separation from the husband/father, the "detained enemy alien" who has not actually been accused of anything. Otsuka focuses intently on what and who is absent, and on what goes perpetually unsaid, unacknowledged, and the elaborate ways in which the evacuees are rendered invisible, by their government, by their fellow citizens, and even by themselves. Through these various iterations of invisibility and silence, Otsuka demonstrates the ways in which the experience of internment cultivates a distinctly racialized double consciousness, in which Japanese Americans learn to see themselves through the eyes of others, in part as a result of their intensifying internalized racism and in part as a strategic means of protection. This double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity," as W.E.B. DuBois so memorably put it, structures Japanese American racialization during this period (3). Thus, silence and invisibility come to function as symptomatic Japanese racial forms, a term I borrow from Colleen Lye. Lye distinguishes "racial form" from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's "racial formation," to emphasize the "radical variability" of racial significations over time and under specific historical

conditions (Lye, "Dialogue," 2).[16] She writes, "In the absence of a historical account of the Asian American subject, race construed as form rather than as formation may help us keep in focus how race is an active social relation rather than a transhistorical abstraction" (Lye, "Racial Form," 100). Drawing on Lye's conceptualization of race as form, I suggest that the trauma of internment marks a historical shift in Japanese racial form in the postwar U.S. Otsuka's novel, I maintain, illustrates the ways in which silence and invisibility, which emerge as traumatic response, become constitutive elements of Asian American racial form and the "model minority" stereotype.

Invisibility

The evacuation itself was staged in such a way as to make it deliberately invisible to the rest of the population. The evacuees were interned in remote deserts and other largely unpopulated areas in the west and southwest U.S., out of sight of the rest of the country. Over 120,000 people, over two-thirds of whom were American citizens, disappeared from their communities practically overnight. Otsuka demonstrates this abrupt vanishing through the "ghost trains" into which the evacuees are packed, with armed guards who order them to keep the shades down:

> Then the last shade went down and the darkness was complete and she could not see the soldier at all. Now she could not see anyone at all and no one outside the train could see her. There were the people inside the train and the people outside the train and in between them there were the shades. A man walking alongside the tracks would just see a train with black windows passing by in the middle of the day. He would think, There goes the train, and then he would not think about the

[16] Lye's *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945*, for example, links what she calls "Asiatic racial form" to the particular historical conditions of globalization and industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and their attendant anxieties over Asian labor.

> train again. He would think about other things. What was for supper, maybe, or who was winning the war. She knew it was better this way. The last time they had passed through a city with the shades up someone had thrown a rock through one of the windows. (28-9)

This act of imposed invisibility paradoxically marks the Japanese American evacuees as Racially other. While the order is ostensibly for their own protection against racist violence—as the girl concedes, "it was better this way"—it likewise teaches the evacuees that they must hide themselves, marginalize themselves, become silent and invisible to avoid detection by whites whose racial antipathy may be stirred by the very sight of them. It forces them into a state of invisibility as a constitutive condition of their racialization. Further, this act of rendering the evacuees invisible is an act of boundary-making signified by the shade that separates the evacuees from everyone else outside: "There were the people inside the train and the people outside the train and in between them there were the shades." The girl's awareness of the shades, her fixation on them and on the armed guard who walks through the train repeating "Shades down. Shades down," is a stark demonstration of the traumatic racialization the family undergoes during the evacuation and internment. The separating shade, and the gun that enforces that separation, become painful signs of a dangerous racial difference. This difference is underlined in the girl's imagination of who may be on the other side of those shades: a man who does not, cannot, see them. "A man walking alongside the tracks would just see a train with black windows passing by in the middle of the day. He would think, There goes the train, and then he would not think about the train again. He would think about other things. What was for supper, maybe, or who was winning the war." This man on the other side of the shades has the luxury of "not think[ing] about the train again," the luxury of "think[ing] about other things," the luxury of life going on, precisely because the girl and the rest of the Japanese Americans are

invisible, ghostly, there-but-not-there. Whether housed in horse stalls at abandoned racetracks, shuttled on "ghost trains" with the shades down, or imprisoned in internment camps in remote deserts, the internees are deliberately and systematically rendered invisible to the broader American public.

This invisibility continues even after the internees return to their homes after the war, through painful acts of willed forgetting by the other members of the community. When the family returns to their Berkeley home after nearly four years of imprisonment, the community's indifference to their plight renders them invisible all over again as no one will acknowledge either their absence or their presence, echoing the same apathy the family witnessed at the initial evacuation:

> The town seemed much the same as before . . . In the windows of the houses on our block we saw the faces of our old friends and neighbors: the Gilroys and the Myers, the Leahys, the Wongs, the two elderly Miss O'Gradys, from whose yard not a single tossed ball had ever been returned. They had all seen us leave, at the beginning of the war, had peered out through their curtains as we walked down the street with our enormous overstuffed suitcases. But none of them came out, that morning, to wish us goodbye, or good luck, or ask us where it was we were going (we didn't know). None of them waved . . .
>
> Now when we ran into these same people on the street they turned away and pretended not to see us. Or they nodded in passing and said, 'Gorgeous day,' as though we had not been away at all. Once in a while someone would stop and ask our mother where we had been—'Haven't seen you for a while,' that person might say, or 'It's been *ages*'—and our mother simply lifted her head and smiled and replied, 'Oh, away'" (115).

This utter obliviousness seeks to erase the intervening three and a half years of the Japanese American family's life, seeks to either ignore or deny the fact of internment "as though we had

not been away at all." The children, too, feel the sting of their own invisibility as they realize upon their return to school that "not a single one of our old friends from before . . . came up to us to say, 'Welcome back,' or 'Good to see you,' or even seemed to remember who we were" (121). In her study of Japanese Americans in postwar American culture, Caroline Chung Simpson considers how the internment, and the deliberate forgetting of it, haunts American national identity throughout the postwar period. The internment troubles American postwar self-perceptions by disrupting tidy narratives of the U.S.-as-savior or moral beacon for the world. These contradictions make the allure of forgetfulness and silence all the more potent: "During the remarkable period of internment, and despite the public's obvious awareness of internment and the major social scientific interest in it, little was written in the popular press about the mass movement of mainland Japanese Americans, primarily because it conflicted with the focus on the more positive and inspirational deeds and causes of the war. The war against the tyranny and oppression of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan often necessitated portraying the United States as a virtual paragon of democratic virtues" (Simpson 9). When the family's neighbors "turned away and pretended not to see" the Japanese American family, they not only repeat that initial enactment of invisibility at the moment of evacuation, but they also render invisible the violent history of loss and trauma the family now carries with them. This refusal to name and confront the internment after the war functions as a secondary violence of erasure—and, importantly, one that the mother mimics with her easy smile and vague explanation that they have simply been "away."

Having been uprooted, stripped of their rights, and imprisoned without charge for years, the newly "free" Japanese Americans are all too aware of the fragility of their status as Americans. Otsuka demonstrates how carefully the family works to shore up that fragility

through a strategic denial and forgetting of their history that constitutes a traumatic self-negation. Lisa Lowe argues that for the American racialized subject, the entrance into "abstract citizenship" requires forgetting:

> for Asians within the history of the United States—as for African Americans, Native Americans, or Chicanos—'political emancipation' through citizenship is never an operation confined to the negation of individual 'private' particulars; it requires the negation of a history of social relations that publicly racialized groups and successively constituted those groups as 'nonwhites' ineligible for citizenship.' For Asian immigrants from Vietnam, Korea, or the Philippines, this negation involves 'forgetting' the history of war in Asia and adopting the national historical narrative that disavows the existence of an American imperial project. It requires acceding to a political fiction of equal rights that is generated through the denial of history, a denial that reproduces the omission of history as the ontology of the nation. (26-7)

The mother's insipid response that they've been "away" is an act of willed forgetting, of wishing her family's experience back into the realm of the invisible, the unspeakable, the spectral. To narrate her experience, to make visible to her neighbors the injustice they've endured, would be to disavow what Lowe calls "the American feeling" that forges the center of the "abstract citizen" (2). The "American feeling," is the mythos of American prosperity and progress, of opportunity and equality promised and delivered to all. "In being represented as citizen within the political sphere," Lowe argues, "the subject is 'split off' from the unrepresentable histories of situated embodiment that contradict the abstract form of citizenship" (2). To name her grievance, to challenge the legitimacy and motivations of the state that imprisoned them for "national security" reasons, would be to sever her tenuous ties to citizenship all over again.

Similarly, after the children return, they do everything they can not just to blend back into school life, but to utterly disappear. The children's desire for invisibility is not only a response to the trauma they've endured during internment, but also a careful performance of their conditionally re-bestowed citizenship. The instructions the Japanese Americans receive in the lecture on "How to Behave in the Outside World" are essentially a directive to disappear:

> And so we mostly kept to ourselves. We moved silently through the halls with our eyes fixed on some imaginary point far off in the distance. If there was whispering behind us—and there was—we did not hear it. If the other students called out to us unkindly—and they did, not often, but often enough—we did not hear them. In class we sat in the back where we hoped we would not be noticed. (*Keep your head down and don't cause any trouble,* we'd been told, weeks before, in a mess hall lecture on "How to Behave in the Outside World." *Speak only English. Do not walk down the street in groups of more than three, or gather in restaurants in groups of more than five. Do not draw attention to yourselves in any way.)* We spoke softly and did not raise our hands, not even when we knew the answers. We followed the rules . . . Always, we were polite.
>
> We said yes and no and no problem.
>
> We said thank you.
>
> Go ahead.
>
> After you.
>
> Don't mention it.
>
> Don't worry about it.
>
> Don't even think about it.
>
> When our teachers asked us if everything was all right we nodded our heads and said yes, of course, everything was fine. (121-122, emphasis in original)

As with the "shades down" refrain, the instructions to keep one's head down and not draw attention to oneself demonstrate the ways in which the internment and its aftermath are

structured around a demand for invisibility. The children's potent fear of being re-branded as "The Enemy" makes them obsessively careful about moving through the world without being noticed; it is a studied and strategic enactment of invisibility, partly as protection and partly as a result of their increasing internalized racism.

We see in the family's postwar performance of re-assimilation how fully their experience of racial embodiment has been shaped by internment's demand for invisibility. This invisibility, imposed from outside during the war, is now imposed from within through the self-regulating force of racial shame. The coercive passivity illustrated in the passage above through the children's nervous silence and studied obsequiousness speaks to the uneasy connections between the racial traumas of internment and postwar "model minority" behavior. Through their experience of internment, the children have developed a distinctly racialized double consciousness, ever careful to see themselves through the eyes of others to avoid any further "trouble." The children appear to shrink into themselves in the classroom, in an attempt to escape notice, to make their return as unobtrusive as possible. Otsuka illustrates how fundamentally the processes of Japanese racialization in the postwar U.S. are conditioned by internment's specters of trauma.

Silence

As a key supplement to the motif of invisibility, Otsuka also demonstrates the centrality of silence to the family's experience of trauma and loss. They consistently refuse to address their father's absence or talk about the war. Nearly all of the (uniformly positive) memories of the husband/father are never spoken. Their grieving is incredibly internal and isolated. They all talk around his absence, in a form of denial of what has happened:

> He [the boy] received a letter from his father written on thin lined sheets of paper. *Of course we have toothpaste in Lordsburg. How else do you expect us to brush our teeth?* His father thanked him for the postcard of the Mormon Tabernacle. He said he was fine. Everything was fine. He was sure they would see each other one day soon. Be good to your mother, he wrote. Be patient. *And remember, it's better to bend than to break.*
>
> Not once did he mention the war (78, emphasis in original).

The talk in the letters about the weather, about how often he showers, about toothpaste are an inadequate covering over of the obvious pain of separation, especially for the boy, whose longing for the absent father is most acute. Of course, the rigid censorship of correspondence also prevents any direct address about what is happening to him, further rendering that experience shrouded in silence and unspeakability. But even after the father's return, over four years after his arrest, the family cannot bear to speak of the past:

> He never said a word to us about the years he'd been away. Not one word. He never talked about politics, or his arrest, or how he had lost all his teeth. He never mentioned his loyalty hearing before the Alien Enemy Control Unit. He never told us what it was, exactly, he'd been accused of. Sabotage? Selling secrets to the enemy? Conspiring to overthrow the government? Was he guilty as charged? Was he innocent? (Was he even there at all?) We didn't know. We didn't want to know. We never asked. All we wanted to do, now that we were back in the world, was forget. (133)

The desire to just forget, as with the children's studied silence, is in part strategic. To speak out, to break the silence, would be to become the enemy all over again, to be sure. But silence is also, of course, a telltale sign of trauma. The Japanese phrase "shikata ga nai," meaning "it cannot be helped," has often been used as an explanation for Japanese Americans' apparent acquiescence to evacuation and internment, a kind of cultural fatalism that discouraged mass

protest or resistance. Joy Kogawa's 1981 novel *Obasan* about the internment of Japanese Canadians employs the phrase as a mournful refrain, and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's memoir *Farewell to Manzanar* likewise uses the phrase to describe the common sentiment of Japanese during internment. Recent scholarship, like that of Emily Roxworthy, however, has challenged the conventional reading of this silence as a cultural quirk of stoic acceptance, arguing that such a reading "has been used to justify and minimize the impact of the internment" and ignores the role of silence as a "structural outgrowth" of trauma (Roxworthy 1, 2).

The silence at the center of the family after internment, particularly surrounding the father's arrest, incarceration, and apparent torture during the war, signals the profound psychic cost exacted from the family that continues to haunt them through its very unspeakability. The children's assertion that they "didn't want to know" what happened to their father is belied by the almost frantic string of questions that pepper the passage above, as they wonder what the accusations against him were: "Sabotage? Selling secrets to the enemy? Conspiring to overthrow the government? Was he guilty as charged? Was he innocent? (Was he even there at all?)" Shoshana Felman describes "'the gaping, vertiginous black hole'" of silence that characterizes the experience of trauma: "The impossibility of speaking and, in fact of listening, otherwise than through this silence, otherwise than through this black hole both of knowledge and of words, corresponds to the impossibility of remembering and of forgetting" (65). This "impossibility of speaking" marks the family's difficulty in fully assimilating what has happened; the sudden and world-shaking incarceration of their father, followed by their forced removal from their homes, their lives, from everything they've known, is impossible to process—especially for the children. This fraught silence indicates more than just the impulse to move on and reassimilate as quickly and seamlessly as possible, as the children suggest; it signals the painful contradictions inherent

in the relationship of remembering and forgetting the traumatic past—a past that in many ways still feels unreal, remote, outside of time and narratibility.

Criminalized Bodies and Model Subjects as Racial Spectacle

Otsuka emphasizes how the process of Japanese racialization during the war is inextricably bound up with the mass criminalization of Japanese ethnicity staged as spectacle. The internment functions as a moment of mass racial interpellation, a national public othering of Japanese Americans that circumscribes the boundaries of national belonging. The boy's memory of his father being arrested after Pearl Harbor illustrates the humiliating spectacle of this othering:

> They had come for him just after midnight. Three men in suits and ties and black fedoras with FBI badges under their coats. 'Grab your toothbrush,' they'd said. This was back in December, right after Pearl Harbor, when they were still living in the white house on the wide street in Berkeley not far from the sea. The Christmas tree was up, and the whole house smelled of pine, and from his window the boy had watched as they led his father out across the lawn in his bathrobe and slippers to the black car that was parked at the curb.
>
> He had never seen his father leave the house without his hat on before. That was what had troubled him most. No hat. And those slippers: battered and faded, with the rubber soles curling up at the edges. If only they had let him put on his shoes then it all might have turned out differently. But there had been no time for shoes.
>
> *Grab your toothbrush.*
>
> *Come on. Come on. You're coming with us.*
>
> *We just need to ask your husband a few questions.*
>
> *Into the car, Papa-san.*
>
> Later, the boy remembered seeing lights on in the house next door, and faces pressed to the window. (74)

The boy feels a haunting humiliation as he keeps reliving the moment of his father's arrest, as he sees him dragged out in the most undignified way in his robe and slippers, and sans hat. The way he is belittled and emasculated before the entire neighborhood is so unsettling for the boy; it's almost as if he just cannot bring the two images together—his idealized vision of the perfect, loving father on the one hand, and the pathetic, criminalized, and feminized image on the other. This traumatic moment of gendered racial interpellation that the boy witnesses is destabilizing in the most painfully emotional way, and images of this scene echo throughout the chapter the boy narrates. He cannot move on from this scene; he relives it, painfully, as the repetitive injury of trauma, as it comes to define his own understanding of his racial identity and his experiences of racial embodiment. In "Racial Naturalization," Devon Carbado argues that racism in America is not solely a means of exclusion, as has so often been argued, but is simultaneously a process of *inclusion*, as the experience of racism comes to structure and define the meaning of what it is to be an American for the racialized subject (637). He argues that racial minorities are "naturalized" into the American racial body politic through the process of racial interpellation. Carbado further argues that (white) onlookers bearing witness to this scene of racial naturalization is a key component of the American racial economy:

> Passersby comfortably engaged in conspicuous racial consumption. The racial product was a familiar public spectacle: white law enforcement officers disciplining black men. The currency of their stares purchased for them precisely what it took away from us: race pleasure and a sense of racial comfort and safety. This racial dialectic is a natural part of, and helps to sustain, America's racial economy, an economy within which racial bodies are differentially valued, made into property, and invested with social meaning. No doubt, our policed presence confirmed what the onlooking racial interpellators already 'knew': that we were criminals. (635)

Carbado's analysis is useful here, as the moment of racial interpellation at the hands of the sneering FBI agents who derisively refer to the boy's father as "*Papa-san*" becomes a key flashpoint in the boy's own understanding of his racial identity as abject, criminal, worthy of suspicion. He participates in the racial spectacle, but as a spectator once removed: he watches the neighbors watching his father's humiliation and his own racial body is disciplined by proxy, through the FBI agents' Althusserian hail and through the gaze of the "onlooking racial interpellators."

