

SEOUL SISTERS: TRAUMA AND WOUNDED FEMALE BODIES IN KOREAN/KOREAN
AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Korean/Korean American women's traumas, as they are represented on the body, are often treated as a national allegory. This dissertation strives to complicate this interrogation by suggesting that these wounded bodies serve as sites of subversion; through the exploration of fictional works by Korean/Korean American writers, this work attempts to find a new ways of articulating the trauma that is written on the Korean American female body. Korean/Korean American literature by women writers in particular engages issues related to hybridized identities, intergenerational conflicts and trauma, diaspora, and representation. These writers explore Korean American woman's identity and bear witness to women's subjectivities and silenced histories. This dissertation hopes to contribute to the exposure and dissemination of these narratives.

Preface

This work is dedicated to Keats. Everything is with, for, because of you. I love you.

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INTRODUCTION

A whole generation of Korean immigrants and their American-born children could have lived and died in the United States without anyone knowing they had been here. I could not let that happen. – Clay Walls, Ronyoung Kim

Korean American writers and Korean writers in English translation have been widely published and acknowledged in the past two decades. In 2001, for example, Beacon publishing house released *Kōri: The Beacon Anthology of Korean American Fiction*, which marked the first anthology of Korean writers by a major publisher. The burst of recognition came, in part, as an observance of historical significance; 2003, after all, marked the centennial of Korean immigration to the U.S. The sporadic publication of works by Korean Americans is aligned to the immigration patterns. Koreans first arrived in the United States in the early 1900s, which came to a halt with the exclusion act of 1924. The second wave of immigration came in the 1940s and 1950s after Korea was freed from Japanese annexation, the Korean peninsula was divided between US and Soviet interests, and the Korean War. The literary texts of the time depict the struggles of the exile. Early Korean American writing was primarily autobiographical; Younghill Kang's *East Goes West* (1937), New Il-Han's *When I Was a Boy in Korea* (1928), Easurk Emsen Charr's *The Golden Mountain* (1961), and Richard Kim's *The Martyred* (1964) mark the earliest examples of Korean American literature. Later writers like Ty Pak (1983) continued to give voice to the Korean experience. However, the themes

centered on immigrant bachelors, male-centered military and war experiences, and male desires. Much attention has been given to the works of Don Lee and Chang-rae Lee most recently, but they too privilege the male perspective.

Korean American women writers have contributed to the canon as well, although much later than their male counterparts. Margaret Pai's *The Dreams of Two Yi-Min* (1989) and Mary Paik Lee's *Quiet Odyssey: A Pioneer Korean Woman in America* (1990) are early autobiographical representations of the immigrant woman's experience. It is not until Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982) and Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997) gained their acclaim that Korean women writers were more widely known and studied. (Published in 1982, *Dictee* was more widely read and studied a decade later. This could be in part due to the generation of new readers and scholars-- the children of those who immigrated in the 1970s. Also, the Los Angeles riots in 1992 highlighted the need for the representation of Korean Americans in the US. Young Korean Americans sought visibility and identification in the national landscape.) Overall, Korean American feminism and literature by Korean/Korean American women has lagged behind other Asian American feminist discourses and literary scholarship. This may be due, in part, to migration patterns and the way Asian American studies evolved overall—prioritizing Chinese/ Chinese American and Japanese/Japanese American cultural productions and of course, male narratives. Notable Asian American scholars, such as Elaine Kim, have conscientiously been inclusive of Korean American texts in their scholarship overall. My aim, however, is to provide a space for more of the Korean women writers. I attempt to explore the feminization of Korean males in the

context of the subjugated Korean woman and to consider how the relationship between the US and Korea is a sexualized one that is negotiated on the female body. This dissertation contributes to Asian American studies, Women's and Gender studies, and literary criticism with the analysis of works by Korean/Korean American women writers. More specifically, this dissertation will connect the threads of trauma theory in the following works of fiction: Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* (1997) and *Fox Girl* (2002), Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982), Chong-Hui O's *Spirit on the Wind* (1986), Kyung-sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom* (2012), Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015), Jung Yun's *Shelter* (2016), Krys Lee's short story "The Believer" (2012), Patti Kim's *A Cab Called Reliable* (1997), Ronyoung Kim's *Clay Walls* (1986), Mia Yun's *Translations of Beauty* (2004), Catherine Chung's *Forgotten Country* (2012), and Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* (2003). I will consider these literary works as they present a racialized and gendered cultural/historical trauma that is articulated through a wound on the female body. The women are a haunting presence that embodies the traces and fragments of war narratives and nationalist discourse and agents of memory.¹

Literary trauma theory first emerged in the early 1990's with Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal's scholarship. Caruth, in particular, pioneered an approach that imagines trauma in literary texts asking how the un-representable is represented in literature. Or, more specifically aligned to my purposes here, how the un-representable is represented in Korean/Korean American literature. Trauma

¹ Interestingly, the Korean word for memory- gieok- can be defined as "repeated recollection"- to recall again and again or "to bring/rise to the surface." Trauma is recalled and relived in its repetition.

theory rests in the unspeakable, indeterminacy, and Freud's claim that trauma is essentially dissociative. In "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History" (1991), Caruth provides a general definition: trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (181). She notes, "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (187). Moreover, she imagines a history that is "no longer straightforwardly referential" (182). Caruth repeatedly draws from Freud's notion of repetition – of leaving and returning – of traumatic departure. Later, in "Parting Words: Trauma, Silence, and Survival" (2001), Caruth draws more explicitly from Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and the idea of reenacting painful memories. She considers "Freud's enigmatic move in the theory of trauma from the drive for death to the drive for life, from the reformulating of life around the witness to death to the possibility of witnessing and making history in creative acts of life" (22). Furthermore, "the language of creativity...bears witness to the past even by turning from it that bears witness that bears witness to death by bearing witness to the possibility of origination in life" (25). In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), Dominick LaCapra also delves into the problem of traumatic representations and goes even further to consider secondary trauma. He writes:

Trauma brings about a dissociation of affect and representation: one disorientingly feels what one cannot represent; one numbingly represents

what one cannot feel. Working through trauma involves the effort to articulate or rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a reenactment, or acting out, of that disabling dissociation (42).

For LaCapra, mourning is “working through,” while melancholia is “a form of acting out” (65). He suggests that both are “performatively regenerated” (70). While both involve some form of repetition and living of traumatic events, working through provides a level of critical distance. LaCapra also takes inventory of Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), highlighting the Freudian repetition of trauma. LaCapra notes, “Caruth thus offers the image of the voice of trauma emerging from the wound itself- a voice testifying to the role of the victim as witness” (182). However, as he makes a distinction between “writing about trauma” and “writing trauma”, he admits that writing trauma can be “equated with acting...it out in performative discourse” which complicates the “prime...privileged place” of the literary to give voice to trauma (190). In essence, then, where Caruth limits the possibility of conveying trauma / traumatic experiences, LaCapra engages with how to write trauma, the recognition of transference, and – as mentioned-- working through. The Korean/Korean American literary texts that this dissertation examines are grounded in testimony and wounded bodies. By engaging the texts through the lens of trauma theory and grounding them in the context of ghostly haunting, we are able to consider not only the collective cultural trauma of Koreans in Korea and Koreans in migration, but also transgenerational trauma.

The legacy of trauma presented in the writings – and as interrogated by Caruth and LaCapra- can be productively associated with Gabriele Schwab’s work in

Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma (2010). Schwab furthers the idea of the unspeakable and considers how the legacies of violence not only haunt the victims, but how “damages of violent histories can hibernate in the unconscious, only to be transmitted to the next generation” (3). She works against Caruth’s idea of “unrepresentability” and strives to engage with memory recollection and representation in the writing of trauma – which embodies what LaCapra deemed “working through.” Drawing from Nicolas Abraham’s work on mourning and crypts, Schwab examines how trauma unfolds in/out of crypts, ghostly figures, and hauntings. She maintains, “Cryptographic writing can bear the traces of the transgenerational memory of something never experienced first hand” (4); ultimately, “the recipients of transgenerational trauma live with a ‘postmemory’ that comes to them secondhand” (14). In literary iterations, these legacies often manifest as “death-in-life” or “speaking corpses.” Moreover, these corpses have typically suffered a “soul murder” leaving the body alive (18). The speaking corpse, therefore, becomes a work of and a conduit for mourning. Korean/Korean American literature is rich with specters and ghostly haunting. In their fictional iterations, ghosts often bear the wounds of trauma and frequently haunt the following generation.

The speaking corpses are ghosts or phantoms. Esther Rashkin’s *Family Secrets and the Psychoanalysis of Narrative* (2016) furthers the idea of ghostly figures as manifestations of trauma as she explores the role of the phantom in literature. She claims that a phantom is created as unspeakable secrets are passed

on transgenerationally through cryptic agents. For Raskin, the haunted individual becomes a conduit. She writes,

My focus is...on examining how phantoms can be concealed rhetorically and linguistically within literature, how their concealed presence can be detected and exposed as the driving force behind the actions and discourse of certain fictive characters, and how the analysis of the modes and processes of their concealment makes possible the articulation of a new approach. (5)

Similar to Rashkin's phantom, Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997) drives trauma theorists and literary scholars to "learn how to identify hauntings and reckon with ghosts" (23) and come to see "the ghosts as a social figure" (25) because, as Caruth configures, the ghosts speak through the wound. As such, the theoretical groundwork of Caruth and Gordon appear throughout this dissertation. Their ideas provide a context to consider how Korean/Korean American women writers articulate trauma, utilize haunting, wounds and memory, and as a means to contextualize how their work is studied. Most notably, these speaking corpses or ghosts are feminine.

Ultimately, in the literature of Korean/Korean American women, the female body is situated as a register of international and domestic political struggles- a site of national divisions and loyalties. In this way, the ghosts are "a social figure." Moreover, the body is positioned as fluid, expressing various ethnic affiliations. The legacy of trauma is written upon Korean women's bodies; the legacy of oppressive Korean patriarchal powers and the Japanese occupation is then further complicated by the traumas of the immigrant experience manifested as wounds. This dissertation will investigate the negotiation of these traumas- the negotiation of the racialized and gendered identities between Korean American women's ethnic,

national, and cultural identities which are all in tension-- the eastern and western and, more interestingly, the space in between. What's more, these racialized and engendered tensions are further complicated by notions of masculinity and the orientalist emasculation of Korean/Korean American men; these men have to navigate these spaces too. In this dissertation, I also hope to consider how the masculine figures negotiate the domestic sphere as I examine how the home can be seen as a cryptic space for the ghostly feminine figures.