In part what happens as a result of the father's arrest and the family's internment is the emergence of a criminalized subjectivity that begins horribly skewing the family's (but especially the children's) self-perceptions. As Carbado puts it, "we experienced a loss of dignity, and our race had been established—once more—as a crime of identity" (636). The boy, haunted by the father's absence as he relives the spectacle of the arrest, struggles at once with feelings of pain and sympathy for his father and with feelings of revulsion at his very Japanese-ness, as "Japanese" becomes synonymous with "Enemy" and "criminal":

> In the beginning the boy thought he saw his father everywhere. Outside the latrines. Underneath the showers. Leaning against barrack doorways. Playing *go* with the other men in their floppy straw hats on the narrow wooden benches after lunch. Above them blue skies. The hot midday sun. No trees. No shade. Birds.
>
> It was 1942. Utah. Late summer. A city of tar-paper barracks behind a barbed-wire fence on a dusty alkaline plain high up in the desert. The wind was hot and dry and the rain rarely fell and wherever the boy looked he saw him: Daddy, Papa, Father, *Oto-san*.
>
> For it was true, they all looked alike. Black hair. Slanted eyes. High cheekbones. Thick glasses. Thin lips. Bad teeth. Unknowable. Inscrutable. That was him, over there.
>
> The little yellow man. (Otsuka 49)

The boy's father, taken from their Berkeley home by the FBI and then imprisoned in labor camps as an enemy alien for over four years without charges, takes on a ghostly presence throughout much of the novel as his wife, daughter, and son narrate their experiences of the evacuation and internment. Fleeting memories and reminders of the absent husband and father permeate the text as the family attempts to cope with the crippling uncertainties of their future in the U.S. In the passage above, the boy's fixation on his lost father, his seeing him everywhere in the camp, is indicative not only of the pain of being separated from his beloved father and the anguish of wondering whether he'll ever return, but also of the children increasingly seeing themselves through the lens of stereotype and war propaganda. The boy's fantasies of seeing his father everywhere around him, his sadness and longing for the loving man who called him "champ" and whistled Cole Porter songs to him while cooking breakfast, quickly gives way to a disgusted description of "the little yellow man." The series of names for his father, "Daddy. Papa. Father. *Oto-san*" moves from the affectionate "Daddy," to the more formal and detached "Father," then finally to "Oto-san," which the boy himself, who does not speak Japanese, would never use. This further demonstrates how the boy's view of his father devolves under the weight of his quickly intensifying internalized racism, the foreign "oto-san" echoing the derisive "*Into the car, Papa-san*" that the FBI agents spit at the father when they arrest him (Otsuka 74). The boy rationalizes his hallucinations by agreeing with the racist assertion that Asians "all look alike," and his descriptions of the abject "yellow man"— "Black hair. Slanted eyes. High cheekbones. Thick glasses. Thin lips. Bad teeth. Unknowable. Inscrutable"—are pulled straight from the wartime propaganda.

Anti-Japanese propaganda posters from the period drew on cartoonish, exaggerated images of the Japanese as conniving, soulless, and monstrous. The boy's confused longing for

Figure 1.

"Tokio Kid" was featured in a series of propaganda posters urging American workers to increase their productivity and cut down on waste. Each of the ads begins with the same phrase, "Tokio Kid Say—," and features the same bloody knife and exaggerated, animalistic fangs dripping with saliva.

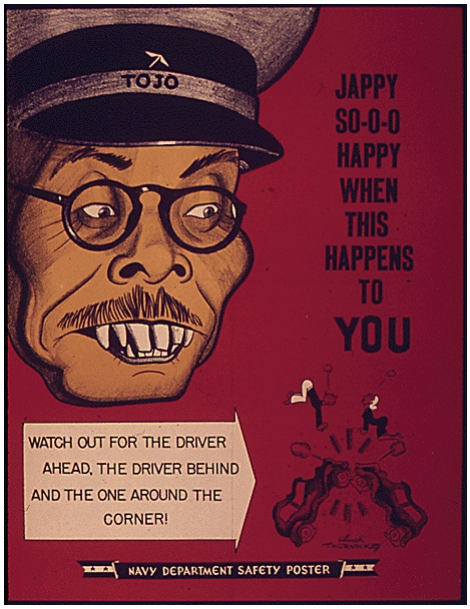

Figure 2.

Safety poster featuring General Tojo, Prime Minister of Japan during WWII. Note the same exaggerated, fang-like teeth.

Figure 3.

WII Propaganda poster depicted the Japanese enemy as ape-like.

his father that gives way to embarrassed revulsion toward the "little yellow man" suggests the boy's growing racial consciousness fueled by popular cultural representations. The boy's description hews closely to the depictions of Japanese men on World War II propaganda posters. A series of posters released during the war featured "Tokio Kid," a Japanese man with barely visible eyes behind oversized thick, red glasses and a tiny cap bearing the Japanese battle flag perched on his head (see *Figure 1*). His giant, be-fanged grin drips with saliva, mimicking the blood that drips from the dagger clenched in his hand. The depiction renders the figure simultaneously buffoonish and frighteningly bloodthirsty. General Tojo, prime minister of Japan during the war, is depicted similarly in a Navy Department safety poster (see *Figure 2*). Tojo's sallow skin and oversized fang-like teeth make him appear monstrous and predatory. Other posters steered clear of the cartoonish buffoonery and mischief of "Tokio Kid," but still emphasized the murderous inhumanity of the enemy Japanese. The "This is the Enemy" poster (*Figure 3*) shows a towering and ape-like Japanese soldier, with knife in hand and long, pointed claws, hungrily reaching for the screaming white woman in front of him. This ad makes explicit the figuring of the Japanese enemy specifically as a threat to whiteness, as the glowing yellow claw of the animalistic Japanese nearly pushes the beautiful and delicate white woman out of the frame. Each of these ads renders not just "the enemy," but Japanese in general as subhuman, bloodthirsty, and grotesque. These images, which typify mass media depictions of Japanese during the period, warp the boy's sense of self as the word "enemy" comes to circulate in the culture in specifically racialized terms.

The quick elision of "enemy" and "Asian" that the boy sees all around him reworks his own sense of embodiment in strictly racialized and criminalized terms. He increasingly begins to take on the presumed guilt of the Japanese subject:

> Sometimes he heard the wind blowing through the sagebrush and he remembered he was in the desert but he could not remember how long he had been there, or why. Sometimes he worried he was there because he'd done something horribly, terribly wrong. But then when he tried to remember what that horrible, terrible thing might be, it would not come to him. It could be anything. Something he'd done yesterday—chewing the eraser off his sister's pencil before putting it back in the pencil jar—or something he'd done a long time ago that was just now catching up with him. (57)

If he is an enemy, he must have done something wrong. He comes to internalize the racist assumption that to be Japanese is necessarily to be disloyal, to be barbaric, to be the enemy. His race has become a "crime of identity" and he struggles with how to make sense of this feeling of always being suspect (Carbado 636). Later, the boy deliberately reenacts this "crime of identity" in an exaggerated performance of Japanese stereotype:

> He narrowed his eyes and stuck out his two front teeth.
>
> *I predge arregiance to the frag . . .*
>
> *Whatsamalla, Shorty?*
>
> *Solly. So so solly*" (87)

Here, the boy mimics the representations of the Japanese "enemy" in the war posters in an ambiguous moment of excessive racial performance. While it's unclear if the boy is further internalizing the stereotypes he sees around him, or if he is making fun of them, it is clear that he is keenly aware of how he and his family are being racially constructed visually and linguistically by the broader culture. Otsuka lays bare here the boy's racialized double consciousness in which he is hyperaware of how he is seen by others.

After the family's release from the internment camp, the children painfully attempt to reassimilate into their old lives, but we see clearly their increasingly troubled racial embodiment

and the extent to which they've internalized that criminalized subjectivity. By the time they return to their Berkeley home, their psychic transformation through the trauma of racial abjection is complete, as they recoil at the very sight of themselves. But, ironically, the conflation of "Japanese" and "Enemy" works to produce the model racialized subject—silent, obsequious, deferent, and afraid to complain, afraid to "make trouble":

> We kept up with the stories in the papers. *More Rescued Prisoners Tell of Japan's Torture Camps. Some Forced to Wear Metal Bits, Others Starved to Death. Trapped Yanks Doused with Gasoline and Turned into Human Torches.* We listened to the interviews on the radio. *Tell me, soldier, has it made a big difference to you, losing your leg?* We look at ourselves in the mirror and did not like what we saw: black hair, yellow skin, slanted eyes. The cruel face of the enemy.
>
> We were guilty.
>
> *Just put it behind you.*
>
> No good.
>
> *Let it go.*
>
> A dangerous people.
>
> *You're free now.*
>
> Who could never be trusted again.
>
> *All you have to do is* behave.
>
> On the street we tried to avoid our own reflections wherever we could. We turned away from shiny surfaces and storefront windows. We ignored the passing glances of strangers. *What kind of 'ese' are you, Japanese or Chinese?* (119-20, emphasis in original)

> If we did something wrong we made sure to say excuse me (excuse me for looking at you, excuse me for sitting here, excuse me for coming back). If we did something terribly wrong we immediately said we were sorry (I'm sorry I touched your arm, I didn't mean to, it was an accident, I didn't see it resting there so

> quietly, so beautifully, so perfectly, so irresistibly, on the edge of the desk, I lost my balance and brushed against it by mistake, I was standing too close, I wasn't watching where I was going, somebody pushed me from behind, I never wanted to touch you, I have always wanted to touch you, I will never touch you again, I promise, I swear . . .). (121-3)

Looking in the mirror and seeing the "cruel face of the enemy" makes them all the more determined to be the perfect postwar citizens, to always know their proper place. As Robert G. Lee argues, "the construction of the model minority was based on the political silence of Asian America," and the wartime internment of Japanese Americans had a cooling effect not just on the targeted community but on Asian Americans broadly (151). The passages above demonstrate how fully the children have come to understand (and fear) their status as Americans as tenuous and contestable, able to be revoked at any given moment. They are bewildered by the flatly contradictory ways in which their reentry into civilian life is staged: they are simultaneously guilty ("a dangerous people") and innocent ("free now"). There is no means through which the children can understand what's happened to them, illogical as it is. The ongoing xenophobia and skepticism from those around them—*"which kind of 'ese' are you?"*—reinforces the narrative of criminality and dangerousness that led to their imprisonment in the first place. The children's sense of self is utterly distorted by the racial logics of internment, to the point that they begin to imagine everything they do as a potential crime; accidentally brushing against someone's arm is "terribly wrong," and just looking at someone sets off a string of "excuse me's," steeped in shame and humiliation. As Lee and others have noted, the "model minority myth" has relied since its emergence on an essentialized view of Asians that points to "an unspecified and decontextualized traditional Asian culture" in which "tradition" is "reduced to the values of obedience, discipline, and motivation enacted by the family" (186). This is a fiction that persists

to this day—a recent Pew Research report "The Rise of Asian Americans" is a key example.[17] But Otsuka critically demonstrates here how the silence and obedience of the Japanese American family after internment are structured not by ashistoric "traditions" of Japanese silence, obedience, and obsequiousness, but by the traumatic experience of mass racial interpellation and criminalization.

Disrupting Domestic Calm, Countering Silence

Otsuka carefully and crucially supplements the ongoing motifs of silence and invisibility with repeated ruptures in the seeming calm and quietude of the ordinary and domestic scenes she depicts with such detail. Through these shocking ruptures she suggests that, in spite of the deep desire to deny and to forget, these violent histories cannot be fully repressed; they keep returning, keep bubbling to the surface. One of the primary ways in which internment was justified and minimized was through reference to Japanese Americans' acquiescence to it, to their lack of mass protest or bitterness (Roxworthy 1). Marita Sturken argues that the World War II internment of Japanese Americans is a "historical event marked by silences and strategic forgetting" and exists in the national imaginary as a kind of "absent presence" (692). She attributes this, in part, to the lack of memorable image-icons depicting internment— a result not

[17] The opening paragraph of the report reads: "Asian Americans are the highest-income, best-educated and fastest-growing racial group in the United States. They are more satisfied than the general public with their lives, finances and the direction of the country, and they place more value than other Americans do on marriage, parenthood, hard work and career success." While it is true that, on average, Asian Americans have higher levels of educational and economic attainment compared with other groups, the report fails to contextualize the shift as result of selective immigration policies that favor highly skilled technical and professional labor, and instead reifies long-standing stereotypes of Asians. The report likewise downplays the bipolar nature of the community, in which Asian Americans tend to be clustered at opposing ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. The report's conclusions are further weakened by its use of median household income, rather than per capita income, as the primary indicator of economic wellbeing. Asian American families are more likely to have multiple generations under one roof, with multiple sources of income, which skews these figures. See Julianne Hing's *Colorlines* analysis, "Asian Americans Respond to Pew: We're Not Your Model Minority."

only of the government's control and censorship of images of the concentration camps, but also of the existing images' failure to conform to familiar narratives of war: "It could be argued that the internment produced an image both too disruptive and too domestic to conform to the war's narratives. These were not aggressive enemies who were easily demonized. They were profoundly ordinary and too close to the ideal of hard-working Americans for comfort . . . the internment of the Japanese Americans ultimately can find no such traditional narrative—of either conflict, resistance, or brutal injustice. Its images are overwhelmed by their sense of the ordinary and the domestic, outside of the discourse of war" (694). Whereas Sturken suggests the "hyperdomesticity" of the camps poses a representational and narrative problem for remembering internment, Otsuka's style revels in details of the quotidian. Sturken argues that "[t]o properly memorialize the camps and their survivors would mean to rethink the myth of America's actions in World War II, a myth that even now remains resolutely intact" (Sturken 704). Otsuka's novel does this emphatically, but not by de-emphasizing the ordinary and the domestic, nor by reframing the event in more readily digestible and memorable terms through the charged emotionality of conflict, resistance, and brutality but, rather, by highlighting the ordinary and the everyday to expose the painful contradictions and injustices of internment. Her direct, spare prose is calm and almost quiet, enacting stylistically the painful silences and absences that remain.

Throughout the novel, Otsuka dwells on images of the ordinary and the everyday, even amidst the pain and panic of the initial evacuation order:

> The sign had appeared overnight. On billboards and trees and the backs of the bus-stop benches. It hung in the window of Woolworth's. It hung by the entrance to the YMCA. It was stapled to the door of the municipal court and nailed, at eye level, to every telephone pole along University Avenue. The woman was

> returning a book to the library when she saw the sign in a post office window. It was a sunny day in Berkeley in the spring of 1942 and she was wearing new glasses and could see everything clearly for the first time in weeks. She no longer had to squint but she squinted out of habit anyway. She read the sign from top to bottom and then, still squinting, she took out a pen and read the sign from top to bottom again. The print was small and dark. Some of it was tiny. She wrote down a few words on the back of a bank receipt, then turned around and went home to pack. (Otsuka 3)

The signs ordering the evacuation of all Japanese Americans appear amidst the banality of daily life—going to the library to return a book, visiting the eye doctor, stopping at the bank. The ubiquity of the signs almost gives a sense of the evacuation order following her, closing in on her. She cannot go anywhere without seeing the signs that name her as other, as alien, as enemy. Otsuka's description of this initial encounter with Evacuation Order No. 19 saturates the landscape with the order's reproach. Yet, in spite of the order's demand, the woman's reaction is completely restrained, emotionless. She simply reads the sign, jots down the information, and returns home to begin packing. Most of the chapter continues in this vein, the woman barely reacting to the upheaval of her and her family's lives. The tone is detached, resigned, as the woman goes about her daily tasks calmly—she sends the two kids off to school, stops by the pharmacy, buys a daily newspaper, goes to the hardware store for packing tape and twine, prepares dinner, instructs the children to do their homework, and so on. Otsuka steeps the chapter in minute details of the household and the mother's tasks as she prepares for the evacuation. She paints a picture of domestic normalcy in which the woman chats affectionately with her children over dinner and comforts her little boy in the night when the sound of the rain on the roof scares him. She tells her daughter to practice for her piano lesson on Thursday, even though she won't be there for it, offering the reassurance of continuity in the face of grave

uncertainty. The domesticity of the scenes and the almost placid tone throughout the chapter gesture toward a smoothing over of the reality of the impending evacuation.

But Otsuka does not allow this domestic quiet to hum along undisturbed. Though the tone is calm and the woman maintains her composure with her children as she efficiently prepares for their departure, a palpable anxiety roils beneath the surface, erupting repeatedly over the course of the chapter. Otsuka's juxtaposition of the ordinary and the domestic alongside the painful and the traumatic suggests the impossibility of containing this injustice. Otsuka plays with existing national narratives of internment, advanced by government propaganda that depict the evacuation and internment as a "benevolent exercise in civil obedience" (Sturken 691-2). The woman's restraint, her resignation is barely held together as she copes with what is happening. The image of a "dark stain" repeats three times in the chapter, each marking an unruly rupture in the veneer of domestic harmony and composure that was so often used as evidence that the internment was not, in fact, unjust.