The first chapter, "Written on the Body: 'History, the old wound' and Utopian Corporeality" connects the threads of trauma theory and the scholarship on ghostly figures to historical trauma and wounds. Furthermore, it considers how Frederic Jameson's notions of utopian corporeality complicate the interrogation of the wounded female body represented in literary texts and their depiction of comfort women, camptown workers, martyrs, and Korean American immigrant women. This chapter considers how a history of trauma is feminized and collected on the female body. Matrilineal lines are also examined to consider how/what traumas are inherited and how transgenerational trauma is articulated. More, it is the inaccessibility and unutterable nature of these traumatic histories that requires a potentially utopian space for articulation. I maintain that these figures, as revealed in Nora Okja Keller's novels *Comfort Woman* (1997) and *Fox Girl* (2002), possess utopian qualities. Further, I consider how Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* (1982) utilizes the wound as a utopic site. If history is written on the female body, that body is wounded and seeks to be transfigured. My argument is centered on the idea that the transfiguration is utopian; meaning that not only is the desire for

transfiguration utopian, but that there is an in-between space of mobility and transfiguration that is also utopian. Drawing from Cathy Caruth's idea of "no place" and Elaine Kim's exploration of the "exile space", I go on to consider how this in-between space or gap is utopian as it is the site from which to articulate trauma.

The next chapter, "Masculinity and Wounded Widowers: 'How can a husband lose his wife!'" attempts to explore how the literary representations of Korean and Korean American masculinity are bound to the domestic sphere; the physical manifestation of a home comes to symbolize the fragile performance of masculinity and authority. Moreover, the patriarchal figures require the hierarchy of the traditional home/domestic space to enforce their authority. This chapter establishes how the domestic space serves as a crypt for the ghostly figures of the mothers as it also considers the complications regarding masculinity in that domestic space. It is this very dependence that further necessitates the need for traditional gender roles within the household. Without a wife, the figure of the husband is also wounded. Continuing to draw from trauma theory as the base framework, I maintain that the Korean American immigrant family is bound to the maternal body that serves as the site to for the negotiation of trauma, haunting, and intergenerational conflicts. Moreover, I will argue that it is the figure of the wife that serves as the site of the wound as I consider the different meanings of the word "wound" in its Korean translation; one use of the word equivocates a wound to the loss of a wife. If a wound is essentially equated to the loss of a wife then not only is the site and trauma feminized, but it is connected explicitly to the figure/body of a woman. If we consider Caruth's insights and the Freudian idea that the wound is

where the injury lives, then it takes on even more nuanced meaning. The wife, then, is arguably the speaking corpse figure Schwab outlines. Furthermore-- in keeping with the Freudian vein-- trauma is embodied in the Other and is founded in its repetition. Chong-Hui O's novella *Spirit on the Wind* (1986), *Please Look After Mom* (2012) by Kyung-sook Shin, and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015) are the works translated from Korean to English that are examined in this chapter. Jung Yun's novel *Shelter* (2016), Patti Kim's *A Cab Called Reliable* (1997), and Ronyoung Kim's *Clay Walls* (1986) are the Korean American texts that serve to complicate the themes with the representation of the immigrant experience.

"Identity, Sexual Suicide, Baby Dolls, and the Burden of the Interpreters: Splitting Sisters in Contemporary Korean American Women's Literature," the third and final chapter considers how sisters are utilized as a trope to represent the splitting of the Korean immigrant woman's subjectivity and performativity. This chapter centers on the sexual domination and exploitation of Korean American immigrant women's bodies as represented in the literature of Korean American women. The hypersexualized image of Asian American women overall is complicated by the historically hypersexualized relationship between Korea and the United States. The military history and sex industry in South Korea and war brides coupled with the trauma of Japanese colonization feed the dominant narrative of eroticization and fetishization. The women are often depicted as split between competing national identities and discourses; this chapter interrogates the use of sisters as a means to explore that split. More specifically, Mia Yun's *Translations of Beauty* (2004), Catherine Chung's *Forgotten Country* (2012), and Suki Kim's *The*

Interpreter (2003) depict the juxtaposition of Western and Eastern ideologies. In each of the novels, the sisters navigate and negotiate their various identities. To further complicate the themes, the writers also utilize the figure of the baby doll to serve as an additional symbol and site for negotiations of trauma and power.

The traumatic experiences of Korean/Korean American women, as they are represented on the body, are typically understood to be a national allegory; ultimately, I hope this dissertation can complicate this interrogation by suggesting that perhaps these bodies, as they engage in expressions of their individual sexuality, can become sites of subversion from both within and in the gaps of the narratives/literature. My exploration of the fictional works by Korean/Korean American writers will attempt to find a new means of defining and articulating the trauma that is written on the Korean American female body.

CHAPTER 1:
Written on the Body: 'History, the old wound' and Utopian Corporeality

*Why resurrect it all now. From the Past. History, the old wound.
 The past emotions all over again. To confess to relive the same folly.
 To name it now so as not to repeat history oblivion.
 To extract each fragment by each fragment from the word
 from the image another word another image the
 reply that will not repeat history in oblivion. -Dictee*

The Korean peninsula, before it was divided at the 38th parallel, was subject to oppressive Japanese colonization; then immediately after liberation in 1945, the start of Western aggression over the country and U.S. military dominion and continued presence began. The collective trauma and grief of the Korean people is rooted, not only in ethnic, colonial, and military hostilities, but also in masculine/patriarchal aggression. Too often, it is the Korean woman who is victim to socio-political and military abuses. Whether it is the sexual violence on 'comfort women' and camptown workers or the abuses in more private domestic spaces, it is the female body that bears the wounds of trauma. Moreover, this trauma is represented in the literature of Korean/Korean American women writers; the bodies of the female characters are presented as sites for masculine contestation. This chapter engages trauma theory and conceptions of utopia to consider the implications of the wounded female body. Frederic Jameson, in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), discerns:

“Utopian corporeality is...also a haunting...harboring muted promises of a transfigured body...eternal bodies projected against the sky” (6). Jameson’s focus on the promise of a transfigured and eternal body warrants interrogation. While he specifically examines beauty products in that context, the overall objective is a consideration of the utopic quality in transcending the temporal life of the body—a body, for my purposes here, that is a metonymic of trauma. The body in question is also that of a woman. I venture to argue that the historical Korean “comfort women” (a term for sex slaves forced to serve the Japanese Imperial army during the Pacific War and World War II) and military camp town workers and their subsequent literary representations in Nora Okja Keller’s novel, *Comfort Woman* (1997) and *Fox Girl* (2002), reveal utopian qualities. Also, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee* (1982) beckons national martyrs and utilizes “History, the old wound” (33) as a utopic site. Furthermore, contemporary theories of trauma, memory, and articulation complicate the very utopian impulse that defines them. I intend to explore Jameson’s use of utopian corporeality as a “haunting” and “promise” of a “transfigured body” in relation to utopia as no-place or no-where, or more accurately, a ghostly in-between or exile space. While this utopian in-between is often manifested or represented symbolically as a wound on the female body, it is transformative in its mobility and unfixed transfiguration. It is utopian, finally, because it serves as a site for the articulation of trauma.

To start, the term “comfort woman” demands inquiry. To dub a sex slave, as comforting, immediately infers that the female body is a vessel of comfort for men—in this case, the Japanese soldiers. To comfort is to sooth, to ease from pain—bound

strictly to the body and physical/corporeal manifestations of both the distress that needs soothing, and the ease that is provided. The comfort is derived from the men and their use of the female body for purposes of transcending their purported hardships and the sacrifices of war. Notably, George Hicks, in *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War* (1995), maintains, "...the women would arrive with the ammunition—and sometimes even before essential military equipment" (16). Korean women's bodies were seen as commodities of Japanese expansion. Further, he ascertains, "More or less institutionalized means have always been found for catering to this primitive sexual need"(29). The notion that the women were part of the cargo—a necessity for the servicemen-- not only affirms the objectification of the women but also reveals the high priority of that "sexual need." Moreover, Hicks goes on to describe the supernatural beliefs the Japanese upheld regarding sex: how it served as a charm, how the possession of a comfort woman's pubic hair was made into an amulet, and how sexual deprivation was unlucky and how sex relieved the stress of combat (32). Explicitly connected to the women's physicality was the belief that their bodies were a means of escape and even protection.

Indeed, in *The Emperor's Forces and Korean Comfort Women* (1976), Kim Il Myon claims that "...a visit to the comfort station was no doubt the only form of relief. It was the only kind of individual act in which one was 'liberated'...from the savagery of the unit" (33). Transcendence from the horrors of war came through the women's bodies. In fact, the Japanese army specifically sought comfort women in place of prostitutes as their bodies were better regulated and better "cared" for

with routine medical examination. The soldiers' desires for liberation from the horrors of war, coupled with their imperial military purpose, are clear manifestations of utopian impulses to escape the atrocities of war. After all, Jameson, in "The Politics of Utopia" (2004), argues that the utopian "involves pleasure." He recalls Ernst Bloch and mentions the "core of a longing for eternal life and the body transfigured" (40). It is this longing for the comfort woman that transfigures the desire of the men. From the perspective of the Japanese, the comfort women are means to an end, a commodity and a right they are entitled to through national, colonial, and gender superiority. The men's visceral desires are bound to their physicality as well, but in the exchange, they transcend their current situation while the women bear the wounds of trauma. The "utopian corporeality" Jameson mentions is split or two-fold; the utopian desire for transcendence of the army men is brutally written upon the bodies of the comfort women who then carry the haunting of the Utopian corporeality. The representation of comfort women and their trauma therefore complicate the Utopian qualities bound to their intentionality. Analysis of a fictional iteration of this trauma further reveals the complications of Utopian impulses and promise of, as Jameson names, "a transfigured and eternal body."

Nora Okja Keller's novel, *Comfort Woman* (1997), is the story of Akiko who was abused as a comfort woman at the hands of the Japanese Army. Her narrative is accompanied her daughter, Beccah's,² who struggles to piece together her mother's history. As the novel progresses, she learns that her mother's actual name was Soon

² Interestingly, Beccah works for the newspaper as a writer of obituaries. Her role and duty is to record the lives of the dead.

Hyo and discovers the painful elements of the past. Keller's novel opens with preparation for a chesa (a memorial of/for ancestors); Beccah delves into her experience with ghosts/spirits and how she strives to appease them believing that they would then leave her mother alone—her mother prone to trances. Beccah explains, “the spirits claimed my mother [and] When they called to her, my mother would leave me and slip into herself...During those times, the body of my mother would float through our one-bedroom apartment, slamming into walls...” (4). The implication that she attempts or is perceived to depart her body is poignant. Bound to the limitations of the body, the spirits that possess Akiko suggests another utopian impulse to transcend the temporality and trauma of the body.

Akiko also understands her existence as a duality. She makes repeated mention of leaving her body in escape of the horrors of the recreation camps. She recalls, “Even in the camps, where the soldiers banged in and out of the comfort cubicles, in and out of our women's bodies, what was left of our minds we guarded, kept private and separate” (68). To reclaim the body and ownership of a Korean identity was to face total severance from the body. The night Soon Hyo became the 41st Akiko; Akiko 40 had “denounced the soldiers yelling at them to stop their invasion of her country and her body. Even as they mounted her, she shouted: I am Korea, I am a woman, I am alive...All through the night...reclaiming her Korean name, reciting her family genealogy...” (20)--which was only silenced when they “brought her back skewered from her vagina to her mouth” (21). Notably, Akiko reasons that her predecessor had gone “sane”, “was planning her escape”, and that ultimately the skewered corpse they brought back that night was she.

While the comfort women were considered “disposable commodities” (147), Akiko reasons that her predecessor “chose her own death” by:

Using the Japanese as her dagger, she taunted them with the language and truths they perceived as insults. She sharpened their anger to the point where it equaled and fused with their black hungers. She used them to end her life, to find release. (144)

It was this choice to reclaim her body and her own death that was the only means of empowerment in this context and perhaps even utopian in its desire to transcend. The severance from the body under the brutal torture and trauma of the comfort stations is a definitively utopian impulse.

Furthermore, Jameson delves into the anxiety and fear over the total obliteration or disappearance of self which at first seems to contradict the impulse to transcend. For Beccah, Akiko had attempted to bind her to her physicality; giving her a “spiritual address,” she claimed, “You needed to be tied to your body...in case you slipped out, these words would have led you back...” (78). Beccah also understands this as she explains, “my body [was] a weight anchoring her to life (157). Akiko’s attempt to anchor her daughter to her body is an attempt to survive for both their sake. It is Akiko’s attempt to prevent the transference of the trauma she survived. She remarks that her body had “lay in its own filth...the instinct for survival in the blood and bones” (39). Her own psychic separation from her body, she explains, is not a matter of “leaving...but of retrieving something that I lost” (48). She asks, “What are living people to ghosts, except ghosts themselves” (18)? In essence, Akiko is not only possessed by spirits but is a ghostly figure herself. Akiko further declares, “...I was nothing but a bag of skin” (92). She is bound only in fragments to her “bag of skin” that served as a vessel for the soldier’s utopian

desires. Their desire was not very different from her desire for her to transcend her own body. Furthermore, her ghostly corpse figure chains her to the trauma and the past: "For I knew then that my body was, and always would be, locked in a cubicle at the camps, trapped under the bodies of innumerable men" (106). Afraid and unwilling to be untethered and leave her daughter behind, she is bound to her body. Yet, she is also ghostly and exists on a spiritual plane as well.

Unable to situate herself, Akiko exists in a space that is ironically "no place." Therefore, the Utopian body manifested is also a metaphorical island in addition to representing the unspeakable and inexpressible traumatic history as determined by Cathy Caruth. In the introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), she claims:

The history that a flashback tells—as psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology equally suggest—is, therefore a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood. In its repeated imposition as both image and amnesia, the trauma thus seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence. (153)

I'd like to pause here to note an interesting use of words in Caruth's analysis. She claims that history "*has no place*" (her italics) neither past nor present. Utopia very literally translates to "no place." The link between trauma, recollection/memory and Utopia is profound and poignant. Jameson employs theories of utopia to reexamine the past to understand/critique the present; Caruth's estimation that traumatic history is placed neither in the past or the present evokes utopia in seemingly contradictory ways. This is not to suggest that sexual slavery or rape is fundamentally utopian; rather, to interrogate the representation of comfort

women—the role of the Japanese soldiers along with their desires and the urgency for the women to escape their horrors and inevitable trauma—reveals how “promises of a transfigured body” are applicable to the female body in complicated and nuanced ways. The haunting of the corporeal body takes on new meaning. Poignantly, there is the “no where” ness of the traumatic history that is represented in the in-between of the ghostly and the material. Also, beyond the desire for a physical ideal, there is a desire for an inextricable transcendence.

Furthermore, the ghost figures often manifest this desire. Beckoning Avery Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* (1997):

Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future. (22)

Trauma and memory are manifested in ghost figures and they serve a trope through which these traces are articulated (or the attempt anyway). Auntie Reno asserts, “Dah spirits love these people, tellin’ em for ‘do this, do that.’ But they hate em, too, jealous of dah living” (9). Caught in the gap, the spirits strive to articulate their histories through living bodies. Again, bodies serve as a vessel for utopian desires for transcendence. More importantly, they are the sites of masculine contestation. Like the Japanese soldiers using the comfort women’s bodies to escape the atrocities of war (and the subsequent comfort women’s desire to escape the torture of the comfort stations), the ghosts—a representation of these collective though

contrasting utopian desires and traumas—seek articulation and utterance through the body and/or wound.

When Beccah opts to cremate her mother's body, it is indicative of her participation in the utopian ideals of the transfigured body. Beccah too understands the need to liberate her mother's from physical confines to send her to the realm of the spirits. To return to the novel's opening with the chesa once again, there is a duty and reverence that is demanded of the living. When Beccah discovers the information her mother left for her to find after her death, the cassette recording leaves instructions:

When I can no longer perform the chesa for the spirits, we will look to you to feed us. I have tried to release you, but in the end I cannot do it and tie you to me, so that we will carry each other always. Your blood in mine. (197).

The significance of Akiko's assertion that she cannot be physically bound to her body while also preventing Beccah's inheritance of the trauma is that Akiko must occupy a realm that is in-between or no-where. As a ghost or spirit, she claims she will look to be fed, suggesting that her transfigured body (at once still bound to physicality as it needs to be fed, but also free from actual bodily confines), is eternal and more than what Jameson dubs a haunting promise; it is the haunting manifested in the gap.

Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) draws from Shoshana Felman's argument that:

[it is] the event of creating an address for the specificity of a historical experience that annihilated any possibility of address... Between all these conditions [unemployment in Germany, the Nazi soul, and so on) and the gassing of three-thousand persons...in a gas chamber, all together, there is an

unbreachable discrepancy. It is simply not possible to engender one out of the other. There is no solution of continuity between the two; there is rather a gap, an abyss, and this abyss will never be bridged. ("The Obscenity of Understanding")

Caruth alludes to a transmission from the gap. Again, if we look to elements of the utopian, the utopian exists in this no place, in the gap—the gap which I have argued is occupied by ghostly figures.

Further, much as Akiko attempts to prevent the transference of her trauma to her daughter, it is inescapable. The transgenerational trauma inherited by the children of World War II and the Korean War is evidenced in both of Nora Okja Keller's novels. In *Fox Girl* (2002), these children are very literally the "leftover", the unseen byproducts of the war. This novel takes place during the 60s and is set in the aptly named America Town, a military camp town where the Korean bar girls and sex workers hope that one of their GI customers will marry them and take them to the USA. (All the characters are looking to escape America Town.) The children of these women grow up fending for themselves with illegal hustles and even, at times, pimping their own mothers. Readers follow the story of mixed raced children-- children who are oppressed by poverty, abandoned by their GI fathers, and marginalized by Koreans who view them as impure. Specifically, we follow the narratives of best friends Hyun Jin and Sookie —two girls we later learn are half-sisters—who descend into a life of prostitution.

Hyun Jin's body is marked at birth as her face bears a large birthmark. As a child, the neighborhood boys call her a "pile-of-shit-face" and "pronounced the first part of [her] name with a hard 'g' at the end, changing its meaning from *wise truth* to *scarred truth* (4) drawing greater emphasis on her scar. What's more, she is

considered “deformed” and always tilts her head in attempt to “hide the birthmark” (8). Her potentially utopian desire to transcend or transfigure her physically in adolescence is tied to her desire to escape what she considers a physical deformity. Indeed, when Sookie draws a picture of Hyun Jin, she draws, according to her, “a perfect me, a me without the birthmark...I was transformed...with the darkness erased,...I had a face as lucky as the full moon” (10). The mark nonetheless is more than just a “deformity” as it can be seen as the physical manifestation of trauma on the female body—inescapable. What’s more, it is considered a marking “From the evils of a past life” (41) which implies that not only is the trauma transgenerational but an unresolved history. An herbalist even makes a tea and ointment for her birthmark claiming, “Slowly, it will fight the darkness coming from within her” (56). To further emphasize the connection to trauma and a fated national and gendered identity: it is believed that “It’s in the blood...life is mapped” (50) and that the “maps of our lives are etched into vein and muscle and bone” (126). More, “Like the truth, it comes rushing to the surface, staining the body, a blueprint for life...” (111). Again and again, the phrase “Blood with always tell” is repeated throughout the novel. “Her blood makes her, marks her” (122); indeed it does. Born as a Korean girl in the aftermath of colonial and postcolonial violence, she is bound to the collective suffering of her people and the sexual violence that is unique to her ethnic and gender identity.

Not only is the female body marked/“scarred” but it is also constantly connected to ghosts and spirits throughout the text. For example, her father teases asking, “...did I hear my daughter’s voice?...or was that a ghost? A faceless fox

spirit..." (7)? More, she grows up hearing the tales of "girls haunting the earth" (8). As the title of the novel would suggest, the myths of the fox girl are carried throughout the narrative. The tale is poignant as it points to how spirits need "a disguise" to help them "move through their world" (25). Moreover, the fox "wraps herself into the skin of a dead girl" who wanders the earth stealing the breathe from boys' mouths because she is "trying to regain what those boys stole from her" (26). (This evokes *Comfort Woman's* Akiko's earlier claim of retrieving something lost.) Before moving on, it is worth noting that the fox is feminized and takes form in the shell of a girl, a feminine body. Next, what she searches for, what was stolen as far as the folk story determines, is a jewel.

The fox was once the keeper of the jewel of knowledge. She kept it safe hidden under her tongue. One day, a young scholar hunted her down, begging her to teach him a little of the world...The fox allowed him to kiss her, so he could have a taste of knowledge. But he became greedy and swallowed the jewel, planning to look up at the sky, then down at the ground before it could dissolve, knowing that if he did so he would possess all the wisdom of heaven and earth. But the fox pulled at his chin...and he was forced to look only at the earth. That's why men only know about things on earth. And that is why the fox borrows a human form, forever searching each man...(27)

The fox girls, Hyun Jin and Sookie, are taught by Duk Hee, Sookie's mother (and Hyun Jin's as we later learn) to always wear their disguise. To them, their masks are ghostly; as Hyun Jin looks at her reflection she notes that she sees "a ghost" (88) and recalls that in the tale, "A fox demon disguised as a beautiful girl could be recognized by forcing it to look into a mirror" because "reflection always reveals true nature" (87). What this suggests is that the girls are ghosts donning the façade of the human. The bodies they are bound to are not theirs. It is rather utopian in this regard: that they can transcend their corporeality and transform themselves. Yet, in

their “girl skin” they are bound to roam the earth and bound to the oppression of men. These men assert violence upon their bodies and “steal” from them, not only their power, but their sexual agency.