The first image of a "dark stain" occurs at the hardware store, where the woman has gone to buy tape and twine to finish her packing. It is clear from their banter that the woman and the store owner, Joe Lundy, know each other and are on friendly enough terms as neighbors. When the woman approaches the register and pays for her items, Lundy resists:

> He pushed the quarters back toward her across the counter but he did not look at her. 'You can pay me later,' he said. Then he began to wipe the side of the register with a rag. There was a dark stain there that would not go away.
>
> 'I can pay you now,' said the woman.
>
> 'Don't worry about it,' said Joe Lundy. He reached into his shirt pocket and gave her two caramel candies wrapped in gold foil. 'For the children,' he said. She slipped the caramels into her purse but left the money. She thanked him for the candy and walked out of the store. (5-6)

Lundy clearly feels guilty about what is happening to this family that he knows, that has been to his store enough that he even recognizes that the woman is wearing new glasses as soon as she walks in. But he is incapable of directly addressing the evacuation, expressing his disapproval of the order, or of otherwise finding any way of sympathizing with the woman. The evacuation is looming over the entire town, but no one seems capable of naming it, of acknowledging it fully. Lundy's obvious discomfort—his refusal to meet the woman's gaze, his guiltily offering her the items for free and the candies for the children—disrupts and unsettles the scene, betraying the charade of their small talk. The "dark stain there that would not go away" speaks to the injustice not only of the evacuation and internment, but also of the shameful silence surrounding it, the reluctance of the other members of the community, friends and neighbors of the evacuees, to speak out.

This "dark stain" repeats shortly thereafter in a shocking and violent disruption of the domestic space of the home. As the woman goes about her daily tasks, she steps out into the backyard to feed her beloved dog, White Dog. Her mind wanders as she sits in the yard with him:

> She stood up and walked across the yard and White Dog followed her. The narcissus in the garden were white with mildew and the irises were beginning to wilt. Weeds were everywhere. The woman had not mowed the grass for months. Her husband usually did that. She had not seen her husband since his arrest last December. First he had been sent to Fort Missoula, Montana, on a train and then he had been transferred to Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Every few days he was allowed to write her a letter. Usually he told her about the weather. The weather at Fort Sam Houston was fine. On the back of every envelope was stamped "Censored, War Department," or "Detained Alien Enemy Mail." (10).

Again this mixture of the mundane (the unmowed lawn) and the traumatic (the arrest of her husband) disrupts the scene and troubles the otherwise matter of fact tone of the description here. The mildewing and wilting plants, the "weeds everywhere" suggest a sickness, a rotting in the very sphere of the domestic that is supposed to comfort, to nourish. This unsettledness reaches an anxious crescendo when, petting and cooing to White Dog, the woman commands him to "Play dead," before she "lifted [the shovel] high in the air with both hands and brought the blade down swiftly on his head" (11). They cannot bring pets with them to the camps.

> Beneath the tree she began to dig a hole. The soil was hard on top but soft and loamy beneath the surface. It gave way easily. She plunged the shovel into the earth again and again until the hole was deep. She picked up White Dog and dropped him into the hole. His body was not heavy. It hit the earth with a quiet thud. She pulled off her white gloves and looked at them. They were no longer white. She dropped them into the hole and picked up the shovel again. She filled up the hole . . . Everything looked the same except the earth was a little darker where the hole had been. Darker and wetter. She plucked a leaf from a low hanging branch and went back inside the house. (11-12)

The dark spot where the hole had been, as well as the woman's gloves "no longer white," echo, of course, the dark stain on Lundy's cash register that he cannot rub clean and further demonstrates the terrific pain and anger that is bubbling just beneath the surface of the woman's cool and collected response to the evacuation order. In addition, the observation that "everything looked the same except" that small patch of ground further demonstrates how everything around her is problematically carrying on as if nothing has happened, as if nothing is happening. Otsuka again juxtaposes domestic ordinariness with the brutalities of the evacuation and internment. What initially appears to be an ordinary scene of a woman feeding her dog in her backyard garden devolves into a gruesome scene of violence.

The repeated images of whiteness in this section—White Dog, white mildew, and white gloves now stained with dirt—like the white dust that covers the family's internment barrack, highlights the traumatic racialization that is so central to the family's pain. Each image suggests the oppressive ideologies of white supremacy that undergird the evacuation order. The woman's killing of White Dog functions, at once, as a sign of middle class stability thwarted and as an indication of the family's complicated melancholic attachment to ideals of whiteness forever out of their reach. The woman cannot lay claim to citizenship and belonging precisely because she cannot lay claim to the whiteness the dog signals in the passage. Just as the boy expresses a simultaneous desire and revulsion toward the white dust, the woman pets and coos to the dog in the same moment that she violently strikes out against it, demonstrating the family's deeply ambivalent relationship with whiteness. Likewise, the narcissus, more commonly referred to as daffodils, further enact this racial dynamic, as the yellow daffodils are infested with white mildew. Otsuka stages the upsetting scene of the killing of the family dog in such a way to highlight the haunting power of whiteness and its intractable links to violence and loss.

Otsuka's final use of the motif of moral stain comes late in the chapter, when the woman finally allows herself to feel the weight of the day. She looks at the place on the wall where a painting, *The Gleaners*, had always hung, until she packed it up that day, and her previous calmness and resolute composure give way to a hysterical outburst of grief and disbelief.

> The white rectangle was glowing in the moonlight. She stood up and traced around its edges with her finger and began to laugh—quietly at first, but soon her shoulders were heaving and she was gasping for breath. She put down the bottle and waited for the laughter to stop but it would not, it kept on coming until finally the tears were running down her cheeks. She picked up the bottle [of plum wine] again and drank. The wine was dark and sweet. She had made it herself last fall.

> She took out her handkerchief and wiped her mouth. Her lips left a dark stain on the cloth. (20)

The image of the glowing white rectangle on the wall where the painting used to be becomes a sign for all the losses the woman and her family are enduring: of their husband and father, of their home and belongings, their pets, their friends, of the routines and familiarities of their daily lives and, once again, how inextricable those losses are from the processes of racial formation shaped by intensifying anti-Japanese animus. Contained within that small, empty space is all the uncertainty their future now holds: "She did not know where they were going or how long they would be gone or who would be living in their house while they were away. She knew only that tomorrow they had to go" (Otsuka 9). The warmth and comfort of the home has been stripped bare, the familiarity and specificity of their existence replaced by a crippling uncertainty and the humiliations of being branded as the enemy: "In a few hours [the boy] and the girl and their mother would wake up and go to the Civil Control Station at the First Congregational Church on Channing Way. Then they would pin their identification numbers to their collars and grab their suitcases and climb up onto the bus and go to wherever it was they had to go" (22).

Otsuka continues to problematize notions of domesticity as harmony or normalcy with her depictions of life in the camps. Her depictions of the domestic and the ordinary become a signifier of the uncertainty of the situation, of the unnatural state of waiting and waiting, of killing time for three and a half years. The boy describes how the internees spend their time in the camp:

> Old men sat outside on the long narrow benches, not talking, whittling away at pieces of wood as they waited for hours to pass. They boy played marbles on the laundry room floor. He played Chinese checkers. He roamed through the barracks with the other boys in his block, playing cops and robbers and war. *Kill the Nazis!*

> *Kill the Japs!* On days when it was too hot to go out he sat in his room with a wet towel over his head and leafed through the pages of old *Life* magazines. He saw the bombed-out cities of Europe, and the Allied soldiers in Burma, fleeing to India through the hot steamy jungle. His sister lay on her cot for hours, staring, transfixed, at white majorette boots and men in their bathrobes in the Sears, Roebuck catalog. She wrote letters to her friends on the other side of the fence, telling them all she was having a good time. *Wish you were here. Hope to hear from you soon*. Their mother darned socks by the window. She read. She made them paper kites with tails woven out of potato sack strings. She took a flower-arranging class. She learned to crochet—'It's something to do'—and for one week there were doilies under everything.
>
> Mostly, though, they waited. For the mail. For the news. For the bells. For breakfast and lunch and inner. For one day to be over and the next day to begin. (53-4)

This scene, a veritable catalog of mundane domestic activity—playing Chinese checkers, reading *Life*, browsing the Sears, Roebuck catalog, sewing, crocheting, arranging flowers—again suggests the ordinariness of internment, hinting toward depictions of the internees as quietly acquiescing to the parameters of their new life, but the cracks in the veneer are again readily apparent. The utter lack of pleasure or purpose and the woman's resigned explanation, "'It's something to do,'" expose the performance of domestic harmony as a mere waiting game as the internees remain stuck in limbo in the camps. The girl, in fact, stops winding her watch once they arrive at the Topaz relocation center and reminds them of the world from which they are separated: "'Right about now,' she said, 'I bet they're having a good time.' [. . .] When he thought of the world outside it was always six o'clock. A Wednesday or a Thursday. Dinnertime across America" (66). This freezing of time in place, signaled by the family's incessant and

anxious waiting, suggests time that is "out of joint," unsettled and unsettling in its inability to move forward.

This kind of disruption of time is precisely the mode of haunting, as Jacques Derrida argues in *Specters of Marx.* The notion of disjointed temporalities is central to Derrida's conception of the spectral (he continuously returns to Hamlet's statement that "the time is out of joint" as a sign of haunting). The specter, "this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one," (5) exists outside of time, outside of the living present, creating a rupture of temporalities, a "sort of non-contemporaneity of present time with itself" (29). We see this disjointedness even more starkly after the family has, at long last, stopped waiting and returned to world:

> That night, the night of our first day back in the world, the world from which we had earlier been sent away, we locked all the windows and doors and unrolled our blankets on the floor of the room at the foot of the stairs that looked out onto the street. Without thinking, we had sought out the room whose dimensions—long and narrow, with two windows on one end and a door at the other—most closely resembled those of the room in the barracks in the desert where we had lived during the war. Without thinking, we had configured ourselves exactly as we had in that long narrow room during the war: our mother in the far corner, away from the windows, the two of us lying head to toe along the wall on the opposite side of the room. Without thinking, we had chosen to sleep, together, in a room, with our mother, even though for more than three years we had been dreaming of the day when we could finally sleep, alone, in our own rooms, in our old house, our old white stucco house on the broad tree-lined street not far from the sea.
>
> *When the war is over,* our mother had said. (111-12)

This sad reconfiguration of their internment barracks in their Berkeley home speaks powerfully to the inescapable repetitions of trauma, as well as to the sense of haunting as being outside of

time, or of an "out of joint" temporality that resists linearity and completion. This moment of return, the moment they have each been dreaming of and longing for for years, is supposed to be a triumphant return to normalcy, to the intimate comforts of home that we see glimpses of in the opening chapter of the book before they've been evacuated. Instead, it is an unthinking reconfiguration of their victimization—it is the return not to normalcy but to abjection. As with the repeated images of the dark stains that reverberate through the opening chapter, Otsuka unsettles the return to home, disrupts the return to the supposed comforts of the domestic.

The greatest and most shocking rupture comes in the final chapter of the novel, narrated by the up-to-now largely absent and silent father who angrily "confesses" to a laundry list of crimes against the United States and calls out the horrible racist stereotypes that have driven the persecution of Americans of Japanese descent during the war. A scant four pages, "The Confession" roils with anger, resentment, desperation, and sadness, and signals the return of the repressed, the racial *revenant* that comes clamoring back into the present in a moment of haunting disruption. "Everything you have heard is true," he begins, and "admits," bitterly, to poisoning reservoirs and food supplies, to bombing railroads, to spying "on your airfields," "on your naval yards," "on your neighbors," "on you—" (140). He continues:

> Who am I? You know who I am. Or you think you do […] I'm the one you call Jap. I'm the one you call Nip. I'm the one you call Slits. I'm the one you call Slopes. I'm the one you call Yellowbelly. I'm the one you call Gook. I'm the one you don't see at all—we all look alike. I'm the one you see everywhere—we're taking over the neighborhood. I'm the one you look for under your bed every night before you go to sleep […] I'm the one you dream of all night long […] I'm your nightmare […] I'm your worst fear […] And I've been living here, quietly, beside you, for years, just waiting for Tojo to flash me the high sign. […] Inform me of my crime. *Too short, too dark, too ugly, too proud.* Put it down in writing—*is nervous in conversation, always laughs loudly at the wrong time,*

> *never laughs at all*—and I'll sign on the dotted line. *Is treacherous and cunning, is ruthless, is cruel*. And if they ask you someday what it was I most wanted to say, please tell them, if you would, it was this:
>
> I'm sorry.
>
> There. That's it. I've said it. Now can I go? (142-4)

It is not clear whether the man's disdainful and sarcastic "confession" is mere fantasy, the words his children see him scribbling in his journal—"he stayed at home, day after day, poring over the newspaper with a magnifying glass and scribbling down words in a little blue notebook"—or if, during his interrogation by the FBI, he actually taunted the agents with this obviously disingenuous admission of guilt (Otsuka 135). In her otherwise glowing review of the novel, Michiko Kakutani laments what she views as Otsuka's heavy-handed and "ill-conceived" closing chapter and argues that "the book is flawed by a bluntly didactic conclusion." She suggests that the "shrill diatribe" is out of place amidst the quiet lyricism of the rest of the novel and "distract[s] attention from the resonant and beautifully nuanced achievement to be found in those foregoing pages." What Kakutani's analysis misses, however, is how Otsuka's novel has been subtly but inevitably building to this devastating catharsis all along. The cracks in the façade of emotional placidity the characters carefully cultivate have been evident from the start and at risk of shattering at any given moment. The "confession" finally and emphatically gives the lie to the decades of assertions of Japanese acquiescence or tacit agreement with the government policy of internment, and critically refigures "model minority" obedience and political silence as coercive and traumatic, rather than culturally determined. The confession is that which was for so long left unsaid but that must always on some level emerge.

Kakutani may be right that "The Confession" lacks the elegance and style of Otsuka's preceding three chapters, steeped as they are in quiet emotional nuance and the accretion of rich

visual detail. In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry writes of the interrogation as an extension of the physical pain of torture, "The question, whatever its content, is an act of wounding; the answer, whatever its content, is a scream" (46). It is the scream—and not the silence—that Otsuka urges the reader finally to witness.

Chapter 3

Making and Un-making the Model Subject: Transnational Melancholia and Spectrality in Chang-rae Lee's *A Gesture Life*

In Chang-rae Lee's 1999 novel *A Gesture Life,* the protagonist Franklin Hata is visited by the ghost of Kkutaeh—whom Hata refers to only as "K"— a Korean "comfort woman[18]" who is brutally murdered by Hata's fellow Japanese soldiers during World War II. Decades after immigrating from Japan to the United States, changing his name from Jiro Kurohata to Franklin Hata[19], and becoming the "primary citizen" of the wealthy New York City suburb of Bedley Run, Hata remains haunted by his traumatic past, incapable of moving on from the grotesque violence he witnessed—and participated in—during the war (Lee 275). Hata describes his state of mind just before he sees K's ghost:

> I sometimes forget who I really am. I will be sitting downstairs in the kitchen or on the edge of the lounger by the pool, or here under the covers in my bed, and I lose all sense of myself. I forget what it is I do, the regular activity of my walk and my swim and my taking of tea, the minor trappings and doings of my days, what I've made up to be the token flags of my life. I forget why it is I do such things, why they give me interest or solace or pleasure. Then I might get up in the middle of the night and dress and walk all the way to town, to try to figure once again the notices, the character, the sorts of actions of a man like me, what things or set of things define him in the most simple and ordinary way. But I forget the usuals, who his friends might be, his associates; I forget even that he has a tenuous and fragile hold of family, this the only idea that dully rings of

[18] "Comfort woman" is, of course, a euphemistic term and does not properly convey the victims' forced conscription as military sex slaves. I use the term not out of disregard for the victims' horrific experiences, but because of the term's widespread use in the literature and scholarship about Japan's WWII system of sexual slavery. The term conveys a historical specificity that "military sex slave" does not.

[19] Though the protagonist recounts his past experiences while he was still known as "Jiro Kurohata," for the sake of clarity I will refer to him as "Hata" throughout this chapter.

> remembrance in his heart. He walks at night in the center of town and it is too dark to see even a reflection in the glass of his old store. He's stopped by a patrol car and asked what he's doing and he says nothing, I'm not really walking, I'm not really here, and he turns for home with the cruiser slowly trailing him, unintentionally lighting his way.
>
> When I reach the house and close the front door it's then I think K has finally come back for me. (285-6)

Hata's hauntedness here and throughout the novel, then, is not just an indication of the persistence of the past and the difficulties of moving on from the scene of trauma, but also a window into the radical instability of Hata's melancholic identity. This passage demonstrates the tenuousness of Hata's carefully crafted identity in Bedley Run, as his sense of self painfully unravels through the pull of history, memory, and loss. Hata's admission that he sometimes "forgets" who he "really" is remains ambiguous for both the reader and the character, given Hata's multiple shifts in identity over the course of his life. Hata notes the performative quality of his identity, as he tries to go through the motions of "a man like [him]," his sense of alienation intensifying until his first-person perspective gives way to a detached third-person narration in which Hata's selfhood shatters. It is at these moments of fracture that K's ghost appears.

I begin with Hata's encounter with K's ghost because it illuminates the multiple ways in which Hata's melancholic subjectivity is conditioned. Throughout the novel, K functions as a key fulcrum of Hata's increasingly fraught identity, and reveals the interlocking structures of power that complicate and constrain his model minority persona. I argue that Lee's narrative hinges on the protagonist's transnational melancholia, which emerges out of Hata's constant traversal of not only national boundaries but racial, social, and economic ones as well. Hata is ethnically Korean but his parents give him up for adoption to a Japanese family, assuming he'll

be better off if he can "become wholly and thoroughly Japanese" rather than remaining an impoverished and denigrated Korean colonial subject (Lee 235). Hata's "passing" as Japanese as a young man signifies an internal colonization in which he must subjugate his Korean identity in exchange for social and economic privilege. K—her shortened moniker functioning as a synecdoche for Korean cultural identity—is the only one who learns of Hata's ethnic origins, and it is this connection that initially forges their relationship and that continues to haunt Hata throughout his life. Hata's reinvention from the lone son of impoverished Korean leather tanners to Jiro Kurohata, promising young medical officer in the Japanese Imperial Army, is directly echoed in his subsequent transformation into Franklin Hata, "number-one citizen" of Bedley Run, New York (Lee 95). Just as Hata's melancholic subjectivity is conditioned by his "passing" as Japanese, so too is it constituted through his status in the U.S. as a "model minority" and a "good Charlie" (Lee 95). Both traversals impart painful psychic losses for Hata, to be sure, but they also grant him access to considerable privilege. Hata's transnational melancholia is similarly constituted through his patriarchal privilege which, of course, cannot be separated from the "Japanese-ness" and "American-ness" that he performs; the national identities he must carefully mimic are steeped in patriarchy and misogyny, as K's story highlights. The continual return of K's ghost to Hata's empty Bedley Run mansion not only signals Hata's fraught melancholic identity, but also renders visible the buried histories of military "comfort women," their systematic erasure from official histories.