After Hyun Jin is disowned by her parents for confronting them about the true identity of her birth mother, she grapples with her “whorish blood, that the inside of my body was as tainted as the outside” (111). Sookie had attempted to recruit her into the life of a sex worker and explains, “...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). Very soon after, out of desperation, Hyun Jin reluctantly agrees to have Lobetto (the childhood friend she stays with after being cast out of her home) find clients for her. As soon as she agrees, she notes, “I felt the heaviness of the birthmark across my cheek and willed the dark stain to spread. I imagined the blackness creeping over the rest of my face, erasing all that I was” (148). This moment is interesting, if the mark/scar is representative of trauma; it reaffirms that history and trauma are not escapable. It also reaffirms that she loses her agency to what she is bound to as a consequence of national, historical, and gendered trauma. The aforementioned darkness in her spreads until it’s no longer the real her; she is just a shell, the girl’s body that sheathes the fox spirit. The Korean female body-- inextricable from the nation-- becomes the site not only for patriarchal aggression but Western colonization as her body serves American GIs.

Notably, just as the comfort women were seen as commodities of the Japanese expansion, the sex workers in the camp towns were deemed as “women working as patriots of the Republic of Korea” (43). Ironically, it is their work that

alienates them from their fellow Koreans and yet their sacrifice is deemed necessary to appease the GI soldiers. Though Hyun Jin is still a virgin, unwilling, and attempts to get out of the arrangement Lobetto makes, she ends up being gang raped by the three American GIs Lobetto brings to her. She explains:

...I gave up trying to hold onto my body, the body that disgusted me with its crying and mess and pain. I finally understood...about letting the real self fly away. From far away, the real me watched them open the shell of my body, ramming and ripping into every opening they could...[Afterwards,] I didn't want this body, this lump of meat on the bed to be me. (154-155)

The diction is notable here; her “shell” evokes the fox girl story, reinforcing the idea that her existence transcends her physically. She also longs to disregard and transfigure the “lump of meat” that she views herself as being. More, the body-- even as a shell-- is the site of violence. Much like the Japanese soldiers in the comfort camps, the American GIs assert their national, colonial, and gender superiority. Accordingly, the phallus is directly linked to war. The hotdog used to demonstrate how to use a condom earlier in the novel resembles a “soldier’s body” and looks as if “it’s going to war” (20).

Like Akiko, Hyun Jin’s utopian desire and impulse to transcend her body is her only way to reclaim her selfhood. Just as spirits possessed Akiko, Hyun Jin performed various roles to secure her survival. She became “Hunni Girl”: “the GIs life-size doll”, “that freak—who would do anything” from “sex on stage with whoever and however many” to getting “pissed and shit on” to “oral sex with a dog” (192). She could transform herself to suit the preference of the GI: “a shy submissive maiden” or “a wild-dancing sex queen” (208). It is this ability to

transform that keeps her in movement, in the place between identities, fluid and “no where” – utopian corporeality.

Like Akiko in *Comfort Woman*, Hyun Jin looks to her daughter Myu Myu to inherit the ability to transform- to at once be anchored to the body and free from it. Once they get to Hawai'i, Hyun Jin notes, “though I was three thousand miles away from Korea, I was still trapped in America Town” (269). Her eventual escape from the Hawaiian brothel lacks hope because of her undocumented status and lack of funds; nonetheless, she and the baby are, for lack of a better word, rescued by the kindness and generosity of an elderly woman; as Hyun Jin maintains, “we are still hidden, underground and safe” (288). The novel closes with Myu Myu's childish observation as she studies the mark upon Hyun Jin's face: “Your face is a map, Mama” (288). Hyun Jin's bodily transfiguration has progressed; her “deformity” has become the journey to Waimanalo, the middle of no where- literally, Utopia. What's more, the journey is written upon the female body. Interestingly, Myu Myu is essentially nameless; “Nothing name...little no name” (199). (Myu Myu was given to her because Sookie, her biological mother, didn't bother to name her.) This nameless child is the next site for contestation and transformation. Hyun Jin claims, “Her face [too] is a map—an inheritance marked by all who were once important...to reside within the landscape of this child's body” (289). While this claim is intended to be hopeful and perhaps even empowering, Myu Myu will inevitably inherit the traumas of her family. The trauma that is written upon/held within her nameless body, nonetheless, can also be perceived as “the fox spirit—the hunter and guardian of knowledge” who “possesses the gift of transformation” (289). This utopian

impulse is furthered when Hyun Jin notes, “everything we could have hoped for and wished to be” is “in the bone and in the blood, in this jewel of a girl” (290). This next generation of daughters in America, Bekkah and Myu Myu included, continue to bear the wounds of history; nonetheless, these daughters possess the “jewel” which was reclaimed by the mothers.

To consider this generation of the Korean American female subject further, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s text welcomes interrogation. Cha’s *Dictee* opens with an image of Korean inscriptions which, roughly translated, reads, “Mother I want to see you (or miss you). I am hungry. Let us go to our native land (or home).” Beginning the work with Korean text, the writer immediately draws attention to the native culture. The faded markings on the wall are deteriorating and convey a sense of distance and longing. (Indeed, they are believed to have been etched on a cave wall by Korean work prisoners during the Japanese occupation, a time when their native language was forbidden.) Moreover, as Shu-mei Shih notes in “Nationalism and Korean American Women’s Writing: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*” (1997), “The Korean engraving on the wall of the Japanese coal mine literally epitomizes words as ruins, and by emphasizing their corporeality, Theresa Cha gives words a physical dimension” (160). Critics, such as Lawrence R. Rinder in “The Plurality of Entrance, the Opening of Networks, the Infinity of Language” (2001), regard *Dictee* as “Cha’s attempt to recall her lost genealogy and to articulate it in words and images” (18). In that sense, the subject “I” in the inscription and the sentiments it communicates is likened, if not equated, to the narrator and narrative purpose of *Dictee*. In longing and through memory, Cha traces a lost history. Her use of multiple voices in the

work effectively articulates and creates a means by which one can examine the female Korean American experience.

More specifically, the female subject creates or reconstructs an identity that is both informed by and informs the production of self and nation. In treating history as a wound on a female body, resisting masculine teleological notions of nationalism and patriotism, Cha effectively subverts the exploitation of female bodies and uses the wound as the space in and from which the female Korean American subject is situated in utopian transfiguration. A Korean American woman, by her native country, her immigrant state in America, and by patriarchal structures of both countries, is triply marginalized. As such an individual, Cha resists the imposition of racial and hierarchal barriers and, through writing, constructs a space in which she can fashion herself and articulate a silenced/repressed history. As Elaine Kim in "Poised on the In-between: A Korean American's Reflections in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*" (1994) asserts,

Refusing to be drawn into opposition between 'woman' and 'Korean' or between 'Korean' and 'Korean American', Cha creates and celebrates a kind of third space, an exile space the becomes a source of individual vision and power...(a) space for an individual search for selfhood as well as a non-reified, non-essential search collectivity. (8)

This third space is the gap, or in-between, or, as I have argued, "no place" to borrow Caruth's wording again, which is utopia. In this space, a martyr is not a passive, self-sacrificing Madame Butterfly but in keeping with Korean nationalist ideals sacrifices herself as an act of aggressive self-determination (Kim 16-17). The martyr's act "in keeping with Korean nationalist ideals" is not to be exploited by male subjects. Rather, the female subjects in the text, as "aggressive" and willful subjects, redefine

themselves. In *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996), Lisa Lowe argues that the heroic martyr “Yu Guan Soon ‘feminizes’ and fragments the masculine narrative of Korean nationalism” (140). Cha constructs female subjects through whom the audience understands: “History repeats itself...The name of the oppressor has changed, but the pain has remained for...women” (Shih 152). However, history and its wound are no longer oppressive in *Dictee*. The martyr’s “aggressive and self-determined” wound becomes the figure and frame through which history’s fragments are textualized and realized in a utopian space driven by the utopian impulse for transfiguration.

Under Clio/History, Yu Guan Soon’s story is presented. The story of the young revolutionary during the Japanese occupation is remarkably powerful since she was “dissuade(d)” by a male-centered “nationally organized movement” (*Dictee* 30). As such, not only was she fighting the oppression of the Korean patriarchy but the Japanese rule. History had been “lost to the Japanese” as was language (28-9), but the young girl’s “Actions prescribed separate her path from the others”(30). Her resistance is as (if not more so) prominent as her repression. “(A)s the leader of the revolution...She is stabbed in the chest” (37). Yu Guan Soon’s personal history as well as her physicality/body attests to the sacrifice of the body as a tool of political agency, as maintained by Elizabeth A. Frost in “‘In Another Tongue’: Body, image, Test in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*” (2002). The martyr’s body was mutilated and dismembered; this serves as a metaphor for the ravished and severed nation. After all, “memory...pricks the skin, stabs the flesh” and “History’s recording” is “Not physical enough...Not to the very flesh and bone” (*Dictee* 32). As Elaine Kim claims,

official Korean history underscores the virtue of individual female self-sacrifice but Cha finds an agency possible for women despite the Korean patriarchal context ("Poised on the In-between..." 16-17). That agency is the wound on the female body as a site for articulation.

Cha's mother, rather, the narrator's mother also suffers the wound in her chest (46). Addressing "Mother"---"Mother, my first sound" (50) ---recalls the image in the book's opening: "Mother I want to see you (or miss you). I am hungry. Let us go to our native land (or home)." The longing for mother is juxtaposed to a masculine Korean identity (as evidenced in the soldiers and policeman) and the Japanese occupation. "The mother is multiply 'tongue-tied': by law under Japanese colonialism, and now in her marriage by virtue of her gender," as Shih argues (15). Her wound bears all that is forbidden: speech, belonging, cause, retrieval (*Dictee* 46). Lisa Lowe claims the mother is posed as a figure for the homeland and yet figures the mother as metonymic of the nation (*Immigrant Acts...*1996). According to Helena Grice's "Korean American National Identity in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*" (2002), this metonymic figuration serves to "express the explicit parallel...between the ravaged, ruptured and invaded female body and the colonization and bifurcation of the body politic...by telling the mother/body's story, Cha also tells the nation/body's story..."(50). Maternal references to mother and country are inextricable. Indeed, the longing for mother is a longing for home.

In a state of "perpetual exile" (*Dictee* 81), the female subjects are fragmented and displaced. The narrator "must traverse the boundaries between America and Korea, suspended between and belonging to neither" (Kim 20). The traumas

incurred in confronting the “boundaries between America and Korea” in being alienated from both and because of the other, the narrator is bound to an exiled and utopian space. The narrator’s subversive act is writing and her writing is in blood. Hyulso or blood writing, as explained by Frost, was “used by Korean dissidents to symbolize their loyalty to the nationalist cause, or the troping of the body as a site of political struggle in feminist and other Western activist poetry, whose aesthetics of accessibility is an element of its politics” (184). As Shih maintains,

...blood writing becomes a literal act of sacrificial self-mutilation...the Korean nation and its history are evoked as a possible location of a nationalized, historicized female identity...Cha’s gendered rethinking of nationalism is linked, moreover, to her critique of patriarchy as a form of colonialism. (154)

Self-narration of the female subject is fragmented. In “Reading the Figure of Diction in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*” (1998), Eun Kyung Min argues, “What is always at stake in the poet’s and martyr’s performative acts of radical substitution is the nature of the uneasy and striking conjunction between self-representation and self-annihilation” (316). As the narrator resists a linear narrative and uses different languages, both written and spoken, the art of communication is rendered insufficient. Nonetheless, “...Cha’s search for speech, and the completion of the invocation (of the muses) is the acquiring of speech and writing and the narration of the self, which is the book” (156). The female body and the text, therefore, articulate and materialize the utopian site in which the self or subject can narrate. The wound on the female body is history’s wound transfigured to a space for articulation. This transfiguration is therefore also utopian.

In the women’s shared martyrdom, in their collective voices, the fragments of history are represented in the text. Having long been silenced and excluded, one

must ask how the martyrs and their wound recreate a silenced and repressed history. How, furthermore, is the female subject to locate herself? The wound on the female body becomes a creative agency. It is the place, the utopian no-where, in which---and the vehicle for---writing and self-narration is possible.

Ultimately, it is toward articulation and writing that Cha strives as a means of locating a self. Though such a multiply situated identity may be forever beyond reach, Cha finds writing as the place where self-identity, and the forces that shape it, including the moments of life and death, are represented (Shih 159).

The “Unemployed. Unspoken. History” will appear and the blood/ink will “spill thickest” (*Dictée* 133). After all, If words are to be uttered, they would be from behind the partition” (132) or from the exiled space, a space in which perpetual exile and fluidity or utopian spatiality are “Inseparably. Indefinitely” what the female subject becomes: As Cha notes, “You are movement” (51). With this mobility, the body, both textual and physical, is unfixed. Elaine Kim argues that it is the “in-between” space that makes the female Korean American’s survival possible (21). Again, this is utopian; it is where both the personal narratives and “official” documents converge in opposition or as Shih claims, history opposed to historiography, the former infused with blood, flesh, and bone, the latter mere words (5).

Through language and through the retelling of long repressed histories, personal and national, Cha resists further exclusion. The “old wound” of history is not a mark of victimization so much as it is a means to articulate memories. What is finally articulated are stories of resistance. Yet, in “The ‘Liberatory Voice’ of Thesesa Hak Kyuns Cha’s *Dictée*” (1994), L. Hyun Yi Kang writes, “Cha rejects any romantic

insistence on a fixed, essential identity through language" (85). Since a female subject is alien and displaced from language, "Cha will then make her text the site of re-creation and ideological resistance" (88). Moreover, the text as site or in-between space or exile space or Utopian impulse, also serves as a productive agency. When confronting a work such as *Dictee*, the structure is not as discomforting as the images scattered throughout the text. Images of protests, executions, martyrs, maps, Chinese calligraphy, landscapes, etc. are jarring. How effective or ineffective are these images in the recreation or articulation of history or identity?

Their image, the memory of them is not given to deterioration, unlike the captured image that extracts from the soul precisely by reproducing, multiplying itself. Their countenance evokes not the hollowed beauty, beauty from seasonal decay, evokes not the inevitable, not death, but the dy-ing. (*Dictee* 37)

The heroic actions particularly of the female martyrs cannot be reduced to a reproduced image. What's more, "their image" is "given to deterioration." But "the memory of them is not given to deterioration." How, then, is memory articulated? Language becomes the vehicle of articulation. Stella Oh's "The Enunciation of the Tenth Muse in Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*" (2002), draws from Bhabha, Wittig, and Benveniste, and discusses Cha's work in terms of language. She claims,

Language is also the site in which the colonized can refuse the indoctrinization of the imposed language and appropriate that language for herself. In doing so, she defines and perceives reality not through the eyes of the colonizer, but remembers and rerecords the history of a once silenced people. (2)

In such a refusal, articulation is possible through fragments of the languages of the oppressors. As Ling Yan Yang writes in "Theorizing Asian America: On Asian American and Postcolonial Asian Diasporic Women Intellectuals" (2002):

Language is central to diasporic imagination, symbolic enunciation, philosophical reflection and worldly historicization...Homi Bhabha rightly states that the performativity and hybridity of enunciating the 'in-between' dialectics in diasporic writing or theorizing is culture's important location...Diaspora is metaphorical of the committed, tireless and unstoppable intellectual and producing decolonized, feminist, progressive, Asian American, rigorous and socially transformative humanism and human knowledge in a perpetually patriarchal, racist, corporate capitalist, anti-intellectual, and hostile world (154).

In the process of reinscription, Cha repositions herself within these utopian spaces and resurrects a newly forged and transfigured identity. Language becomes a site of struggle to articulate one's identity and come into being and the text becomes the site for resistance and recreation. History's wound upon the female body is the site of trauma, the articulation of the repressed history, personal and national tales of resistance, and the agency through which the female can articulate her identity. After all, "*She says to herself if she were able to write she would continue to live*" (*Dictée* 141). The very site of trauma, the wound is transfigured as this site for articulation.

What does it mean to be defined as or to define oneself as a Korean American woman? (Particularly for Cha?) Elaine Kim could not conceive of approaching Cha's work without first coming to the understanding that the writer sought to unearth her Korean American identity (23). Cha, rather poignantly, gives voice to Korean women and their perspectives. But, what of the "American" aspects of the writer's identity? Stella Oh feels that Cha "advocates a hybridity of location" (17). The Korean American identity is not an either/or situation. Rather, in being a Korean American, not Korean and/or American, in the third or exile space, a fluid hybrid identity is forged; this is the utopic space once again. To be a female Korean

American is to be further marginalized. Yet, as the wounds on the female body reveal, self-narration and articulation are possible through the reassembling of language and history. Furthermore, as Oh continues, "*Dictee* is the antiphonal answer to the hegemonic discourages of male-centered Christianity, cultural and military colonization, and patriarchal nationalism...the antiphon or counter response to the various powers that have silenced the Korean American immigrant female figure" (11). The text itself, and the narration of individual and collective trauma, is an act of rebellion. Grice suggests, personal and collective experience and identity are inextricable. Neither the individual or national identity is extricable from the other. Moreover, examining history is not merely to measure the events but is a burden from which nation and individual are struggling to recover (45). Significantly, the recovery of the personal and collective experience is through a matriarchal line. As Shih explains,

Writing or narrating is here a process by which one speaks to, for, about, and from the mother, thereby engendering the birth of a self whose locus is the polyphonic gathering of voices and bodies of mothers and daughters in history and myth. The self here is located in the axis of a mother-daughter continuum...(159).

In the last section of *Dictee*, after the reconceived history has been articulated through the fragmented voices of the martyrs, Cha narrates a folk-tale. In this simple story, a woman offers a young girl medicine for her mother. "This imparting of knowledge from the older woman to the girl reinforces a female lineage that connects the experiences of women throughout history" (Oh 16). In "remember(ing) all she had told her" (*Dictee* 170)--in remembering the woman's words or speech, the girl is able to bring healing remedies to her mother. (To

remember is to start to heal, after all.) In remembering, “she saw her village coming into view.” Recalling the Korean inscription at the beginning of the text, the “native land” or home that is longed for now comes into view. Drawing from Lowe’s argument once again, the mother figure is metonymic of the nation. The mother and nation are healed through the female tradition, through the matrilineal line and legacy, and through longing and memory as it continues to live on in the written word (*Dictee* 141); this collective restores the woman’s part in reclaiming and actively resisting oppressive forces. The connection to mother, to native land, to home is profound. If the mother is metonymic for the nation, then the heart-spirit of the county, its people, and their collective trauma are also definitively feminine.³ While the abuses are upon the female body, so are their articulations and subversion. These bodies “will not repeat history in oblivion” (*Dictee* 33).

Furthermore, Caruth in “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History” (1991) notes, “For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (187). Perhaps then, it is this “very inaccessibility” that is utopian.

³ Interestingly, Cha’s MAH-UHM (her capitalization) is written in blood. The *hyulso* or blood-writing is derived from and exists within the female body’s wounds and reflects the MAH-UHM of the individual and the nation. The Korean word MAH-UHM is best translated as heart/spirit/soul or perhaps, heart-spirit. Oddly, the word is most frequently used to communicate emotional turmoil or pain: “my MAH-UHM hurts” or “my MAH-UHM feels empty.” The most positive use is to when one says, “My MAH-UHM is at peace.” When referring the MAH-UHM, one refers to the deepest core of one’s being and its state has the most profound implications. The MAH-UHM, after all, contains the purest of feelings buried deep beneath notions of propriety or convention. Further, the Korean MAH-UHM is without a point of reference. Notably, the word “mommy” translates into Korean as *umma*. The phonetic pronunciation inverted is: mah-uhm.

Ultimately, what is utopian is what cannot be grasped, uttered, or even imagined—whether of the past or the future. The utopian exists in the gaps—between the physical and the spiritual—in this no - where, in the silenced past and memory, the trauma on the body and the eventual release from the transfigured body. As we read, study, theorize, and attempt to give words to the traumas of comfort women, their descendants, and the children of the Korean War, there is something utopian in these efforts too. To at once draw attention to what is silenced or lost; to mark the pause between what is unutterable; to mark the trenches; to mark the bodies—is this not an attempt to fulfill the promise of a transfigured body? Or perhaps, it is utopian fancy to deem fiction as a means to articulate historical traumas and to give place for historical testimony under the guise of metaphors, symbols, and ghostly figures.

CHAPTER 2:
Masculinity and Wounded Widowers: 'How can a husband lose his wife!'