In drawing critical linkages between the ache of racial melancholia, the violence of colonization, the trauma of war memory, and the complex webs of power and privilege that condition these social structures, Chang-rae Lee offers a sharp critique of the demands of national identity and cultural belonging. In a 1999 interview about *A Gesture Life,* Lee reflects

on the themes that drive his writing: "I'm interested in people who find themselves in places, either of their choosing or not, and who are forced to decide how best to live there. That feeling of both citizenship and exile, of always being an expatriate—with all the attendant problems and complications and delight" (Lee, "Adopted Voice"). It is in this in-between space that Lee interrogates the large human costs of nationalism and its relationship to militarism and violence, and posits an assertive and counter-normative position of un-belonging.

Racial Melancholia and the "Model Minority"

Franklin Hata prides himself on being the ultimate "model minority" in the very affluent (and very white) Westchester suburb, Bedley Run. In fact, he refers to himself as the town's "primary citizen, the living, breathing expression of what people here wanted—privacy and decorum and the quietude of hard-earned privilege," an unofficial title he's worked tirelessly over the years to attain (275). Anne Anlin Cheng notes the psychic conditions produced through processes of assimilation, in which "an obsession with the norm (imagined to be perfection), accompanied by an exquisite sensitivity for any deviation from that norm" haunt the assimilating subject (79). Thus, assimilation is never a completed act but, rather, an open-ended process of often compulsive comparison and mimicry. Hata's life is consumed by gestures of accommodation and assimilation, as he painstakingly constructs a life in the image of perfect upper middle–class whiteness. For example, when he first moves into his Bedley Run mansion, he carefully calculates the proper response to his neighbors' welcome gifts:

> From the time I moved here, I was very fortunate to understand the nature of these relations. Even when I received welcome cards and sweets baskets from my immediate neighbors, I judged the exact scale of what an appropriate response should be, that to reply with anything but the quiet simplicity of a gracious note

> would be to ruin the delicate and fragile balance. And so this is exactly what I did, in the form of expensive, heavy-stock cards, each of which I took great care to write in my best hand. Each brief thank-you was different, though saying the same thing, and I know that this helped me gain quick acceptance from my Mountview neighbors, especially given my being a foreigner and a Japanese. (44)

Hata, keenly aware of his difference from the rest of the town as a "foreigner and a Japanese," carefully gauges his every action in Bedley Run so as not to disrupt the "fragile balance" of white upper-class propriety. Aware that such a disruption could place him forever outside the sphere of acceptance and belonging in the town, he must continually study these relations, observing and assessing the social norms of his new community, in a careful choreography of comparison and mimicry. As Homi K. Bhabha notes, however, this kind of mimicry by the racialized subject is always a partial failure—"*almost the same, but not quite . . . almost the same, but not white*" (89). Hata himself recognizes the laborious nature of his attempts to "fit in," observing, "it's hard for others to know how consuming one's arrival in a new land can be, how it will take up every last resource of spirit, which too often can lead to the detriment of everything else" (49). But it is not just Hata's initial arrival that requires such vigilance and care; his "endless propensity for comparison" continues to haunt Hata decades after his arrival in Bedley Run, long after he's already been accepted as the town's "primary citizen" (Cheng 80, Lee 275). His assimilation—no matter how expertly staged—is never fully complete. This haunting incompletion of the assimilative process places Hata in a melancholic relation to his adopted town and, by extension, nation. His hyper-awareness of his difference, of his not-quite-belonging, continues to fuel his desire to become the "number-one citizen" (Lee 95).

While someone like Hata, a long-time resident and pillar of the community who is well-known and well-liked around town—indeed, Hata has very congenial relationships with all the

town residents we meet in the novel—often operates in the national racial imaginary as a "success story" of seamless assimilation and American multiculturalism, Lee constantly calls into question this celebratory reading of the "model minority." Hata's daughter Sunny, a mixed-race black and Korean orphan he adopts from Korea—"a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl"—becomes the voice of critique against Hata's fixation on acceptance:

> [A]ll you care about is your reputation in this snotty, shitty town, and how I might hurt it . . . all I've ever seen is how careful you are with everything. With our fancy big house and this store and all the customers. How you sweep the sidewalk and nice-talk to the other shopkeepers. You make a whole life out of gestures and politeness. You're always having to be the ideal partner and colleague . . . Well, no one in Bedley Run really gives a damn. You know what I overheard down at the card shop? How nice it is to have such a 'good Charlie' to organize the garbage and sidewalk-cleaning schedule. That's what they really think of you. It's become your job to be the number-one citizen. (95)

Hata's performance of the "number-one citizen" cannot inaugurate him into the community of privileged whiteness he so desires, as the very perfection of his performance—the excessiveness of its adherence to the norm—paradoxically renders him *abnormal*, Other. Bhabha argues that "the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. The authority of that mode of colonial discourse that I have called mimicry is therefore stricken by an indeterminacy: mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal" (86, emphasis in original). Hata is not earning a place as an equal, but merely proving himself a "good Charlie," a properly obsequious Asian who has dutifully learned how to maintain the established order of the town. By demonstrating the excessive work that Hata must put into his assimilation, as well as how indelibly he remains marked as racially and ethnically foreign to the

other (white) residents, Lee highlights and challenges the problematic assumptions underlying the model minority stereotype. As David Eng and Shinhee Han argue in "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia," "Asian Americans are forced to mimic the model minority stereotype in order to be recognized by mainstream society—in order *to be* at all. To the extent, however, that this mimicry of the model minority stereotype functions only to estrange Asian Americans from mainstream norms and ideals (as well as from themselves), mimicry can operate only as a melancholic process" (350). Thus, Asians Americans are faced with dutiful mimicry on the one hand, or invisibility on the other. Hata's rebellious daughter Sunny does, indeed, disappear from Bedley Run, running away to live in Harlem with her African American boyfriend when she can no longer stand her father's obsessive concern with his reputation in the town, signaling the other pole of this untenable demand.

Not only must the model minority prove himself exceptional in his ability and willingness to conform to mainstream norms, but he must also swallow the racist and classist values that underlie the community's privilege and condition his own devalued "almost-but-not-quite" status. In order to maintain their own quasi-acceptance as part of the privileged community, "they must not contest the dominant order of things; they must not 'rock the boat' or draw attention to themselves. It is difficult for Asian Americans to express any legitimate political, economic, or social needs, because the stereotype demands not only an enclosed but also a passive self-sufficiency" (Eng and Han 351). Hata frequently—if obliquely—refers to the casual racism of Bedley Run. For example, when he first meets his neighbor Mary Burns, with whom he eventually strikes up a romantic relationship, Hata explains his attraction to her as a result of her immediate ease with him:

> I think it was because she seemed so perfectly at ease with me, as if our meeting was the most ordinary thing. *And I the most ordinary man*. She didn't seem to

> speak more slowly or loudly than she might otherwise, she didn't gaze at me too attentively, but paid as much attention as she appropriately should, all of which, at least for me, was the most unlikely kind of flattery. (49, emphasis added)

Hata's reaction to Mary Burns's interactions with him reveals, on the one hand, Hata's own deep desire for "ordinariness," expressed through the approval and ease of the rich white citizens Mary Burns represents. Hata's description further reveals the painful gap that normally exists between his desires and his reality in the town. His observations of what Mary does not do—she doesn't speak slowly or loudly or condescendingly to him, doesn't "gaze too attentively"—suggest how attuned Hata is to how often others in the town *do* do this to him, constantly singling him out or making him feel otherwise not quite at home. This initial meeting between Hata and Mary Burns demonstrates how unsettled Hata is with his racial markedness in the town, how keenly aware he is of his difference, and how deeply he wishes to cover over it. Hata's explanation of his attraction to Mary as being rooted in her seeming disregard for his ethnicity dovetails with his physical descriptions of her, further revealing Hata's (perhaps unconscious) racial motivations for dating Mary. Hata frequently emphasizes her whiteness when describing her: "She was quite easy to look at, her coloring pale and soft and falling in a certain range, her light hair and her light skin and the milky, faded color of her eyes" (48). Note that Hata, in just this brief description, refers to her skin tone twice, "pale" and "light skin." The lightness of her hair and the "milky" color of her eyes further emphasize her whiteness and connect Hata's desire for Mary to his desire for belonging that has eluded him in Bedley Run.

His relationship with Mary Burns, however, does not lend him the racial comfort he wants and, in fact, sometimes brings his feelings of difference into even sharper relief. Hata describes, for example, the nagging discomfort he feels when he accompanies Mary Burns to social events at her country club:

> colored people were a rare sight in Bedley Run, especially at social events, and never did one see such 'mixed' gatherings. I, certainly, would sometimes find myself at Mary Burns's country club for social hours and dances, the only one of my kind, a minor but still uncomfortable feeling, like the digging edge of an overstarched collar. (101)

Again, Hata refers to the lack of racial diversity and casual racism of the town-- a fact that makes him "uncomfortable" but does not or cannot elicit his disapproval. Hata is careful to dub his feelings of exclusion as only "minor" and certainly not enough to prevent him from attending social functions at the country club. Similarly, when Hata overhears women at the club disparaging a nearby working-class town, Ebbington (where Hata's daughter Sunny eventually settles), asserting they would "never" go there, his reaction is again very measured: "This instant, unwavering judging did bother me a little, as it naturally made me wonder what thousand other predeterminations had been made and kept to" (131). Hata senses that he very well may be a victim of their sweeping generalizations, and his daughter Sunny—half-black and a working class resident of Ebbington—certainly is, but this can bother Hata only "a little." In order to maintain the marginal acceptance he's gained in Bedley Run as the "good Charlie," Hata must not "contest the dominant order of things" as this will only highlight his separation from the community (Eng and Han 351). As seemingly his only path toward visibility and acceptance, Hata must continue to enact the role of the "model minority," even when it means denying or downplaying his own exclusion from the very community he supposedly "belongs" to. Lee highlights not only the ways in which Hata is victimized by racism and stereotyping in the dominant white culture but also, importantly, how richly Hata benefits from taking up the mantle of the "model minority." Hata aspires to the social and economic markers embodied by the model minority type, and exploits the stereotype not only to assimilate into a new culture, but

also to access and claim privilege. By excusing, even assenting to, the racist attitudes of his friends and neighbors, Hata is able to further reinforce his privileged standing in the community.

We see this maneuvering perhaps most starkly when one of Hata's friends Renny Banerjee, an Indian-American resident of Bedley Run, expresses frustration at the racist comments he's been getting from some of the white residents, despite his living in the town for nearly a decade. Hata, while he assents that he understands what Renny is referring to, rejects the notion that they should take offense:

> 'It's true that at times I have felt somewhat uneasy in certain situations, though probably it was not anyone's fault but my own. You may not agree with this, Renny, but I've always believed that the predominant burden is mine, if it is a question of feeling at home in a place. Why should it be another's? How can it? So I do what is necessary in being complimentary, as a citizen and colleague and partner. This is almost never too onerous. If people say things, I try not to listen.' (135)

Hata's melancholic attachment to the ideals of whiteness that Bedley Run represents for him prevents him from criticizing the growing racism that Renny observes and, in fact, compels Hata to turn his criticism inward: "it was not anyone's fault but my own." However, Hata's endlessly accommodating posture in this scene also helps to position him favorably against the new "Third World" residents who are changing the "direction of the town" (Lee 133, 134). Liv Crawford, a white, middle-aged real estate agent and friend to Hata and Renny, grows increasingly exasperated with Renny's complaints over the course of the conversation, becoming defensive and dismissing Renny as overly dramatic. After Hata suggests the onus is on them to "feel at home," Liv concurs:

> [Doc Hata] lives in a gorgeous house in the most prestigious neighborhood, and he's enjoying the high golden hour of a well-deserved retirement, for having been

> a business and civic elder and leader. This from *anybody's* view. I could argue that in fact, Doc Hata *is* Bedley Run. He is what this place is about. . . . Doc Hata has it right. You *come* to a place like this, Renny; you don't make it yours with money or change it by the virtuous coffee color of your skin or do anything but welcomingly submit and you're happy to do so. (136)

It becomes clear in this exchange that Hata is able to purchase a certain level of belonging, but only at the expense of others. By tacitly reaffirming the assumptions that undergird U.S. racial politics—that social mobility eludes working class blacks and Latinos just because they don't try hard enough—Hata gains Liv's approval and more fully entrenches himself as the "number-one citizen" of Bedley Run. Whereas Sunny uses the title derisively to point out Hata's self-denying subservience to the values of the town, Liv's assertion that "Doc Hata *is* Bedley Run" is sincere and self-satisfied. Hata's assimilation comes to serve as proof of the enduring promise of the multicultural American Dream, and his rejection of association with other racial minorities validates Liv's conviction that race no longer matters.

Hata's compulsive desire for belonging in Bedley Run is prefigured by his earlier transformation into Jiro Kurohata, in which he must become "wholly and thoroughly Japanese," assimilate completely into his new culture in order to succeed, in order to escape detection. Hata's subjectivity, and the malleability he demonstrates, cannot be separated from the historical contexts of World War II and Japanese imperialism that first generate and condition his haunting melancholia.

Patriarchal-Imperial Violence and the "Gentle Boy-Face" of Evil

While most of the novel takes place in the 1990s in suburban New York, Lee draws linkages between Hata's fraught racial discomfort in Bedley Run and his time serving the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II through flashbacks to Hata's war memories. We learn that Hata was an army medic at a Japanese base camp in Burma that housed a "comfort station" with five Korean women who served as "soft slips of flesh, a brief warm pleasure to be taken before it was gone, which is the basic mode of wartime," as Hata explains (Lee 251). These women, forcibly conscripted as sex slaves to "maintain morale," were referred to as "comfort women." The men form queues everyday outside the women's tiny, wooden stalls that are "not even wide enough for a tall man to lie across without bending his knees" (179). The quarters are described like small stables for animals and, indeed, the soldiers speak of the girls as if they were "speaking of any animal in a pen," and the men rape and abuse them around the clock, until "the girls' privates were terribly swollen and bruised," their bodies caked with dried blood and semen (251). Though Hata himself refrains from visiting the girls, he does not challenge the practice, remarking, "They were quite valuable, after all, to the well-being and morale of the camp" (166). Hata, like the others, dehumanizes the girls and thinks of them only in terms of their relation to the pleasure and aggrandizement of the men. In the flashbacks to Hata's wartime service, Lee draws parallels to his blind conformity in Bedley Run and his rationalizations of atrocities during the war. The same allegiance to community norms—no matter how morally questionable—drives Hata's actions, allowing him to turn a blind eye to the racism and sexism that oppresses those around him. His desire for belonging and acceptance first as a Japanese, then as an American, compel him to swallow the costly demands of nationalism.

Lee complicates our understanding of Hata by deepening his characterization beyond a man simply (or simplistically) constructed through structures of racial/ethnic exclusion, and interrogates the ways in which Hata's patriarchal and imperial privilege are just as constitutive of his haunting melancholia. Hata's ruminations on the comfort women are particularly telling:

> Although it was the most naïve and vacant of notions to think that anyone would willingly give herself to such a fate, like everyone else I had assumed the girls had indeed been 'volunteers,' as they were always called. To the men in the queue, they were nothing, or less than nothing; several hours earlier I had overheard a soldier speak more warmly and humanly of the last full-course meal he remembered than the girl he'd been with the previous afternoon. He was a corporal attached to the motor pool, a typically decent young man. He crudely referred to the comfort girl as *chosen-pi*, a base anatomical slur which also denoted her Koreanness. Though I knew it was part of the bluster and bravado he displayed for his fellows, there was a casualness to his usage, as if he were speaking of any animal in a pen, which stopped me cold for a moment. I certainly did not think of the other girls as animals, and yet I cannot say they held any sort of position in my regard; perhaps my thinking was as a rich man's, who might hardly acknowledge the many servants working about his house or on the property, their efforts and struggles, and see them only as parts of the larger mechanism of his living, the steady machine that grinds along each night and day. (251)

Hata's privilege is apparent here, in his acknowledgment that he did not (or perhaps could not) think of the comfort women as much more than a small part of the machinery of war—a necessary component of the men's daily living. Hata's relationship to the women is one of utter dominance, both by virtue of his position as a male and as a lieutenant of the army. The women and girls are utterly anonymous and dehumanized not only by "the men in the queue," but by Hata as well. Though Hata does lament some of the soldiers' treatment of the girls, he does not

challenge the practice of constant, brutal rape and blindly accepts the dubious designation of the girls as "volunteers," despite evidence to the contrary. All Hata takes particular offense to here is the corporal's use of a "base anatomical slur," suggesting he is more upset by the crassness and impropriety of the soldier than by the enslavement and rape of Korean women. Indeed, Hata frequently defends the logic of the military's practice, noting in particular the necessity of protecting the men from venereal disease:

> Now that the comfort stations were run under military ordinances and the women not professionals but rather those who had unwittingly enlisted or been conscripted into the wartime women's volunteer corps, to contribute and sacrifice as all did, the expectation was that the various diseases would be kept more or less in check. (180)

The enslavement and rape of thousands of women by the Japanese army is merely a necessity of war, in Hata's (and the Japanese government's) estimation. The lives and the integrity of the women can only ever be secondary to the sexual needs of the men. In this formulation, Hata is not really even able to think of these women and girls as human beings—they are military rations. The Japanese Imperial Army further thought of these "unwitting" sexual laborers as integral to consolidating their imperial power across Asia. As Yuki Tanaka documents, "For good strategic reasons, they believed that the antagonism of civilians in occupied territories towards their conquerors was exacerbated by [the rape of civilians by Japanese soldiers]. They also believed that a ready supply of women for the armed forces would help to reduce the incidence of rape of civilians" (28). This logic, of course, relies on the transformation of these women from civilians to "military supplies" (Tanaka 31). Likewise, Hata's language in the passage above deliberately obfuscates the situation of the comfort women. His phrasing, "unwittingly enlisted," hints at, but does not directly name, the common recruitment practice in

which the women and girls were deliberately misled about what their duties would be. They were often told they would be sent for paid factory work and could thus help support their impoverished families (Tanaka 38). The women were deceived, but Hata attempts to place the choice in the women's hands. He includes "or been conscripted" but then immediately attempts to undercut the nature of their forced labor by calling it a "volunteer corps" and comparing it to sacrifices that all must make during wartime. These women, in Hata' s justification, are simply fulfilling their wartime duties. As the army medic, Hata is charged with examining the women regularly to make sure they are free from venereal disease and cannot infect the men. He assents to the command that he place women back into rotation as comfort women, as long as they are not diseased, even when he sees that their genitals are "bruised and swollen nearly beyond recognition" (226). As with the women, this is simply his duty and not to be questioned; he asserts, "All this was inviolable, like any set of natural laws" (227).

Hata's deference to authority is total. Even when his commanding officer sets aside one of the girls, Kkutaeh (whom Hata refers to as "K"), and keeps her locked up in the infirmary for no apparent reason, Hata comes up with ways to justify the captain's odd singling out of this girl:

> But in the end, I believe, it was not that the doctor thought her to be simply beautiful. For it is a fact well evidenced that there were many attractive, even lovely girls that one could have as a solider of an occupying army. It was a more particular interest than that, and one I think perhaps he himself could not (and would not) describe. Like a kind of love, which need not be romantic or sexual but is a craving all the same, the way a young boy can so desire something that he loves it with the fiercest intensity, some toy or special ball, until the object becomes him, and he, it. (182)

The other soldiers (and, indeed, the reader) assume that Captain Ono has greedily reserved the girl—described as the most beautiful of the group—so she might serve as his own personal concubine. But Hata's dog-like loyalty to authority and hierarchy compel him to rationalize

Ono's actions so that he may still regard him as superior and honorable. He perversely romanticizes the doctor's exploitation of K here, equating it to "a kind of love," despite K's repulsion and her utter lack of agency in this situation. Furthermore, Hata blindly compares that love to the love of an object ("some toy or special ball"), relegating K (and, by extension, the other girls) to the status of mere object, devoid of humanity and existing only for the enrichment of the subjects (the men). He furthers this conception of women as devoid of agency or humanity in his matter-of-fact assertion that the soldiers of the occupying army could "have" any girl they wished. Hata takes it as a given that the men will rape the women in the countries they occupy—it is, he seems to suggest, their right. The passage ends on an image of consumption or subsumption, in which the object utterly disappears or disintegrates under the fierceness of male desire. He comes to destroy even her objecthood through the intensity and violence of his desire for it. But these descriptions from Hata seem utterly un-self-aware. He relays this with a kind of awe and respect, rather than with disapproval or disgust. Hata's description of the situation reveals not only his troubling patriarchal denigration of women, but also the lengths to which he will go in order to maintain the rightness of the hierarchy he so reveres. We can think of Hata's misogyny as, at least in part, a product of his internal colonization and attendant performance of Japanese masculinity.

Hata's view of the comfort women changes somewhat when he becomes infatuated with the beautiful and willful K, but the power of his privilege and his inability to think of women apart from their subjugated relation to men persist. Hata is ordered by Captain Ono to keep K apart from the other women and guard her and, after speaking with her and learning that she is from a well-educated Korean family and did not volunteer to serve as a military prostitute, he begins to change his attitude: "had I been of the slightest different opinion, I too would probably

have thought of them that way, as soft slips of flesh, a brief warm pleasure to be taken before it was gone, which is the basic mode of wartime. But with K, I was beginning to think otherwise, of how to preserve her, how I might keep her apart from all uses in any way I could" (251). But Hata here reveals how even his evolving opinion is hardly different from the other men's, and in no way undermines the patriarchal structure that subjugates K and the other women. While he moves away from thinking of her merely as an animal, merely as a "soft slip of flesh" that exists for the men's pleasure, he still insists on thinking of her in conventionally misogynist ways. As his infatuation grows, he becomes convinced that her purity and goodness, her honor, must be preserved so he can rescue her, then marry her. Hata is only capable of the kind of rigid gendered thinking that defines women as either whores or angels. He's never able to consider K outside of her status as an object of desire; her own desires and subjectivity are erased, made invisible, by the primacy of Hata's privilege.

Hata's obsession with K grows, culminating in Hata twice raping her—though Hata himself never fully acknowledges this fact. Lee deliberately leaves ambiguous whether or not Hata even realizes he's forced himself on K against her will; indeed, it's ambiguous whether Hata is even capable of understanding her as having her own will. He talks around the encounters, carefully avoiding clear confessions of his complicity in the abusive use of comfort women, or the ways in which he objectifies and violates the woman he supposedly loves. Importantly, K is nearly absent from Hata's descriptions of the rapes, disappearing beneath his lofty ruminations on his desire and satisfaction:

> And it was so that I finally began to touch her. I put my hand on the point of her hip and could feel all at once the pliancy of it and the meagerness and the newness, too. I felt bewildered and innocent and strangely renewed, as though a surge of some great living being were coursing up my arm and spreading through

> my unknowing body. She was sleeping, or pretending to sleep, or somehow forcing herself to, and she did not move or speak or make anything but the shallowest of breaths, even as I was casting myself upon her. I kissed as much of her body as was bared. I kissed her small breasts, which seemed to spill a sweet, watery liquid. I gagged but did not care. Then it was all quite swift and natural, as chaste as it could ever be. And when I was done I felt the enveloping warmth of a fever, its languorous cocoon, though when I gazed at her shoulder and back there was nothing but stillness, her posture unchanged, her skin cool and colorless, and she lay as if she were the sculpture of a recumbent girl and not a real girl at all. (260)

This passage, littered with I's, demonstrates the self-centeredness of Hata's relationship to K and his inability to recognize his own position of power and control. K, of course, is in no position to freely offer her consent to Hata's advances, nor to resist them—she is a prisoner being guarded by an armed officer. Lee illustrates here the dovetailing of patriarchal and imperial violence, in which Hata's power and privilege allow him to utterly disregard K's humanity. Even as he realizes that she stays completely still and silent "even as I was casting myself upon her," Hata remains indifferent to the girl beneath him and fixated solely on his own desire, which he perversely refers to as "chaste," unable to even fully admit the forcefulness of his sexual desire. In describing the rape as an act of love, and even chastity, Hata again attempts to separate himself from the larger machinery of war that he finds distasteful. Loathe to think of himself as just another of the lustful men in the queue, Hata attempts to erase his participation in the violent exploitation of the comfort women and—in so doing—erases K and the trauma she's suffered. In the final lines of his description, Hata echoes the earlier objectification of K as "some toy or special ball," comparing her this time to a "sculpture" and "not a real girl at all," again erasing her embodiment and agency.

Lee further highlights the insidiousness of the ideologies that rule Hata's actions and justifications when Hata leaves her in the small supply closet that serves as her prison and overhears her sobbing before he leaves. "I stood quietly for a moment and waited and indeed, saying over and over very quietly what sounded most peculiarly like *hata-hata, hata-hata*. But as I listened more closely I realized that she was fitfully crying, though in quelled gasps, as if she were trying to hush herself" (261). K's uncontrollable crying and Hata's mistakenly hearing his own name buried in her sobs, suggest a realization of his guilt, of the way in which he's cruelly violated her despite proclaiming to want to protect her from such violence at the hands of the other soldiers. But Hata's misguided belief in his own purity and good intentions, and his failure to acknowledge his own capacity for evil, cover over K's victimization, in a secondary violence of erasure:

> After I left her I found myself in a state of unease and exhilaration. I could understand why she should become upset, that she was perhaps sad for the end of her maidenhood (which I thought then was the most precious ore of any woman), but hadn't I professed my devotion to her, hadn't I in mitigation said the words that should let her know what I was intending for us, after the war? I thought I should have also told her that I was now resolved to speak candidly with Captain Ono […]
>
> And yet I had no other, further plan; there was no good recourse from her required duties to the camp, there was no actual reprieve I was offering her. I loved her, though I cannot say how that love was or if it was true or worthy in any sense, having never in my life been sure how such a thing should be. I can say I wanted her and could not bear her being with another. (261)

Hata, again, remains seemingly willfully oblivious to his enactments of patriarchal-imperial violence. The evidence included in Hata's descriptions of the rape—K's silence and stillness, followed by convulsive sobs-- paint a clear picture for the reader that K is traumatized by the

encounter. Hata's apparently sincere assumption that she is merely mourning her lost "maidenhood" cannot erase from the reader's mind Hata's shifted status from bystander/apologist to active perpetrator of violence.

Hata's second rape of K further elucidates the erosion of boundary between hero and villain, as Hata's violent use of K becomes clearer. Hata awakes after receiving a near-fatal beating from Captain Ono when he demanded that K be kept from her duties as a comfort woman. Upon regaining consciousness in the same infirmary that serves as K's prison, Hata orders her to undress so that he may confirm Ono's assertion that K is pregnant, and was so even before entering the camp. He scrutinizes her emaciated body and, seeing no signs of a swelling middle, calls her to him:

> I put out my hand and she came to me, not looking at me anymore, and I kissed the tepid skin of her, at her belly and below, and I could taste her, her sharp-sweetness and unwashedness and her living body underneath. My eyes and cheeks felt shattered but I pressed against her anyway, more than I could bear. I was nearly crying from the pain. She did not hold me but she did not push me away. I never meant for this but I could no longer balk, or control myself, and then something inside her collapsed, snapped clean, giving way like some storm sieged roof, and then I descended upon her, and I searched her, every lighted and darkened corner, and every room (295).

The violence of Hata's description is notable here; whereas his recollection of the first rape focuses on his own pleasure and the sensual transformation that envelopes him in a "languorous cocoon," this second encounter emphasizes pain and destruction, and hints at a realization on Hata's part of how thoroughly the war-- and the power he's amassed in and through it—has corrupted him. He strains at first against his own crippling pain, pressing his battered face into her body, as if expecting to be healed by it. Hata's pain then gives way to K's, as he describes

his command of her as a kind of demolition: "something inside her collapsed, snapped clean, giving way like some storm sieged roof." It is as if he's destroyed her and now knows it, something breaking in her irrevocably. The violence of this depiction continues as Hata remembers the rape as a kind of feverish investigation: "and I searched her, every lighted and darkened corner, and every room." This description emphasizes K's emptiness, in a way—she is cavernous rooms, there for Hata to explore, to pore over and search for meaning. Hata believes he wants to save K from her fate in the camps, but what finally becomes clear in this passage is that he really only wishes to save himself through her; Hata attempts to turn her into a vessel for his own salvation. He searches "every lighted and darkened corner" for redemption through K, but finds only how easily he's slid into depravity.

As with Hata's dutiful adherence to the norms of Bedley Run—even when he knows they are wrong or unjust—he likewise becomes deeply influenced by the common practices of the camps. The daily queue of men waiting their turns to rape the comfort women, as well as the broader patriarchal-imperial structures of power that devalue both women and colonial subjects, work to normalize the kind of violence that Hata commits against K. He can "no longer balk or control" himself because there is no social imperative for him to do so. Lee, importantly, emphasizes the ease with which a basically good person can fall into such monstrous acts of violence and exploitation, emphasizing what Hannah Arendt has memorably called the "banality of evil." We do not learn about Hata's treatment of K until very late in the novel, after Lee has already established him as the ideal citizen in Bedley Run, ever eager to please and accommodate others. He's characterized as a supremely passive and milquetoast man, seemingly incapable of even raising his voice. When we learn of the rapes, Hata comes to represent the absolute ordinariness of violence, the inherent capacity that humans have for evil.

It is notable that Lee chooses to frame the plight of comfort women in this way, from the perspective of a largely sympathetic perpetrator, in sharp contrast to a writer like Nora Okja Keller, whose 1997 novel *Comfort Woman* portrays the Japanese soldiers as monstrous and inhuman villains. Lee thus shifts the focus from a singular and unfathomable evil to a pervasive cultural problem of masculinist power and violence and the demands of cultural belonging. Lee's narrative choice also emphasizes the inevitable and irrecoverable gaps in our knowledge of comfort women's experiences, the impossibility of understanding. After recounting his memory of the second rape Hata finally begins, it seems, to recognize his complicity in the violence inherent in the system:

> And yet afterward—I don't know for how long, for time seemed to bend upon itself inside the small ward—we were simply sitting on either end of the cot, not speaking, not meeting each other's eyes. I could only glance over at her and see how she was bent over her knees and cradling her face in the crook of her arm. Not weeping or moaning, but figured in certain quiet. Almost hiding there, though I was sure—even as young and earnest and fearful as I was—it was not just from me; it was from that place and time, the whole picture and small detail, from the homely, dim structure about us, the squalor of the heavy air, from the ennui and restiveness of the entire encampment, the surreally distant war, and then of course from who I was as well. For in my own way I comprised it, my yearning and wishing and my wanton hope, the sum of which, at end, amounted to a complete and utter fraudulence. For that is, finally, what she would escape if she could, not the ever-imminent misery and horror but the gentle boy-face of it, the smoothness and equability, the picture of someone heroic enough to act only upon his own trembling desire (295).

This is the closest thing to an admission of guilt that we will get from Hata, and it is this realization of his complicity that continues to haunt him throughout his life. It is not just the

brutality of the rapes and the constant threat of death that makes the experiences of the comfort women so traumatic, but also the ordinariness, the normalization of the system's implementation that is so devastating. It's the "gentle boy-face of it," the knowledge that these are ordinary men—brothers, sons, fathers—who can so easily assent to brutality and injustice. That the system becomes so quickly and easily embedded in the culture of military life and becomes "like any set of natural laws" is a deeper horror (227). As Hata recalls his brief time with K, he muses: "And yet, I see now, I was in fact a critical part of events, as were K and the other girls, and the soldiers and the rest. Indeed the horror of it was how central we were, how ingenuously and not we comprised the larger processes, feeding ourselves and one another to the all-consuming engine of the war" (299).

Patriarchal-Imperial Ghosts

Just before K's gruesome death, as she begs Hata to kill her, knowing her fate will be worse than death, she asserts: "'This time won't end. It will end for you, but not for me'" (Lee 301). K's plea speaks directly to the repetitive injury of trauma and the impossibility of such a traumatic past ever remaining in the past. In *Haunting the Korean Diaspora*, Grace Cho argues that those displaced and traumatized by war exist in a state of "psychic exile" in which "survivors bear the lasting effects of trauma and are unable to be settled in the present moment" (77). "This time" won't end for Hata, either, however, as he remains haunted for decades by his war experiences, especially K. K's horrific death—which Hata knows he likely could have prevented—stays with him as an indelible reminder of the brutality of the war and his complicity in it. After Hata's vicious beating at the hands of Captain Ono, when he and K are both housed in the infirmary, Ono comes to see K, offering her sweet mochi and embracing her tenderly. K

kills him, slicing cleanly through his carotid with a scalpel she's stolen from the surgical supplies. She begs Hata to kill her, as she's done before but, instead, Hata covers up the murder as he wonders how he can keep her from her duties in the comfort house. The sentries rush in, one whisking Hata away to tell the commander what's happened to Ono, the other caressing K. She slices the sentry's face from his eye to his mouth and, as Hata is leaving, he sees the sentry punch her in the mouth so hard that "some of her teeth flew out, like tiny white birds" (303). Hata doesn't intervene, even as he sees the sentry strike her again. He returns an hour later to a gruesome scene:

> The men. It was the men. Twenty-five of them, thirty of them. I had to slow as they went past. Some were half-dressed, shirtless, trouserless, half-hopping to pull on boots. They were generally quiet. The quiet after great celebration. They were flecked with blood, and muddy dirt, some more than others. One with his hands and forearms as if dipped in crimson. Another's face smudged with it, the color strange in his hair. One of them was completely clean, only his boots soiled; he was vomiting as he walked. Shiboru [the sentry whose face K sliced] carried his saber, wiping it lazily in the tall grass. His face was bleeding but he was unconcerned. He did not see me; none of them did. They could have been returning from a volleyball match, thoroughly enervated, sobered by near glory.
>
> Then they were all gone. I walked the rest of the way to the clearing. The air was cooler there, the treetops shading the falling sun. Mostly it was like any other place I had ever been. Yet I could not smell or hear or see as I did my medic's work. I could not feel my hands as they gathered, nor could I feel the weight of such remains. And I could not sense that other, tiny, elfin form I eventually discovered, miraculously whole, I could not see the figured legs and feet, the utter, blessed digitations of the hands. Nor could I see the face, the perfected cheek and brow. Its pristine sleep still unbroken, undisturbed. And I could not know what I was doing, or remember any part. (304-5)

Hata's description of the scene he returns to further emphasizes the horrific juxtaposition of abject violence and quotidian life. The men, drenched in blood after gang-raping K and tearing her body to shreds, are quiet and sated. The images of "a great celebration" or a "volleyball match" trivialize and normalize the men's acts. Lee's use of romanticized pastoral imagery here further emphasizes this normalization of patriarchal-imperial violence. K's shattered teeth flying out of her mouth "like tiny white birds," the sentry cleaning his bloody sword "lazily in the tall grass," as the "treetops shad[e] the falling sun" suggest a natural ease with such violence that underscores Lee's critique of patriarchal and imperial power. The moment of K's death and the impossibility of holding the two images together—her dismembered corpse and the contented men—marks a key psychic breaking point for Hata. The tenor of his recollection of gathering up the pieces of her body is at once detached and bereft, and all he can narrate is the impossibility of narration. He cannot smell, see, hear, or feel the scene, even as he describes it. He insists he cannot "remember any part" but the very thing he cannot remember he also cannot bear to forget. Cho views this as the way of haunting, "sites of unacknowledged loss" that "can be neither forgotten nor fully remembered" (51, 53).