“What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by
 the secrets of others...the burial of an unspeakable fact...
 like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within.” –Abraham and Torok

“I am an Oriental. And being an Oriental, I could never be completely a man.”
 -David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*

The female body manifests the wounds of trauma and national oppression, as ghostly figures continue to haunt Korean/Korean American novels. In this chapter, I extend this interrogation further to explore the representations of men in relation to female characters in works translated from Korean to English: Chong-Hui'O's novella *Spirit on the Wind* (1986), *Please Look After Mom* (2012) by Kyung-sook Shin, and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015). I further the scope to include Jung Yun's novel *Shelter* (2016), Patti Kim's *A Cab Called Reliable* (1997), and Ronyoung Kim's *Clay Walls* (1986) as Korean American examples that serve to complicate the themes in their representation of the immigrant experience. I argue that Korean American masculinity is bound to the domestic sphere because patriarchal figures are dependent upon the traditional power structure of the domestic space or home to establish and maintain their authority and dominance. Therefore, without a maternal figure –or more specifically a wife within the home, the patriarchal figure or husband loses his agency as he is also wounded. I hope to challenge the

assumption that men have power in the public sphere while women maintain the domestic; in fact, male authority in the home is nuanced as it is dependent upon the women within. Furthermore, the physical home is depicted in these literary texts as cryptic and as a symbol of the patriarchs' masculinity and gender performance.

As I continue to utilize trauma theory to examine how the Korean American immigrant family is bound to a maternal body, I maintain that the figure of the wife serves as the site of the wound and the negotiation of historical trauma and intergenerational trauma in these texts. Yet this does not ignore the potential for a wounded male figuration. Poignantly, in the Korean language, *Hangul*, the word for "wound" is *sang chuh*. More precisely, *sang* refers to an injury, while *chuh* refers to the location or site of said injury. A wound – or *sang chuh* – therefore, is literally translated and understood to be "the site of injury." More interestingly, however, is the other vernacular use and meaning of the word. *Sang chuh* is also commonly understood to mean the loss of wife.⁴ This warrants further consideration because if a wound is equated to the loss of a wife then not only is the site and trauma feminized, but it is connected explicitly to the figure/body of a woman in relation to a husband's loss. In another way, this *sang chuh*, if we employ the definition of "the site of injury," is also an injury to masculine dominance. The husband figure is metaphorically injured and loses his wife; also, he is injured because he loses his wife. Without a wife, the injury a husband "suffers" adopts both manifestations of *sang chuh*.

⁴ As of now, there is no existing scholarship in English (or in Korean literary scholarship to my knowledge) on the use of the term *sang chuh* as both wound and loss of a wife. As far as I am aware, this linguistic coincidence was once I stumbled upon.

Han Kang's award winning novel *The Vegetarian* (2015) presents a female protagonist who attempts to gain power over her body against the will and dominance of the male figures in the text. The novel is written in three parts from the perspective of the protagonist's husband, brother-in-law, and sister respectively. The Kafkaesque tale follows Yeong-hye's obsessive refusal to eat meat and her decision to ultimately stop eating all together. The renunciation of food is at once an act of rebellion and empowerment-- a means to assert agency over her own body. The glimpse we are granted into her domestic life depicts the mundane performances of typical gendered roles with little disturbance to Yeong-hye's husband's "carefully ordered existence" (12). His only gripe had been how she preferred not to wear a bra (an ongoing insistence that he have control over her physicality). That is, until her violent and bloody dreams prompt a new diet. For him, her vegetarianism was an example of "sheer obstinacy...against her husband's wishes" (22). As she grows thinner, eating less, she stops complying with his sexual demands claiming that his body smells of meat (24). What is also startling is her husband's admission that he frequently rapes her; though he doesn't view it as such, he notes that "she lay there...as though she were a 'comfort woman' dragged in against her will, and I was a Japanese soldier demanding her services" (38). He is immediately claimed as the aggressor asserting his sexual domination. She is also met with violence from her father as he tries to forcibly feed her. He strikes her when she continues to refuse and holds her down--with help from the other male family members--forcing her mouth open.

The connection between meat and masculinity is clearly reinforced by Kang.

Yeong-hye's rationale for giving up meat notably supports this. A lump pains her chest:

Yells and howls, threaded together layer upon layer, are enmeshed to form a lump. Because of meat. I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there. Blood and flesh, all those butchered bodies are scattered in every nook and cranny, and though the physical remnants were excreted, their lives still stick stubbornly to my insides (56).

The description evokes masculine colonial power. And this legacy of violence is trapped within her body. Her rejection of meat, therefore, signals a more symbolic rejection of masculine power. Further, her refusal to comply with her husband's wishes triggers his repulsion and rejection. After she frees herself from her father's forced feeding, she grabs a nearby knife and slits her wrists, which results in her hospitalization. At the hospital, she continues to refuse food- vomiting anything that is forced into her and removing the tubes and IV's from her body that are intended to sustain her. She is found naked, outside the hospital grounds; as her eyes meet those of her husband's, he notes, "I do not know that woman" (59). The "loss" of his wife is connected to his perception of the roles he assigns to her and her deviation from those expectations; her defiance results in her metaphorical (and ultimately by novel's end, physical) death. Therefore, this *sang chuh*, if we employ the definition of "loss of wife" is quite literal. Nonetheless, it is also an injury to his masculine dominance. No longer able to control her, the injury he suffers and his loss adopts both articulations of *sang chuh*.

Further, the second part of the novel centers around Yeong-hye's brother-in-law's obsession with her Mongolian mark. Narrated two years after her suicide attempt, he recounts that "she could almost have been a ghost" and recalls how she

“had attacked her own body right in front of his eyes, tried to hack at it like it was a piece of meat” (74). She is dehumanized, as he cannot understand “the way his brother-in-law seemed to consider it perfectly natural to discard his wife as though she were a broken watch or household appliance” (78). Moreover, Yeong-hye’s husband considered himself the victim as he has lost his wife--regardless of how easily she is discarded. For the brother-in-law, her function and worth is still bound to her physicality and he is no more commendable than the husband. His perspective supports the focus on Yeong-hye’s body. As he gazes on her naked body, he notes:

This was the body of a beautiful young woman, conventionally an object of desire, and yet it was a body from which all desire had been eliminated. But this was nothing so crass as carnal desire, not for her – rather, or so it seemed, what she had renounced was the very life that her body represented. (92)

For him, her corpse-like body is a *tabula rasa* upon which he paints flowers-- leaving only her Mongolian mark untouched. Her body that “was no more than itself”; her humanity lost as he claims, “she could not be called a ‘person’ ...with her two empty eyes” (95-96). Her lifeless depiction recalls the dreams that haunted Yeong-hye, which had initially prompted her to refuse meat: the dreams of bloody faces and rotting corpses that cease only when the flowers are painted on her body. This is the bodily site upon which trauma is written. It is only in the bearing witness and depiction of the trauma that the ghostly nightmares stop.

Remarkably, her defiance is explicitly connected to her body and her exertion of control over what her body consumes. Moreover, she seems to embody a Freudian desire for negation or disappearance as she proceeds to starve herself.

Her transgressions challenge multiple norms and mores since she betrays her sister. Her affair can be read as deliberate or be seen to victimize the protagonist who is not “sane” enough to make such decisions and would then ultimately have been raped by her brother-in-law as well. In another way, if we give her agency, then her desire to shed her humanness to evolve into vegetation is valid when she claims, “I wanted to bloom from my crotch, so I spread my legs; I spread them wide...” (154). Her willful rejection of what is expected of her as a traditionally loyal and chaste Korean wife goes beyond a defiance of her husband; she challenges all gendered expectations and socially contrived virtues. She does this by shedding the human. Her metamorphosis is not just her illusion of transforming into a tree, but the depletion and departure of her body. The loss of wife, therefore, is very literally and metaphorically at the site of and the loss of the wound.

Likewise, *Please Look After Mom* (2012), by Korean novelist Kyung-sook Shin, recounts a family’s search for their missing matriarch who was lost in the Seoul subway station. The novel is presented in parts from the perspective of the daughter, son, husband, and the missing woman herself. Most notably, the husband’s testimony reveals his profound loss:

Before you lost sight of your wife on...the platform, she was merely your children’s mother to you...like a steadfast tree...a tree that wouldn’t go away unless it was chopped down or pulled out. After your children’s mother went missing, you realized that it was your wife who was missing. Your wife, whom you had forgotten about for fifty years...Only after she disappeared did she come to you tangibly, as if you could reach out and touch her. (131)

The literal *sang chuh* here is obvious. His trauma is only in relation to the loss of her body. Moreover, the notion that she became tangible only in her absence evokes a haunting after her physical body is gone. This chapter is narrated by the husband

and is titled, "I'm home"; the phrase he repeats again and again, day after day still expecting to hear his wife's reply. This behavior invokes Freudian conceptions of repetition; he continues to recall all his failures and all the injuries he inflicted on her, interspersed between him calling out: "I'm home." Without her presence and without her reply, he is rendered powerless. Moreover, he admits to himself, "Since your wife has gone missing, your heart feels as if it will explode" (149); "You realize how cowardly you were. You lived your entire life heaping all of your pain onto your wife" (168). His wife is the bearer of the family's collective trauma and it is only in her absence that he notices her and his negligence.

It is after she is gone missing that the fragmented narratives of her life come together. We are granted glimpses of her hardships and suffering, the endearing way she tried to learn to read, her volunteer work, and we even learn of the existence of her sole and secret friend. There is not one living person to connect all those fragments to weave a cohesive attempt at a whole; rather, she occupies a specified role for each narrator as either mother or wife. Even when we are granted the voice of her phantom, as she visits house after house and family member after family member, we are given fragments of the life she led – "in darkness, with no light, [her] entire life" (59). We learn that her "body was in constant pain" (60). The pain culminates in a cut on her foot that she has managed to incur when she gets lost. Furthermore, the festering wound on her foot serves as the symbolic site of trauma. Each narrative perspective mentions the wound that was visible to the witnesses who claimed to have encountered the missing mother. Each person the family members interrogates in their search, mentions the visibly injury. They note:

“sandals had cut into her foot” (78); she’d hurt her foot...covered in pus (83); the top of her foot had a gash and...it was infected all the way to her toenails” (96); “flies buzzed around and landed near the pus-filled wound” (68). The *sang chuh* here is not only the visible and physical wound, but the countless injuries she has suffered emotionally from her negligent and self-absorbed children and husband who bound her to prescriptive gendered expectations. Her husband, in particular, who continued to exert his power and dominance over her, as he constantly asserted his masculinity in the household--masculinity that was threatened by poverty and national hardship-- was merciless in his authority. He bears some of the responsibility admitting: “You should have let her say what she wanted to. The years of silence...have pushed your wife toward her pain” (171). Silenced and wounded, his wife haunts the spaces of her living family.