Hata remains haunted by the scene of K's death, reliving it as a kind of ungrievable-- because unacknowledged-- loss. Hata's recuperation of K through the ghost is indicative of his troubled psyche and his still-unacknowledged complicity in her death. His attachment to this haunting and his insistence on her physical, bodily presence—"she was absolute, unquestionably real, a once-personhood come wholly into being"—works to re-member K's violently broken corpse, preserving her outside of death (Lee 286). When K asks Hata when they will "move on from this place," explaining that she "cannot die here," Hata resists this closure: "'I don't want you to die,' I said to her, feeling just as suddenly that this is a daily conversation we have, that

we have gone over this ground before, and before. So I told her, as I always do, 'I want you to live with me forever'" (287). The temporality of this encounter with K's ghost is nebulous, as Hata initially implies that this is her first appearance, but over the course of his retelling suggests that she visits him often, even daily. Lee conveys a confusion of time and remembrance here that, coupled with Hata's deteriorating sense of self, reveals a hauntingly and multiply melancholic attachment to K—as a lost object of sexual desire, as a signifier of his own repudiated Korean ethnic identity, and as a shaming reminder of the destructive force of patriarchal-imperial violence.

Hata's reckoning with K's ghost is suffused with the same contradictory identifications and dis-identifications that characterize their living encounters. He recounts her response to his wish that she live with him forever:

> A faint, sad smile softened her face, and she let slip the black cloth from her shoulders and lay down with me beneath the covers. Her skin was cool and chaste to me, almost sisterly, alabastrine, and I thought I had convinced her to remain yet again, remembering now how many times I had done so, today and yesterday and all the days before that, in a strange and backward perpetuity. I keep winning her over with hardly an argument, though each time an ill feeling comes over me, the soiling, resident sickness you develop when you have never in your life been caught at something wrong, when you have never once been discovered. (288)

In this passage, Hata in some ways reinscribes K's subjugation, as he reimagines her in a position of loving consent and submission to his will. K's climbing into bed with Hata mimics her silent and still sleeping position during the first rape. His recycling of the word "chaste," which he used in describing the first rape, likewise recalls his perverse erasure of his own violent desire. But, at the same time, Hata's confrontation with the ghost of K also reveals the final unraveling of his obfuscations. Hata is deeply haunted by K's very disappearance, her near

disintegration into nothingness, as if she never even existed. The ghost's refusal to die functions, then, as an act of carrying on what's been lost to history. Hata's continual conjuring of K's specter ultimately reflects a refusal to think of her—and, by extension the rest of the "comfort women"—as expendable, inconsequential. Lee thus offers up a counter-narrative in which that history can be remembered, as K invades and complicates the central assimilation narrative, as the haunting remains of a history the world has tried desperately to bury and forget.

Hata's adopted daughter Sunny, too, functions as a key ghostly presence throughout the novel, and is often figured as both a stand-in for the lost K and a racially-marked symbol of Hata's never-quite-perfect assimilation. Hata resolves to adopt a child so as to more fully approximate the normative Bedley Run citizen, even going so far as to bribe the adoption agent when she says there is no precedent for a single man being granted an adoption. Hata's "relief" at finally becoming a father gives way to disappointment, however, when he sees Sunny:

> A skinny, jointy young girl, with thick, wavy black hair and dark-hued skin. I was disappointed initially; the agency had promised a child from a hardworking, if squarely humble, Korean family who had gone down on their luck. I had wished to make my own family, and if by necessity the single-parent kind then at least one that would soon be well reputed and happily known, the Hatas of Bedley Run. But of course I was over-hopeful and naïve, and should have known that he or she would likely be the product of much less dignified circumstance, a night's wanton encounter between a GI and a local bar girl. I had assumed the child and I would have a ready, natural affinity, and that my colleagues and associates and neighbors, though knowing her to be adopted, would have little trouble quickly accepting our being of a single kind and blood. But when I saw her for the first time I realized there could be no such conceit for us, no easy persuasion. Her hair, her skin, were there to see, self-evident, and it was obvious how some other color (or colors) ran deep within her. And perhaps it was right from that moment, the

> very start, that the young girl sensed my hesitance, the blighted hope in my eyes. (204)

Hata's racism is apparent here, of course, as he reveals his disgust at seeing Sunny's legible blackness, her "other color (or colors)," that disrupt his fantasy of the "well reputed" "Hatas of Bedley Run." Sunny's visible biracial background and her consistently contentious relationship with her father, repeatedly highlight the depths of Hata's desire for "ordinariness" and belonging, even at the expense of his own troubled daughter.

Furthermore, Sunny functions as a ghost of the Korean War and U.S. occupation of Hata's erstwhile home. Her (implied) status as the orphan of a Korean military prostitute and an African American GI connects her history to that of K's by virtue of their shared history under imperialism and masculinist violence. Cho argues that the *yanggongju*, or military "camptown" prostitutes in Korea exist as a haunting refiguring of the comfort woman: "The comfort woman . . . is the yanggongju's ghost. On the heels of this 'breaking silence' by the surviving wianbu [comfort women] comes the haunting presence of the dead yanggongju, who would become a spectral force that made visible the continuing traumas of U.S. military domination" (6-7). She continues:

> The exposure of Korean women's sexual labor in the 1990s did not simply reveal some sordid secret; it unleashed the traumatic effects of colonization and war that had been accumulating in the Korean diasporic unconscious for fifty years . . . both figures [the wianbu and yanggongju] emerged from historical and political contexts that were similarly haunted by militarized sexual violence and imperial domination. (7)

Indeed, the historical conditions from which the comfort women and "camptown" prostitutes emerged are hauntingly similar. As with the military comfort women, the yanggongju were

primarily impoverished women and girls who gathered at U.S. military bases in the hopes of earning a living (Yuh 20). Likewise, deception and kidnapping were common practices used to meet the demands of thousands of U.S. occupying soldiers (31). According to Ji-Yeon Yuh, "U.S. bases were one of the few, if only, sources of income in the poverty-stricken years of the 1940s through the 1970s" and at the peak of the camptown culture "more than thirty thousand women earned their living entertaining some sixty-two thousand U.S. soldiers stationed in virtually every corner of South Korea" (21-22). This traumatic through-line from Japanese colonization to U.S. occupation, and the violent exploitation and oppression that nourish imperialism, links Sunny irrevocably to K. By refiguring K's story in the abject body of Sunny, Lee further intertwines the complex webs of power that span across the text's multiple narratives. Sunny's connections to K give substantial weight to K's plea to Hata that "this time won't end," as Sunny's origins testify to the ongoing trauma of Korea's colonial history and its devastating effects on impoverished women in particular (301). Though we can certainly understand Hata as himself a fellow victim of Japanese imperialism, as his internal colonization suggests, Lee is careful to highlight the ways in which Hata's dutiful adherence to norms of a masculinized national belonging relies on the subjugation of others.

Lee's interrogation of the complex intersections of transnational racial melancholia and patriarchal-imperial violence reveals the inevitable and painful psychic toll exacted by the demands of national belonging. The novel closes with Hata selling his estate and leaving town:

> Perhaps I'll travel to where Sunny wouldn't go, to the south and west and maybe farther still, across the oceans, to land on former shores. But I think it won't be any kind of pilgrimage. I won't be seeking out my destiny or fate. I won't attempt to find comfort in the visage of a creator or the forgiving dead. Let me simply bear my flesh, and blood and bones. I will fly a flag. Tomorrow, when this house is alive and full, I will be outside looking in. I will be already on a walk

> someplace, in this town or the next or one five thousand miles away. I will circle around and arrive again. Come almost home. (356)

Hata eventually acknowledges the ways in which his obsessive need for belonging throughout his life has inevitably taken a toll on his morality. The massive wealth he's accumulated and the social standing he's gained in Bedley Run become meaningless to him, as his performance of the model minority ultimately collapses beneath the weight of its contradictions. He sees that his constant striving for acceptance and social standing—for honor as defined by normative ideals of masculinity and nationalism—is destructive, toxic. Lee's closing on an imagining of coming "almost home" suggests an arrival at an almost-place, a not-quite-place of assertive un-belonging, in which the steep costs of national and cultural belonging are deemed too high.

In the next and final chapter, I return to the figure of the *yanggongju*, or Korean military prostitute, to consider the haunting legacy of imperial violence in South Korea.

Chapter 4

The Melancholy of Mixed Race: The Amerasian Child as Mediator of History

This chapter examines two novels written by Korean American mixed-race authors, Heinz Insu Fenkl and Nora Okja Keller, set in military camptowns in 1960s South Korea. Both Fenkl's *Memories of My Ghost Brother* (1997) and Keller's *Fox Girl* (2002) center on the camptowns that sprung up around U.S. military bases in South Korea and the Amerasian children fathered, and often abandoned, by American GIs. Fenkl and Keller delve into the difficult terrain of a population of mixed race children produced through U.S. military intervention and domination in South Korea. I argue that, in this context, the mixed race child comes to circulate as a critical part of the camptown economy, in which impoverished Korean women—very often military prostitutes—view bearing the child of an American GI as a strategic means of access to social mobility and economic stability. I further consider how women's bodies become their primary—if not only—means of participation in an economy driven primarily by the U.S. military occupation. The Korean Amerasian child is produced and conditioned at the intersections of racial and gender hierarchy, U.S. global hegemony, and the broad devaluing of Korean life in the aftermath of the Korean War. Thus, the Amerasian child becomes an overdetermined symbol of Korea's fraught history of colonization and war, a profoundly melancholic figure simultaneously bearing the weight of a painful history *and* a deeply uncertain future.

The melancholia of the Amerasian child manifests across multiple registers in these novels and demonstrates the ways in which the mixed race child functions as a key mediator of Korean history. Fenkl and Keller demonstrate the contingent and often shifting significations of

the Amerasian body in South Korea, revealing the complex politics of mixed race identity that emerge from the camptown culture. The accumulation of unassimilated losses—produced not only through the massive loss of civilian lives[20] and homes during the Korean War but also through the subsequent decades of U.S. military occupation and South Korean economic and military dependence—are manifest in the bodies and psyches of the Amerasian child and their camptown mothers. Both Grace Cho and Katherine H.S. Moon have argued that the Korean military prostitute is at once hypervisible as a sign of U.S. exploitation of Korea and pushed from consciousness and made ghostly through the force of shame. In her study of militarized prostitution in U.S.-Korea relations, Moon suggests that it is precisely the prostitute's intimate ties to Korea's traumatic histories of colonization and war that so often render her invisible:

> Koreans have not wanted reminders of the war lurking around them and the insecurity that their newfound wealth and international power have been built on. That is, kijich'on[21] women are living symbols of the destruction, poverty, bloodshed, and separation from family of Korea's civil war. They are living testaments of Korea's geographical and political division into North and South and of the South's military insecurity and consequent dependence on the United States. (8)

The social meanings that cohere around the Amerasian child likewise carry the burdens of this history. Thus, the children in Fenkl and Keller's novels become deeply fraught objects of both desire and disgust. They contain, at once, the glittering promise of immigration and access to American prosperity and the shame of Korean poverty and dependence. As the bodies onto which Korea's deeply ambivalent relationship to the U.S. are projected—and introjected—the Amerasian child comes to embody a wellspring of melancholic attachments.

[20] Approximately three million Koreans were killed during the war, about 10 percent of the total population (Cho 75).
[21] Military camptown

Historical Context

Because the historical context is so vital to understanding these two works, I want to provide a very brief overview of the Korean camptowns and the culture of militarized prostitution that characterizes them. The rise of camptowns began with the U.S. entry into the port city of Inchon in 1945, with the nearby town of Pupyong (where much of Fenkl's novel is set) becoming the first camptown established to cater to the needs of U.S. soldiers. Impoverished women, many of whom were military prostitutes or comfort women during the Japanese occupation, came to cater to the new occupying forces in the hopes of making a living (Yuh 20). Many others were either widowed or orphaned by the war and turned to the camptowns to support themselves (Moon 3). Others, as Moon explains, felt marginalized even before becoming a part of the military camptown life: "Many of the kijich'on prostitutes considered themselves 'fallen women' even before entering prostitution because they had lost social status and self-respect from divorce, rape, sex, and/or pregnancy out of wedlock. For these women, camptowns served as a place of self-exile as well as a last resort for earning a livelihood" (3).

During the Korean War (1950-1953), the number of camptowns grew as the American military presence expanded, with makeshift camptowns forming wherever bases were located. According to Ji-Yeoh Yuh, "The 1960s were the heyday of the camptowns, when more than thirty thousand women earned their living entertaining some sixty-two thousand U.S. soldiers stationed in virtually every corner of South Korea" (21). From the 1940s through the 1970s, U.S. military bases were the primary—and sometimes only—sources of income for Koreans.[22] In

[22] Indeed, according to Katherine H.S. Moon, from 1954 – 1970 U.S. military and economic aid alone constituted one-tenth of South Korea's total gross national product (59).

addition to the influx of prostitutes, pimps, black-market sellers, and criminals hoping to profit from American wealth, other poverty-stricken Koreans flocked to the camptowns to set up restaurants and businesses catering to Americans (22). The camptowns, however, are primarily associated with the red-light districts that exclusively serve American sexual desires.

The Korean military prostitutes, also known as *yang galbo* (Western whore), *yang gongju* (Western princess), or *yang saekshi* (Western bride), often end up where they are as a last resort, driven into prostitution due to poverty. But many women end up as camptown prostitutes in the same ways as the comfort women who preceded them—they were often tricked, sold, kidnapped, or otherwise coerced into prostitution (Yuh 30-31). Just like the military "comfort women" who served as sex slaves and prostitutes to the Japanese Imperial Army, young, impoverished Korean women and girls were often recruited from rural areas with the promise of factory work or other menial labor that could help support their struggling families. "After answering ads promising work, room and board, and sometimes even an education (although education in what was never specified), the women were usually raped, beaten into submission, and then sold to a Korean brothel or a camptown club" (Yuh 31). As I noted in the previous chapter, Grace Cho has posited the *yanggongju* as the haunting refiguring of the comfort woman, linked through their shared histories of "militarized sexual violence and imperial domination" (7). Yuh goes even a step further, calling the *yanggongju* "America's comfort women" and condemning the United States military's complicity in the mass sexual exploitation of hundreds of thousands[23] of Korean women and girls all in the name of "morale" (14-15).

Both the Korean and U.S. governments viewed the institution and regulation of militarized prostitution as a necessary evil, boosting morale and controlling venereal disease among the troops on the one hand, and protecting the "virtuous" Korean women from the threat

[23] Cho contends that over one million Korean women and girls served as prostitutes to the U.S. military (4).

of rape on the other. Thus, the *yangongju* could be considered a kind of mass sacrifice of the lives of young Korean women and girls in exchange for U.S. military and economic support of South Korea in the postwar era. Their lives, widely deemed expendable, work to prop up a neoimperialist alliance of U.S. domination and Korean subjection.

Memories of My Ghost Brother and an Economics of Desperation

Heinz Insu Fenkl's 1997 novel *Memories of My Ghost Brother* tells the story of a young Amerasian Korean boy Insu—born to a Korean mother and a German-American GI father—growing up near the U.S. military base in Pupyong. The novel is highly autobiographical, and Fenkl himself has said that it could just as easily be called a memoir, as all the events in the work hew closely to Fenkl's real life experiences growing up in South Korea after the war (Fenkl, "Making"). Insu's mother sells American goods on the black market, and his father is largely absent from his life over the course of the novel, as he is alternately overseeing American troops in the DMZ on the border between North and South Korea, or serving in combat in Viet Nam. Insu's relationship with his American father is charged with tension, as he imagines him waging war against people who look like him and his mother, identifying his father as a member of "the clan that kills people whose skin is the color of mine" (133). Insu is haunted throughout the novel by the ghosts of his lost family members, one of whom is Gannan, a cousin who hangs herself after a brief stint working as a military prostitute. The other is the eponymous "ghost brother," Insu's half-brother whom he never met. Throughout his childhood, Insu is disturbed by recurring images in his mind of this other boy who looks like him and, late in the novel, he discovers that it is his half-brother Kuristo, whom his mother was forced to give up for adoption before Insu's father would agree to marry her. This "ghost brother," like Insu, was the son of an

American GI. The disappearance of the other son, and the secrecy surrounding it, produces a melancholic haunting within the family through the power of this unspoken and unavowable loss.

The novel is further haunted by the specters of the Japanese occupation and its refiguring in the current U.S. military presence. Before the family's move to Pupyong near the military base, the family lives in rural Samnung, renting a room in a house that "had been built during the Japanese Occupation by a Colonel who tortured and murdered tens of thousands of Koreans for his amusement" (5). Then, during the Korean War, the house became a haven for refugees, many of whom died there from disease and starvation. Insu is deeply attuned to the tragic history of the house, and is continually haunted by the ghosts of the dead. He sees the Japanese Colonel wandering the yard and "gazing at me with his sad and lonely eyes," and frequently hears "whispers which I knew were the lamentations of the refugees who had died during the war" (7). Though the family moves from the Japanese Colonel's house when Insu is about six years old so he can attend "American School"—"'You don't want to grow up a heathen, do you?'" his father says—this early experience of haunting and Insu's sensitivity to Korea's tragic history stays with him throughout his life, informing his understanding of his new life in Pupyong as continuous with the violent colonial history that preceded him. The conditions of Korean life are still premised upon foreign domination and Korean subordination. Thus, Fenkl demonstrates how the ghosts that haunt Insu throughout the novel are not merely ghosts of a distant or forgotten past, but ghosts of the present and future of Korea as well.

Fenkl provides a complex and devastating portrait of the desperation Korean women felt in their struggle for survival, which is often mediated through their mixed race children. Insu suspects the drowning of his friend James—a fellow Amerasian child of a Korean "bar girl" and

an American GI—was likely not an accident, but committed by James's mother as a way of saving herself. James's African-American father was sent to Vietnam after being stationed in Korea, and was killed in action, leaving James's mother to care for her son alone, as well as carry the stigma of having borne a half-black child. Insu's uncle Hyongbu disdainfully explains the position of women like James's mother:

> "Think about it," he said. "You're a dungwhore and you catch yourself a GI by getting pregnant with his brat, but then he goes off to Vietnam and gets himself killed. That leaves you with benefits from the great Emperor of America, but now you have a Black brat to feed, and it's not enough money. So now you want another GI husband to start things over—maybe a white guy with a higher rank, ungh?—but who would marry a whore with a Black kid?" […] "Maybe she was trying to scrub the color off and she held his face down in the washbasin too long."
>
> I wanted to lift my head and say something back to Hyongbu, but I was tired and full of shame, and I sat there rather helplessly, listening to him go on about dungwhores and Black GIs, children of mixed blood, the devious conniving of Korean women. (229-30)

Hyongbu consistently represents a mainstream Korean viewpoint in the novel, and his speech here to Insu clearly reveals the racial, gender, and class hierarchies that govern camptown life. His dehumanization of these women by calling them "dungwhores" demonstrates their lowly status in their communities and reveals how strictly limited their options are in towns where the only significant flow of money comes from the U.S. soldiers. Once a Korean woman becomes involved in any way with the American GIs, whether through dating, prostitution, or even rape, they are marked as whores and looked down upon by other Koreans. Hyongbu also alludes to the racial hierarchies of the camptowns, as white soldiers are prized above blacks. The U.S. military bases were still racially segregated at the time, and this segregation extended to the

prostitutes as well, who had to choose whether they would service white or black soldiers, a point to which I will return.

As the representative voice of traditional Korean social values in the novel, Hyongbu repeatedly attempts to initiate Insu into this misogynistic worldview that systematically disenfranchises Korean women by defining them as worthless and inferior. In another horrific scene of misogynistic abuse, Hyongbu takes his son Yongsu, his daughter Haesuni, and Insu on a boat ride. When Haesuni gets scared, Hyongbu orders her to get into the cold river and hold on to the boat rather than ride with the men. Insu fears for her as she shivers and groans in the icy water, and he tries to help her, but is reprimanded and threatened by Hyongbu. He recalls, "Somehow, after the longest time, we finally reached the riverbank, and Haesuni walked unsteadily away with us to Big Uncle's house. We said nothing about what had just happened, but as we walked, something flashed between us, as if we had all realized, at the same instant, that we had seen Haesuni's spirit on the verge of leaving her body" (45). When Insu later admits to his uncle Hyongbu that he was scared Haesuni would drown, his uncle reassures him: "'I would never do that to you or my son, Insu-ya. Never. But she's just a girl. A woman. A woman can ruin an entire bloodline'" (46). This, of course, is of a piece with Hyongbu's repeated rants to Insu about the "deviousness" and worthlessness of women, as he tries to socialize his nephew into a violent and destructive patriarchal privilege.

But Insu actively resists Hyongbu's lessons of masculine privilege and identifies instead with the disempowered women around him. Whereas Hyongbu reads James's mother's supposed murder of her own child as a craven calculation, as "devious conniving," Insu grapples with his conflicted feelings, finding himself incapable of simply hating her. Insu, "full of shame" and "helpless," cannot help but feel *injong*, or compassion, which his cousin Gannan

urged him to remember the day before she killed herself because the "yellow-haired GI" who impregnated her refused to marry her. As a mixed race child, Insu is himself closely tied to the harsh realities of Korean postwar life and, haunted by his forgotten "ghost brother," develops a deep well of not only melancholia but also empathy. He rejects Hyongbu's misogyny and reinvests these women with a complex humanity deeply shaped by the forces of history beyond their control. He critically replaces the image of the abject "dungwhore" with the sympathetic image of wartime sacrifice. He remembers "a tragic and ironic story of wartime" in which a mother, in a boat full of refugees attempting to escape under the cover of night, covers her baby's mouth to stifle its cries and accidentally smothers it to death:

> We all forgive this mother her unwitting sacrifice because it is for the good of the many, but what if she were alone in that boat, if she covered the baby's mouth not at someone else's behest, but merely out of her own shrewdness? What if she had done the pragmatic thing, anticipating the danger, and drowned the child before entering that critical stretch of black water? Could we ever forgive her then? Or would we forever condemn and hate her?
>
> To say I hated James's mother would be inadequate. Somewhere, running through my tangled emotions there might have been a single thread of hate, but my feelings were too incoherent and too frayed for me to examine so concisely. Looking back—or even now—it would be easier for me to feel vengeful, to wish her ill, and be done with it; but what I felt in my heart then, and what I feel now, is a great blank emptiness. It is a profound sadness, a fatalism, a knowledge that the world is the way it is, and that the path of blame is not an arrow's flight, but the mad scatter of raindrops in a storm. I could have blamed James's mother, but that would have been too simple to do her justice. In the end there is no blame, only endurance. (232)

The "tangled emotions" Insu feels for James and his mother are inextricably and complexly bound up with Korea's violent history of war and colonization. Insu, in rejecting the notion of individual culpability here, blames instead an economics of desperation in which mothers may be

forced to trade the lives of their children for their own. The path of blame is not direct or singular in the case of James's mother, and Fenkl forces the reader to consider the webs of power that constrain these women, that offer no viable options. The "mad scatter" of blame falls everywhere—from the rigid patriarchal ideologies that define girls as worthless and inferior, to the Orientalist thinking that exoticizes and sexualizes Asian women as objects for Western consumption, to a long history of colonization and dispossession that has left the Korean peninsula economically devastated, to the glittering promise of the "American Dream" that lures these women into trading anything for a chance at the prize of immigration. Insu's proximity to these harshest realities of camptown life, and his own complicated status as a mixed raced child who is the product of these vast inequities, invests him with a profound sense of empathy. Insu's resignation at the end—"there is no blame, only endurance"—points to the ways in which a most basic impulse of survival, of self-preservation defines the camptowns for Koreans, and Korean *women* in particular.

It is this "mad scatter" of blame and loss and longing that haunts Insu throughout his life in the figure of his "ghost brother." The disappearance of his half-brother Kuristo and the disappearance of his best friend James mirror each other in important ways for Insu, even as they speak to the sharp divides that differentiate their stories. Insu does not learn of his half-brother's existence until he is about twelve years old, when he confides in his cousin Haesuni that he keeps having dreams about a lost brother. She explains that the other boy wasn't his father's son, and so he wouldn't marry Insu's mother until she gave the other boy up for adoption. When Insu asks why this was kept a secret from him, she replies:

> "What would it have helped?" said Haesuni. "They wanted you to be the oldest son. And Mahmi was upset enough. She cried and cried. She gave him up and took him to the orphanage in Sosa, but then she went back for him. She did it

> twice, and then the orphanage threatened not to take him again and the whole family had to keep her from going back. They put him in a different place that she didn't know about, where she couldn't go get him. It's all because of your father. He didn't want some other man's son in his family. Why do you think he treated you so oddly when you were little? He almost dropped you when my mother gave you to him that first time. Maybe he was afraid it was that other man's son." (264)

These two instances of the sacrificed son demonstrate the extent to which the mixed race child comes to circulate in the camptowns as an important aspect of economic exchange between U.S. soldiers and Korean women. The children born of a Korean mother and American father repeatedly become overinvested as symbols of hope and despair. As Ji-Yeon Yuh argues in her compelling study of Korean military brides, *Beyond the Shadow of Camptown*, the sexual relationships between American GIs and Korean women—including those that end in marriage and immigration to the U.S.—are inevitably shaped by structural inequality and domination:

> Relationships between Korean women and American soldiers have been shaped by the unequal relationship between the United States and Korea. These marriages might be based on personal choices made at the individual level but they are also a consequence of a half-century of American military domination over Korea. At least for the women, the choice to marry an American solider is profoundly shaped by this larger context of Korean subordination. America's military presence in Korea serves as a constant reminder of the glaring contrast between Korean poverty and American wealth, which is too often interpreted as the contrast between Korean backwardness and American modernity. Additionally, the sexual subordination of Korean women on and around U.S. military bases in the region cannot be overlooked when examining the nature and the origins of relationships between Korean women and American soldiers. (9-10)

In an economy dominated by U.S. wealth, Korean women often and understandably come to view American GIs as their only potential source of economic support and stability and, indeed,

as their only way "out" of an untenable existence in South Korea. Thus the mixed race child comes to signify access to an American culture and American economy that have been powerfully defined as superior through the force of U.S. global hegemony and Cold War politics. The women gamble on their futures by offering the only thing of value to GIs they possess—their bodies.

Further informing the two mothers' relinquishing their sons in Fenkl's novel is the pervasive influence of U.S. neoimperialist ideology during the "American Century." On top of the everyday business of survival are the aspirations of these young women who imagine the possibilities of a glittering life ahead of them in the United States if they can marry a GI. The wealth disparity between the U.S. soldiers and the Korean camptown women is immense to the point of incomprehensibility. On the eve of the Fenkls' move to the United States, Insu asks his mother if she really wants to go to America, and she responds that she's dreamed of it "ever since [she] was a little girl during the War" (267). She tells him it's "where all the wonderful things come from" and says that she hopes to find her other son there (267). When Insu asks how she could marry a man who would force her to give up her own son, it becomes clear how fully her relationship with her husband is bound up in her fantasies of what America may hold for her:

> "When I first met your father I thought he was the most beautiful man I had ever seen. His skin was white like milk and his hair was like gold—real gold. I had never seen anyone so beautiful. It was like the way the Catholic fathers said angels of the Lord were up in heaven. I didn't know about his temper then. But he's a kind man despite his temper. And really, I did think the streets in America are gold or something. I used to think every American was a millionaire and everyone owned his own house and had a car and drank Coca-Cola instead of water and had meat for every meal. I don't know where I got those ideas, but I

> had them. My friends who came back tell me that everything will be a disappointment, but I don't care. I have to go there and see for myself." (267-8)

The perceived beauty of Heinz, Sr. is synonymous with his whiteness—his skin "like milk" and his hair the same color as the gold-paved streets of an America awash in money and privilege. His appearance takes on a spiritual, even magical, quality as she compares his glowing whiteness to haloed angels up in heaven. The religious imagery Insu's mother uses here is indicative of the transformative, even holy, power impoverished Koreans in the camptowns come to associate with the United States. Her assumption that everyone in America is rich is not difficult to understand, as we see throughout the novel the juxtaposition of abject poverty with the seemingly limitless spending power of the U.S. military forces. So invested in this dream is she that she refuses to listen to the chorus of people who have returned from the States and deemed it a disappointment. The hopes she places in the promise of the American Dream also make the sacrifice of her son all the more understandable. In giving up her son for adoption, she has not only preserved her own chances of trading Korean poverty for American prosperity, but provided Kuristo with that gift as well. Adopted by two American doctors, Kuristo—his mother must imagine—has come to benefit from all that the U.S. has to offer, and has escaped from the dirt and chaos of camptown life.

In James's parallel story, Fenkl not only urges his readers to sympathize with the plight of James's mother and understand the tragic circumstances that could compel a mother to commit such an act, as we do with Insu's own mother, but he also highlights the ways in which James's story is even further distorted by racial hierarchies. Whereas we are allowed to imagine Kuristo living—perhaps even thriving—somewhere in the United States, the only image we can hold of the half-black boy James is of him lying face down in the sewer creek (211). Kuristo,

half-white and adopted by two presumably white American parents, has access to a future that was always already foreclosed for James. Despite he himself engaging in racist taunts against his friend James and other Black-Korean children, Insu admits that it took decades for him to realize how central James's blackness was to his tragedy:

> For the longest time, I had not realized what it meant that James was Black . . . Even a decade later, I could not look back and see that James's tragedy was in the fact that his father was Black. The irony and the symmetry of what his mother and Changmi's mother had done never struck me until twenty years later. How pragmatic was that balancing act: James's mother destroying her half-Black son to find a white husband, Changmi's mother plotting to bear a half-Black son to keep her new Black husband. Bartering sons for their own welfare. It was unfortunate that the rules of blood would not permit one mother simply to hand her son to the other, to keep the balance sheet in the world of the living and not in the sad realms of ghosts and memory. I would learn that women—even seemingly devoted mothers—will traffic in children for the mythic promise of America. And they would all look back in regret from the shores of the Westward Land. (232)

The social meanings grafted onto Amerasian children are not uniform. And though Insu feels the shame of his own difference, he also acknowledges that "when people looked at us oddly, they looked at him [James] more oddly than me" (232). In the economic calculations that condition this "balancing act," the black child is eminently, and tragically, more expendable.

Shifting Racial Hierarchies in the Camptowns of *Fox Girl*

Nora Okja Keller, too, critiques the complicated system of racial hierarchy in the Korean camptowns in *Fox Girl.* Keller's novel, like Fenkl's, is set in the 1960s camptowns but focuses more centrally on the women and girls who work as military prostitutes in the bars and clubs of "America Town" near the U.S. military base. *Fox Girl* follows the lives of two young girls,

Hyun Jin—the narrator—and her best friend—later revealed to be her half-sister—Sookie, both of whom end up working in the clubs as prostitutes when they are barely teenagers. Their childhood friend, Lobetto, also a mere teen, pimps for them and other neighborhood girls to make a living, and the three ultimately form a kind of makeshift family until their relationships crumble under the weight of their constant struggle for survival. Hyun Jin begins life in relative comfort as the daughter of shopkeepers, while Sookie and Lobetto—both the offspring of *yanggongju* and black GIs—live in poverty and shame.

Though Sookie and Lobetto are certainly denigrated due to their status as fatherless "whore children" and "black dogs," while Hyun Jin initially holds higher status over them because she is identified as fully Korean and not Amerasian, Keller demonstrates the ways in which the racial hierarchies that govern the camptowns are anything but simple or stable. Statuses shift and change in various ways in "America Town," as the social meanings of race are always articulated in concert with the complicated dynamics of gender, sexuality, and camptown economics. As Anne McClintock argues in *Imperial Leather:*

> race, gender, and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like the armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other—if in contradictory and conflictual ways. In this sense, gender, race, and class can be called articulated categories. This, then is the triangulated theme that animates [*Imperial Leather*]: the intimate relations between imperial power and resistance; money and sexuality; race and gender. (5)

It is this contrapuntal character of systems of power that define and redefine the nuances of status in the camptown economy in *Fox Girl.* Keller traces the shifting power dynamics among her

three main characters to demonstrate the ways in which race and status are contingently defined, particularly for the Amerasian population.

The position of the Amerasian children in the hierarchies of the camptowns is complicated not only by race and gender, but also by the allure of the fantasy of America and possibility of immigration. Sookie and Lobetto are taunted and denigrated because of their African American fathers, their darker skin and textured hair marking them as the product of camptown girls and GIs. However, Lobetto—before his father abandoned him—enjoyed a prized status within the camptown, despite his being black, because of the assumed superiority of Americanness and the possibility that he might get to immigrate to the U.S. Thus the role of a still-present American father alters the status of even a black Amerasian child, as the United States is consistently defined as superior—economically, morally, racially, culturally—to Korea, so any connection to the United States, no matter how tenuous, can heighten the cultural capital of a camptown resident. Hyun Jin remembers the days before Lobetto's father abandoned him:

> When his father still lived in Korea, Lobetto swaggered everywhere. One of the smartest kids in school—as well as the richest—he was able to present Respected Teacher with weekly gifts of coffee, cigarettes, and nuts dipped in chocolate. Lobetto was chosen leader of the class almost as much as I was.
>
> But when his father left for the States and did not return, Lobetto stopped swaggering. The teacher stopped calling him to the front, then stopped seeing him at all. Eventually, Lobetto joined the other *ainokos*[24] at the missionary school for children of GI whores. (76-7)

After he is abandoned by his father, Lobetto becomes just another "tweggi"[25] or "trash animal" like Sookie, rendered invisible and worthless by the severing of his ties to America (35). This is

[24] Japanese term for "love child" or "mixed child"; used derogatorily in Korea
[25] "Mongrel" in Korean

a wound from which Lobetto never recovers, and he carries with him at all times the sole letter from his father, reminiscing about the days when he was the only one who could afford to buy candy and still waiting for the day he'll leave for America.

The social meanings of the mixed race body shift drastically when the approval of the American father is withdrawn. Whereas Lobetto used to be an object of jealousy because he was "half-American," "the big shot GI baby," his status transforms from the positively associated "half-American" to the negatively associated "half-black." The Amerasian children abandoned by their African American fathers have scorn heaped on them in ways the fatherless half-white children do not. The implied association of whiteness with Americanness pervades the camptowns and is reasserted by the continued segregation of the military bases and the recreational facilities. Thus, the American racial politics of the 1960s become grafted onto the Korean camptowns and onto the contingent body of the mixed race child, as well.