What is notable is that each of the protagonists in both novels bears one distinguishable feature-- the Mongolian mark and the festering toe. It is these marks that not only help to identify the women, but also set them apart in such a way that they can be remembered and recalled. The physical markings upon the body are poignant as competing narratives are negotiated on the female body. Indeed, the bodies and wounds are representative of familial, cultural, historical, national, colonial traumas and an inheritance of trauma. All of which are definitively patriarchal.

More, echoing Shin’s text’s husband’s search for his wife, Chong-Hui O’s novella *Spirit on the Wind* (1986) opens from the narrative perspective of a husband asking, “where was my wife” (25)? Un-Su’s frequent departures and absences had

almost come to be expected. Her association with ghostly figures is established immediately as she is described as a drifting wanderer: “a trace...an everlasting shadow”; he even remarks that his wife’s body was “surprisingly cold” (47). He appreciated “the narrow confines of her world” (30) as she was cut off from everything, the only daughter to a widow and without friends or hobbies--her daily life devoted to chores and duty. He realizes after her first disappearance that “there was something awkward and unrecognizable about” her (39). Like the wife in *The Vegetarian*, Un-Su is lost to her husband even when she is physically present. Nonetheless, her disappearances left him with “feelings of disappointment and degradation” (42). Her wanderings are explicitly connected to wounds and the fragility of his masculine dominance in the home:

Every time my wife left home, I agonized...at the images of our life and of the wretched, worthless man that I saw...When she returned and our life resumed just as before, our wounds seemed at first glance to have healed. But with the next absence they would open up, deeper and more livid than ever. Those wounds never really healed...those wounds had suffused our life. (44)

Notably, the word “wound” is repeated in this passage. If we read the text, replacing the word “wound” with “injury” (or site of injury more specifically) then the meaning does not change much. However, if we substitute “wound” with “the loss of wife”, then the lines gain a more nuanced meaning. Indeed, it is the wife that “never really healed” and the loss of the wife that “suffused [their] life.” The loss of wife is clearly the *sang chuh* or wound in this text as well.

Beyond the rejection of the domestic duties and her husband’s authority, Un-Su grapples with the sexual violence she suffered and a past she had repressed.

During one of her wanderings, she came across three men on a hilltop and was raped:

She imagined what she must look like spread out in the sunlight...But the strange thing was this: shining through from the depths of her memory...was her earliest recollection – a pair of black rubber shoes lying in sunlight...What had happened to her?...Was a thirty-four-year-old woman supposed to cry if she was stripped naked in broad daylight and gang-raped? (67)

The assault triggers an early childhood memory; one we later learn was of the day her parents and twin were brutally murdered by robbers. Common during the war-time famines, the robbers ransacked the little food stock they had. She recalls standing in her still courtyard staring at rubber shoes. (The woman who had raised her had actually been a kindly neighbor.) Bearing the trauma of a legacy of war and Korea's colonization, she is cast as ghostly throughout her life, haunted by her own past.⁵ Once she suffers sexual violence and is utterly lost to her husband, she embodies the wounds of collective national and gendered oppression. This loss: the notion of losing one's wife to other male figures -- as evidenced in *The Vegetarian* when Yeong-hye engages in a sexual relationship with her brother-in-law—is further complicated when the patriarchal figure confronts his status as an emasculated immigrant in the United States.

⁵ All of these women, once they are lost, go searching for home- a home that does not physically exist—which is in contrast to the homes/shelter required by the patriarchs. Whether it is Yeong-hye's attempt to return to the forest, or the mother in Shin's text that wanders from house to house, Un-su's search for the house with the rubber shoes, they are seeking to return. Their ghostly return to the home space is beyond the physical and apart from their bodies. The destination isn't a physical home, but a negation of self – to a state before consciousness. Turning to Schwab once again: "In order for trauma to heal, body and self must be reborn and words must be disentangled from the dead bodies they are trying to hide" (96). These female figures, these lost wives are essentially trying to navigate the cycles of trauma that are negotiated on their bodies.

Historically, both naturalization laws and exclusion acts have prevented and regulated citizenship for Asian immigrants, particularly Asian men. As Lisa Lowe highlights in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (1996),

A national memory haunts the conception of Asian American, persisting beyond the repeal of actual laws prohibiting Asians from citizenship and sustained by the wars in Asia, in which every 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).

In essence, "the administration of citizenship was simultaneously a 'technology' of racialization and gendering" (11). Beyond the "feminized" jobs that the male immigrants worked--typically in domestic service, they occupied a feminized position in contrast to white males. To complicate this racialized gendering, "Oriental men had suffered...from a paradoxical opposition of stereotypes...often portrayed as sexual threats to white women, Asian men were also emasculated by stereotypes of passivity and weakness" (131), as Henry Yu argues in *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (2001). In essence, they were deemed asexual sexual threats, at once threatening and impotent.

Koreans, specifically, were further oppressed as they were considered Japanese subjects even after migration; their emigration from Korea was regulated (prevented for the most part) by the Japanese authorities and also met with resistance from the American side. Even after annexation, rights to property and citizenship were denied to Koreans in the US. In the United States, they not only fought for their place in society, but to separate themselves from the Japanese. As Richard S. Kim in *The Quest for Statehood: Korean Immigrant Nationalism and US Sovereignty* (2011) notes, the struggle came with "their involvement in the Korean

Nationalist movement” as they sought “recognition and fair treatment of their status abroad as well as in the United States” (120). These interests were not competing with their allegiance to the US; however, their efforts may have fueled more distinctions of their foreignness. In prioritizing Korean nationalist ideals, they fostered a masculine rhetoric that sought empowerment in opposition to Japanese colonization and exclusion in the United States. Additionally, Asian American men have been victims of “racial castration” – a term used by David Eng in *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (2001) to explain the exclusion of Asian and Asian American men from participation in American masculinity and white men’s refusal to acknowledge the Asian phallus. This racial castration not only reinforces prevailing white masculinity but also consequently emasculates the Asian man. (This emasculated man is not very different from the stereotypes of submissive and subservient Asian women.) The gendered female body has become the figure of the national body and has been examined similarly thus far in this dissertation as well; perhaps this can be extended to include not only threatened masculinity, but also another representation of the nation. In place of a female body, the castrated male figure is arguably extended into the figure of the house or home.⁶ To examine how the literary articulations of Korean American masculinity are bound to the domestic sphere, I turn to Ronyoung Kim’s *Clay Walls* (1986), Patti Kim’s *A Cab Called Reliable* (1997), and Jung Yun’s novel *Shelter* (2016). Specifically, the home comes to symbolize the fragile performance of gender and the how these

⁶ While the home is typically considered the domestic space for women and female subjects, it can also stand for a physical site for men to assert their patriarchal authority. While it does continue to uphold oppressive gender norms for women, I hope to show that it may also be of detriment to the men – especially the racialized and emasculated Asian man.

patriarchal figures necessitate and perpetuate the existing structure of authority in these texts.

Ronyoung Kim's *Clay Walls* (besides the very overt and obvious mention in the title) utilizes the house/home to symbolize the materialized nation and typical patriarchal objectives of dominance. The male figure seems to understand his failures in terms of the immigrant experience and family obligations as inextricable from the home. For the patriarch, the trauma is external and written upon material possessions—a replication and a bastardization of the American dream. Beyond just the physical walls of the home, the male figure attempts to uphold traditional structures of power and gender expectations. Within the boundaries of the home, the father/husband attempts to enforce these structures. In *Clay Walls*, the family patriarch Chun rapes his wife Haesu, but she is unable to articulate it since “she did not know the word for what he had done to her” (30). He rapes her after an argument they have about their move to America during which she blames him for having to be “in this strange country” (29). His need to assert his power and masculinity is connected to their state as foreigners in America. Moreover, there is no way to articulate the rape within the home as a violation- the home in which the patriarch's authority is unchallenged.

Just before they were married, Chun had a clear image of their future: She would obey his commands, serve his needs, and mother his children (142). The move to America changed the dynamics in that he has to operate within a public

sphere that limits his mobility and does not grant him any authority.⁷ Eventually, Chun is able to build a life and gather some economic stability, but it is always with the help of a white man since Chun has no access to leases/mortgages for homes or businesses. Everything – from his rentals to his businesses has to be placed under the name of a white citizen because US law denied Asian men property rights. In the public sphere, he has no capital or agency. He relies on the generosity and support of white male peers. What is notable is that after he loses his business (to government contracts) and his savings (to senseless gambling), it is a Korean man--who Chun cuckolded--that takes the little money he has left; remarkably, it happens during a card game hosted in his own home.⁸ When the proverbial house of cards crumbles, there is no space left for Chun to occupy. The family loses the house; Chun alone moves away in search for work, and eventually he dies far from home without his family. Clearly, the loss of his home is directly correlated to the loss of his masculine authority.

Earlier in the novel, Haesu recalls: “Korean walls are made of clay, crumbling under repeated blows, leaving nothing as it was before...Chun had wanted a wall around their home” (105). The need for those walls and boundaries of the home are analogous to his patriarchal authority. Only in the confines of those determined roles and traditional norms can Chun maintain his masculinity. As Kandice Chuh

⁷ This is not to suggest that life in Korea under Japanese rule provided much opportunity for Korean men to strive. Rather it is to suggest that in addition to the trauma of colonization, the trauma of immigration further leaves the men emasculate which consequently seems to fuel their performance of masculine authority within their homes.

⁸ What is interesting about this scenario is how it can be analogous to the conditions during the Japanese occupation in Korea; many Koreans functioned as informants and aggressors against their own countrymen in support of the imperial powers. Chun’s loss to the Korean gambler – who clearly hustled him – evokes a sense of greater betrayal and conflicting masculinities.

notes in *Imagine Otherwise: on Asian Americanist Critique* (2003), “The boundaries of the self, of self-identity, metaphorized as bodily and mental integrity, remark in *Clay Walls* on the multiple and dissimilar forces that erect and erode those boundaries. Like clay walls, they require constant reconstruction and serve a double-edged purpose: protection but also constraint” (98). While Chun attempts to preserve and protect the hierarchy in his home that privileged his authority, he is paradoxically confined within the boundaries and gendered expectations he upholds; without a context to enable and perform his masculinity, he is rendered completely powerless and without agency.