Keller demonstrates the effects of internalized racism not only on the Amerasian children, but on the relationships between Korean women and American GIs as well. In both *Fox Girl* and *Memories,* multiple characters suggest that the black GIs are more likely to marry Korean women, and tend to treat Korean women better than the white men do, because they are happy to be with anyone who is lighter-skinned than they are. In *Memories of My Ghost Brother*, when Gannan is distraught that she cannot convince her "yellow-haired boyfriend" to marry her, Hyongbu sneers, "'she should just marry one of those Black bastards who're glad to get anything with skin whiter than theirs" (17). Likewise, in *Fox Girl* when Hyun Jin asks Sookie why her mother "goes with the ugly, black dogs," Sookie explains: "'My mother said darkies are the kindest […] The most grateful. They go with anybody who is lighter than them. Even the ugly ones […] I could get a darkie,' she said, licking her teeth. 'Even you could,

maybe'" (13). These exchanges demonstrate both how the Koreans have come to rearticulate the American racial hierarchy that defines blacks as inherently inferior, as well as the crippling internalized racism affecting the black GIs who serve their country in a still-segregated military. Thus, Korea inherits the U.S.'s own ghosts, through this refiguring of U.S. racial politics in the military camptowns.

Women's Bodies "at war"

In following the lives of Hyun Jin and Sookie as they reluctantly turn to prostitution to support themselves, Keller emphasizes the centrality of Korean women's role in the neoimperialist economy of the camptowns. Born into poverty and patriarchy in a nation whose founding is inseparable from U.S. militarism and global influence, Keller implies that these women's lives are in many ways predetermined by the violent sociohistorical forces that brought contemporary South Korea into existence in the first place. *Fox Girl* proves a fitting follow-up to Keller's 1997 novel *Comfort Woman* that similarly grapples with the pervasive constraints placed on young Korean women, produced at the intersections of poverty, war, and patriarchal-imperial violence. I say this not to suggest that these Korean camptown women are devoid of agency, or are incapable of managing their lives at an individual level, but to suggest the ways in which their subjectivities are conditioned by deeply entrenched social and historical circumstances that constrain their lives in important ways. The systems of oppression in place in 1960s South Korea—and that persist in camptowns to this day—are powerful institutions of globalization, militarism, and cultural imperialism that are not easily resisted or dismantled.

Keller illustrates this powerful push of history and violence through Sookie's mother Duk Hee, who—it is implied—was conscripted as a comfort woman during World War II and, after

returning home to find her town utterly destroyed and her family gone, goes to the American camptown to continue serving as a military prostitute to survive. As Grace Cho points out, the refrain in *Fox Girl,* "Blood will tell"—spoken frequently by Hyun Jin's severe and disapproving mother in a veiled reference to the secret of Hyun Jin's true lineage as the daughter of Duk Hee—refers to the future of the *yanggongju's* children: "The suggestion, of course, is that there are generational continuities in military prostitution. 'Blood' here can be regarded as genetic disposition, but it can also be read as a transgenerational haunting in which those who are more intimately tied to the violences of war and colonization are bound together" (155). The tragic history first of the comfort women, then of the *yangongju* is carried on from one generation of women to the next not, as Hyun Jin's mother would have it, because the daughters are inherently tainted, but because of their proximity to the harshest realities of war and military occupation.

Duk Hee understands, with great pain and resignation, the near-impossibility of escaping that continuity, and attempts to prepare Sookie and Hyun Jin for this "war" as soon as they hit puberty. Hyun Jin recalls, "Sookie's mother taught us ways to protect ourselves," including telling them to "Never depend on a man" (15). Sookie and Duk Hee warn Hyun Jin that puberty "changes everything" and she must now be careful "of everything" in order to protect herself from the threat of American men who view young Korean women solely as sexual objects to be used up and discarded. "With the onset of blood, the world seemed a more menacing place," Hyun Jin worries. When Duk Hee teaches the girls how to use a condom by demonstrating it for them on a hot dog (importantly, a quintessentially American product), Hyun Jin—incapable of understanding the dangers she'll soon face—giggles uncontrollably while Sookie—who we later learn has been forced to have sex with GIs since she was eight years old—remains stone-faced and urges Hyun Jin to take the lesson seriously. When the laughing Hyun Jin jokes that the

condomed hot dog looks like "a small red soldier standing at attention in his coat and hat," and says "It looks like it's going to war," Duk Hee simply replies, "It is a war" (20). Having first served as a "comfort woman" for the Japanese, then as a military prostitute for the Americans, Duk Hee knows all too well how the politics and economics of colonization are played out on the female body.

The camptown girls' circumstances are further informed by the particularities of Western attitudes toward Asia broadly, as "the Orient" is feminized through a host of racial and ethnic assumptions. The relationship between the nations themselves is gendered through the Orientalist assumptions that underpin the U.S. intervention and occupation, as Korea is feminized as a helpless other in need of protection and salvation through the force of American masculine power. This feminizing of the Korean nation dovetails with the racist and sexist stereotypes of Asian women as exotic and submissive sex objects who are eager to cater to the sexual desires of Western men. As Yuh argues, "These distorted and dangerous ideas on the part of Westerners are embedded in the very fabric of the relationship between U.S. soldiers and local camptown women" (16).

Duk Hee's lessons to the girls are a strategic means of accessing some level of power in relationships to American GIs that are inherently unequal. She instructs Sookie and Hyun Jin: "'If you ever catch an American man to marry . . . you need to learn their secrets. The more you know about them, the more power you will have. Remember, it is war'" (22). Duk Hee uses the Americans' racist assumptions for her own ends, deliberately playing on stereotype and the ignorance of the soldiers to provide for her own security. With this "war" being waged in and through women's bodies, Duk Hee uses the only weapon she has. She further instructs the girls: "'*Miguks* [Americans] can't see us,' she said. 'Korean faces blind them'" (23). When the girls

ask what she means, she replies, "'Just that it's possible to be invisible to them'" (23). She shows them how they can use makeup to mask their true selves and trick the GIs: "I think that this makeup is magic—a disguise that lets us move through their world safely" (25). The magic "disguise" of makeup indicates a kind of cleaving of the self that separates the "real" woman from the sexualized and exoticized performance of the *yanggongju*. In coaching Sookie and Hyun Jin—her own daughters—to understand and exploit this split subjectivity, Duk Hee attempts to show them how to protect themselves, how to find some small measure of power and control in their own inevitable exploitation.

This lesson parallels Sookie's refrain that you must "let the real you fly away" in order to work as a prostitute: "'You can do anything if you have to . . . the more you do it, the more you know it's not the real you. The real you flies away, and you can't feel anything anymore'" (131). Though Sookie has learned Duk Hee's lessons well, it is important to note that this is far from liberatory for any of the women, and serves as barely anything more than basic survival. Duk Hee has been abused and discarded over and over again and, at the close of the novel—after losing her spot at the club because of an extended stay at the "Monkey House" where the prostitutes are sent to recover from venereal disease—she is barely scraping by "in the pit of America Town" living in the street cubicles called "fish tanks." "The women who lived in these 'fish tanks'—rows of boxes, really—danced naked in the glass doorways" hoping to lure in GIs for "a cheap quickie" (114).

The gang rape of Hyun Jin when she is a young virgin serves as a devastating example of how limited Duk Hee's lesson of strategic double consciousness truly is, necessary though it may be. Hyun Jin is disowned by her family when they assume she's had sex with Lobetto because she fell asleep at his house, bereft after learning that Duk Hee is her real mother. Desperate, she

asks Lobetto to set up a "job" for her with a GI. When she changes her mind, it is already too late—three American men are waiting for her at Lobetto's house. The men justify Hyun Jin's sobbing and obvious terror through their automatic assumption of her sexual willingness and their own desirability: "'I think it's their culture or something; they cry so they won't feel guilty when they enjoy it'" (152). This is a typical attitude, as Yuh argues: "The women are seen by the soldiers as innately sexual, even depraved, and doing what they do for fun and money. If anyone has forced them into prostitution, in the eyes of the soldier, it is the Korean madams and pimps, not the U.S. military and certainly not the soldiers themselves" (Yuh 14). Hyun Jin narrates in horrifying detail her brutal gang rape by the three American GIs: "After a while, the men rotated, shifting from one orifice to another, taking turns at the stations of my body. They pumped, grunting and grinding themselves into me while I whimpered and tried to get away. It didn't matter what I did; they pinned me down, moving my arms and legs as if I were a doll" (153). She continues:

> I screamed. And then went numb. I could barely hear them above the whimpering, the small animal cries. When I grasped that the inhuman keening was coming not from a cat cornered in the alleyway, but from me, I gave up the struggle of trying to hold onto my body, the body that disgusted me with its crying and mess and pain.
>
> From far away, the real me watched them open the shell of my body, ramming and ripping into every opening they could. I watch them spread the legs open, splitting the inner lips wide enough to fit two of the men at the same time. I watched them bite at breasts and *poji* till they drew blood, and saw them shoot themselves into and over the belly, take breaks, then come at it again. (154)

Hyun Jin's descriptions of herself throughout this brutal scene, first as a "doll" and an "animal," then no more than a collection of disembodied parts—legs, lips, breasts, *poji*[26], and belly—demonstrates painfully and graphically the flip side of the split self Duk Hee and Sookie advise her to cultivate. Here, Hyun Jin is not just two selves—one for her and one for the GIs—but is utterly shattered into pieces through the agony of sexual violence. She describes herself as first dehumanized in the images of the doll and the keening animal, but even that inhumanity cannot hold for her—it is too whole. Hyun Jin's description of "the real me" certainly parallels Duk Hee's and Sookie's explanations of disguise and strategic distance, but hers is not a splitting of the self, it is the destruction of self.

As Elaine Scarry argues in *The Body in Pain,* "torture consists of acts that magnify the way in which pain destroys a person's world, self, and voice" (50). Hyun Jin's response to the sexual brutality she experiences is not that of Sookie's strategy of detachment, of letting "the real you fly away." Rather, the "real" Hyun Jin does not fly away but watches, helpless, from outside herself as her body is brutally and repeatedly violated. Scarry's account of torture is instructive in understanding how Hyun Jin's cleaved self is categorically different from the strategic double consciousness described by Duk Hee and Sookie:

> For what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but, except in the extremity of sickness and death, only latent distinction between a self and a body, between a 'me' and 'my body.' The 'self' or 'me,' which is experienced on the one hand as more private, more essentially at the center, and on the other hand as participating across the bridge of the body in the world, is 'embodied' in the voice, in language. The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. (49)

[26] Korean slang for "vagina"

The "inhuman keening" and uncontrollable sobbing that Hyun Jin describes is precisely this destruction of language through violence, which erases her selfhood. What's more, the limited language she is able to use in an attempt to stop the assault—she screams "no" and "stop" in both English and Korean—is perversely used by the men as evidence of Hyun Jin's depravity, as "part of the game" she's playing with them (152).

It takes her months to recover from the trauma of the gang rape, and it is a violence that still haunts her, but Hyun Jin is forced to go back to the clubs to earn money to help support a now-pregnant Sookie. This time, it seems, she has fully internalized the split selfhood and learned how to use it to her benefit. Hyun Jin quickly grows accustomed to the work and becomes the "Hunni[27] Girl," the girl who would do anything. She was "the bar girl called on for requests, doing what the other girls didn't want to do—at least not on stage. I was the GIs' life-size doll, always smiling, always bendable, always able . . . I built a name, a reputation as the girl—that freak—who would do anything. They paid to push the limits of what Hunni would do" (192). Keller points to the paradox of Hyun Jin becoming the lowest of the low in the eyes of Koreans, but for the first time in her life feeling a true sense of power. The amount of money she makes as the "Hunni Girl" eclipses what other Korean women could make outside of prostitution, and she revels in the power she gains through her American dollars:

> I dressed as what I was, not bothering to try to hide that I was an America Town girl. Though the fishwives would look at me as if I were trash—they in their grimy, gut-stained rags—I flashed my money. Enough of it to make them hide their scorn and smile at me. Enough to make them greet me like a celebrity, and to compete for my attention. 'Here, lady, here,' they would call to me. 'Fish just pulled in today. Someone like you should have only the best.'

[27] "Hunni" means "anything" in Korean

> I suppose they must have felt like choking on their words, steeped in false praise, but I wouldn't buy from them unless they said them. They more they catered, the more they groveled, the more I minced around their stalls, teasing them with what I could buy. I paraded through the maze of stalls, selecting only the choicest and most succulent offerings. (193)

Hyun Jin, who once prided herself on being the teacher's pet and the apple of her father's eye, is completely transformed through the pain of trauma—first her disownment by her family for simply *appearing* to have been unchaste, then the brutal gang rape at the hand of U.S. soldiers that shatters her psyche. Keller's portrayal of Hyun Jin and Sookie, mere children at the start of the novel, humanizes the image of the *yanggongju*, in an attempt to reframe her experience as one of necessity, desperation, and very often coercion. Keller points, at once, to the seeming inevitability of the young girls' slide into militarized prostitution, and to the powerful allure it holds in a nation economically, socially, and physically devastated by decades of war and colonization. Hyun Jin's defiant strut through the market is a stark representation of the structural inequalities produced and maintained, in large part, by the U.S. military occupation. Keller's depiction of Hyun Jin and Sookie's transformation from girlhood friends competing to be the number-one student in class and dreaming of attending university, to "America Town girls" who are considered "Throwaway Koreans," counters the simplistic narratives surrounding the outcast women and children of the camptowns (162).

Fenkl and Keller add a critical supplement to the "forgotten" histories of the Korean War by emphatically repositioning militarized prostitution, and the Amerasian children produced through it, as central to postwar South Korean experience. They demonstrate the ways in which the Korean "bar girl" and the mixed race Korean child emerge as deeply melancholic figures in South Korean history, a history inextricably tied to the consequences of decades of war and

colonial exploitation. The *yanggongju*, "a figure built out of layers of collective trauma and fantasy," and her Amerasian children are conditioned at the volatile intersections of race, class, sexuality, and global politics, and haunt South Korea as reminders both of its traumatic beginnings and its possible futures (Cho 4). The liminal position of the Amerasian child—at once both and neither: both Korean and American, neither Korean nor American—speaks to the anxieties and the hopes of a postwar South Korea deeply entangled with machinery of American power.

Afterword

Toward Political Accountability and Historical Memory

Figure 4: Comfort Women Memorial Statue in Glendale, California.

Tim Berger/ *Los Angeles Times*

A spate of controversies has arisen in recent years over the memorialization on American soil of the hundreds of thousands of women and girls who served as "comfort women" to the Japanese Imperial Army during World War II. The first memorial plaque was installed in 2010 in Palisades Park, New Jersey, a town just outside of New York City, where a majority of its nearly 20,000 residents are of Korean descent (United States Census Bureau). This was the first comfort women memorial in the United States, and reads:

> In memory of the more than 200,000 women and girls who were abducted by the armed forces of the government of Imperial Japan, 1930s – 1945. Known as

> comfort women, they endured human rights violations that no peoples should leave unrecognized. Let us never forget the horrors of crimes against humanity.

In May 2012 the Japanese consulate in New York sent two delegations of Japanese officials to Palisades Park to request that the memorial plaque be taken down. The second delegation even suggested that the comfort women were never forcibly conscripted and were "women who were paid to come and take care of the troops," according to the town's mayor (Semple). The dedication of the second memorial, to be placed at the Bergen County courthouse alongside the slavery and Holocaust memorials, was delayed until the wording was changed to remove a reference to the Japanese government (Henry). The Bergen County memorial was unveiled on International Women's Day, March 8, 2013, in spite of the deluge of complaints—including a full-page ad in New Jersey's *The Star-Ledger* calling the comfort women story a farce and directing readers to a Youtube video entitled, "Sex, Lies, and Comfort Women"—from opponents of the memorial who continue to claim that the women were prostitutes who willingly sold sex for money (Sullivan). This same tug-of-war over this history took place in Glendale, California, which installed the first comfort women memorial on the west coast in August 2013. The Glendale memorial is an exact replica of the comfort women memorial statue that sits outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul, South Korea. The fervor over the Glendale memorial was enough to stop plans for a similar memorial in Buena Park, California.

The bronze statue in Glendale features a young woman in Korean dress sitting next to an empty chair (see *Figure 4*). Next to the empty chair is a plaque that reads, "I was a sex slave of Japanese military" [sic]. As the plaque explains, the empty chair is meant to symbolize "comfort women survivors who are dying of old age without having yet witnessed justice" (Johnston). The haunting emptiness of the chair signifies beyond this long and slow wait for "justice," whatever

that might mean to the few remaining survivors, now in their eighties and nineties. It conjures the thousands of women and girls who died anonymously as comfort women before and during the war; the women who, knowing the ostracism they may face, died without ever having revealed their past, without having lived to see the day when their fellow survivors would come forward and demand redress; the survivors who continue to live in silence, having chosen to keep their traumas secret. It conjures the families from whom these people were taken. It conjures the men who participated in this system of exploitation, as well as all those who perpetuated it after the war by rejecting and ostracizing survivors. The empty chair forces the viewer to contend with invisibility and silence, to bear witness to the impossibility of seeing what the ghost in the empty chair may have seen and experienced. It asks how we can "attend that speech," to quote again Kogawa, "a wordless word" that can testify only to its own unspeakability.

The ongoing controversies surrounding the human rights activism on behalf of "comfort women" is a telling example of the fraught politics of historical narratives, of the deep and abiding desire to forget. These continued denials and attempts to foreclose such painful histories—of which the comfort women memorials controversy is merely one recent example—act as a secondary violence of erasure that must be resisted. The Asian American writers studied in this dissertation assert the persistent presence of the past and, indeed, seek to recover, translate, and give voice to histories of trauma, war, and displacement that have been foreclosed by dominant historical narratives. Taken together, these texts reveal a crucial anxiety at the heart of Asian America—an anxiety over a historical amnesia that threatens to erase these violent histories. Contemporary Asian American literature challenges such deliberate forgetting through the figure of the ghost. From the reverberating lessons of the Vietnam War, to the refiguring of Japanese internment in "indefinite detention," to the presumed triumph of the "Forgotten War" in

Korea—a war that still has not ended—the clinging to loss that is characteristic of melancholia cannot simply be read in these texts as a debilitating helplessness born of racism and trauma, but must be viewed as a demand for political accountability and historical memory.

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