Without the traditional family structure, Korean men are depicted as lost and desperate. Without the anchor and boundaries of home, as Patti Kim and Kryss Lee depict, they are mere “Immigrants. Indeterminate and silenced” (157). Kim’s *A Cab Called Reliable* tells the story of a young girl, Ahn Joo, who is left with her father after her mother (or who she believed was her biological mother) runs away with her younger brother. Immediately, her father attempts to restore order to the home by replacing the mother/wife figure to reestablish his role as patriarch. Loo Lah is an overly made-up twenty-five year old woman who stops cooking once she moves into their apartment- spending most of her days grooming, listening to music and sleeping. When Loo Lah leaves him, too, for his lack of ambition and earning potential (another point of his emasculation), it is Ahn Joo that is forced into the role that her mother and Loo Lah abandon. She maintains the home and helps him in his business endeavors, even as he is a victim of racism and robbery. The female role must be occupied in order for him to perform his masculinity. It is only once she

steps into the roles and duties enacted by her mother that she understands the dynamic between the prescriptive masculine and feminine roles within the household. She writes letters –knowing they will never be mailed or read-- to her mother: “Father has changed beyond recognition...I now see that you suffered greatly living with father...Your life here was torturous...” (106-108). She also becomes the sounding board for her father’s troubles. He tells her about how he was continuously beaten by his own father; he immigrated to America only “to run away from his father” (76). Ahn Joo tells him, “He is haunting you...You’ve got to get him out”, but her father only offers sporadic fragments “singing about trying to forget” (151). Still tethered to the past and his homeland, he is often immobilized. Oppressed not only by his own paternal figure, but white American masculinity in his state as immigrant and perpetual foreigner, he attempts to control his immediate domestic space.

What’s more, he expects that his authority should be respected and repaid. She knows his plea well: “I cannot do this for long...take care of me, make money, make my suffering pay off, make my sacrifice worth while” (125). And she is unable to counter with any expression of her dismay or rebellion, as “Duty caught [her] by the throat” (126). Nonetheless, she could not occupy the role of daughter/wife only to appease his need to support his role as patriarch. Ultimately, “the walls of our house were too close together, the ceilings weren’t high enough, the floors weren’t low enough...” (153). Returning to the idea that the home functions much in the way that the female body is a site of trauma and national allegory, Kim leaves the father ill and alone in his home implying that he is still bound to the confines of a

cryptic space as he has not worked through his past traumas and still upholds the traditional structures of the heteronormative Korean family. With his daughter's departure -- which marks the departure of the last remaining member of his family -- he is negated and as he lay helplessly in his bed, there is no one left to perform to/for.

Like *Clay Walls* the paternal figure in Kim's story is defeated, but in a different way. Though the house's structure is still intact, without the female figure to occupy it, the male figure has nothing to juxtapose to his performance or enact his masculinity. Bound to America, since he willfully abandoned the abuses of his family and native country, he exists in an empty and stagnant physic space. These texts seem to suggest that masculinity of Korean American men is explicitly connected to the home literally and metaphorically. What's more, there is no place outside of the domestic sphere for them to exist with their own agency. As such, these writers reappropriate the domestic space to reinforce the discourse on the flawed structured of gendered spheres and performance.

In Jung Yun's debut novel *Shelter*, these ideas are further complicated. *Shelter* takes place during the housing crisis of 2008. It follows a young Korean American man, Kyung and his family as they grapple with the effects of a horrific crime; his parents were victims of robbery and assault; his father was beaten, his mother and their cleaning lady raped repeatedly. As the family members attempt to return to their lives, seeking literal and metaphorical shelter from and for one another, their collective and silenced past hidden beneath the new traumas begins to unravel. Beneath the surface—one that upholds the ideals and material success

of the American dream—are diasporic and transgenerational traumas. *Shelter* examines intergenerational conflicts and raises questions of how the immigrant experience transmits a feeling of indebtedness and negotiates these traumas. Moreover, the novel carries the same themes as the other fictional works examined thus far. The home once again is the site that upholds oppressive gendered expectations. What's notable here is that Kyung's parents are attacked in their home. His mother, therefore, is not only victim to his father's abuses, but those of white men who literally destroy and emasculate the Asian authority in the domestic space. If the home is no longer a space for the Korean man's authority, or that authority is challenged/undermined, what are the implications?

The novel opens with a visit from a realtor who has come to assess Kyung's home. He and his immediate family, having lived beyond their means, can no longer afford their mortgage. During the assessment he ruminates, "He was raised to believe that owning a home meant something. Losing a home like this—that would mean something too" (12). Interestingly, the novel makes note of the ways that the characters value the image portrayed to others and how it is inextricably tied to homes. Kyung notices with shame, "Despite all appearances, they have more in common with the poor people than with the rich ones" (80) though "Kyung makes a decent salary at the university...their mistakes are finally catching up with them. Their house...student loans...refinanc[ing] their mortgage, borrow[ing] from their credit cards, and transferr[ing] their balances...they can't keep up with this shell game much longer" (83). The appearance of living the American dream and embodying all the characteristics of the well-assimilated, heteronormative, and

successful model minority stereotype is “the shell” that he upholds and as it is also the very thing that oppresses him and his family. In addition, it is all bound to the physical home they reside in.

It is the very same “shell” that bound his father and mother to domestic violence. Jin, Kyung’s father, had often beaten Mae when she was unable to maintain appearances—the façade of the model minority with its status/wealth and a feminine domestic ideal. Kyung asks about an incident when his father knocked out one of his mother’s teeth. The significance of it was that Mae “cried about it for days, probably because it was something she couldn’t hide under makeup or clothes.” The catalyst for the beating was a tag. Poignantly, Jin explains, “it was the price tag” (317); a price tag that revealed “her dress had been marked down so many times, there were bright orange stickers all over the tag” (319). All of Jin’s work had been undermined and degraded with that oversight. Anything that revealed cracks in the surface of the “shell,” was met with violence and anger. He explains how he had been the only person of color “on campus for years” and “people never let [him] forget that...and went out of their way to make [him] feel like nothing” (319). Kyung could “see why his father always held himself to such impossibly high standards. Jin thought he had to be perfect. And Mae and Kyung and the house, they had to be perfect too. They were his extensions into the world, the things by which he was judged” (318). Because of his marginalization and emasculation, the appearance and performance had to be intact.

All of Jin’s frustrations and hardships associated with the immigrant experience are inflicted on the female body. It’s important to note that Kyung

assumed that Jin inflicted his mother's injuries when Kyung first discovered her in the backyard having just escaped her home invasion and the assault by the Perry brothers. He has only ever known his father to mark/injure her body and we come to understand that the wounds she bears tell multiple narratives—one of Jin's telling and then of the Perry brothers. Kyung notes bruises, "Two in the center of her throat. Eight more fanning out on the sides of her neck. Fingerprints...The scratches on her arms and breasts. The bloody patches where her pubic hair has been ripped out. Bruises everywhere. Bruises again" (16). Kyung reads her body, which bore the tale of her assault: "Mae was tied to her bed, splayed like an X, faceup. Marina was on the other bed, tied the same way but face down. Both of them were naked...Mae knew the men had no intention of letting them go...She's seen their faces, knew their names, carried the shame of them on her body" (69-70). Her body is the site upon which trauma is written. Moreover, her body carries the memory of a violent and oppressive male narrative—multiple male narratives in fact.

What's more, her body becomes the conduit to further transgenerational trauma. Looking at his mother in the hospital bed he sees, "No sadness, no anger, no pain" only "a pale shell, ready to crack with the slightest hint of pressure" (45). She, like the homes in the text, becomes the marked façade of a life they all pretend to live. After all, "Mae was a teenager when she married Jin and barely in her twenties when they moved to the States. She had no friends, no job, no control over anything in her life except for Kyung...His father hit Mae. Mae hit him. That was the order of succession in their family" (104). With that, we are lead to question what Kyung

inherits. Though he comes to identify with his father's struggles in America, his trauma is best represented in the homes/shelters. Kyung understands his failures in terms of the immigrant experience and family obligations as inextricable from the home. It is more than the threat of losing his own home; the damage to his parents' home is most poignant. Kyung cringed at how the originals, the only evidence left to document his childhood or birth" had been destroyed (25). In fact, he believed the damage to the house and their possessions "seem[ed] personal" (28). As Kyung surveys the house, he notes that it is "as if the damage in the room were somehow done to him" (129). For the patriarchs, the trauma is external and written upon material possessions—a bastardization of the American dream.

Contrarily, the sexual violence inflicted upon Mae's body by the Perry brothers represents a standing history of rape upon the physical nation of Korea and its women. While these injuries are incurred in America, we can argue that the patriarchal and colonialist trauma of the US occupation in Korea is negotiated on her body. Mae, is arguably, a phantom after the attacks. After all,

She had no idea how long she'd blacked out, or how she managed to free herself from her bindings, or what time it was when she left the house. The only thing she could add to her account was that she thought she was dead. All that time, wandering though the woods in the dark and the cold, she thought she was dead and God had finally sent her to hell. (72)

Emerging as a corpse, Mae is ghostly, nearly vacant. This is seen most evidently in "her eyes—the emptiness of them, like no light will ever break their surface again" (136). Mae's face is paler than usual...she looks thinner than before, almost skeletal" (117). The transgenerational trauma, the wounds of the male narratives, the

ghostly/haunting are all written on her body. To quote Gabriele Schwab in “Writing Against Memory and Forgetting” (2006):

The dead pass on their unresolved conflicts to their descendants. This foreign presence finds its way into speech and writing...An individual or generation in a cryptic speech marked by an unspeakable secret. Thus we can see the consequence of family secret, communal, or national histories and how silenced or secretive histories haunt and inscribe themselves in cryptic stories that are told. (105)

Since Mae refuses to speak of what she has suffered or endured, silence is perpetuated. When Mae slaps Kyung, it recalls his childhood with “this miserable woman who was supposed to love him but barely even seemed to like him” (136) and yet pity takes him again as she rocks herself and “seems wounded, as if she feels more pain than she just inflicted” (136). By continuing to problematize and silence the narrative of intergenerational conflict, she bears the symbolic wounds and inflicts more trauma onto her son, metaphorically and literally as she slaps him and beat him during his childhood and later accidentally inviting the violence of the Perry brothers into her home and the destruction of her property. What’s more, Jin asserts, “Never talk to her about what happened. She won’t survive that. It’s better if we all let her forget” (46). Kyung argues, “She will never forget” expressing disdain at the reverend’s suggestion that prayer and religious guidance will somehow heal her. Jin claims, “There are different kinds of forgetting” (48) which suggests a selective amnesia.

Yet, why is Mae’s perspective never articulated in words? Her attempt to articulate her trauma is fragmented in the overall text and seen in her design/home decor; the narrative, however, is dominated by the men. Mae’s testimony is not as accurate as Perry’s. I venture to say it is because they, the male narrators, too are

haunted. Turning to Schwab once again: “In order for trauma to heal, body and self must be reborn and words must be disentangled from the dead bodies they are trying to hide” (96). However, what is metaphorically written on the female body is physically preserved as a testimony of a legacy of patriarchal violence and transgenerational trauma both from the native country, migration, and the hostility and exclusion of the host country.

Mae’s suicide—the last willful and autonomous act can be deemed subversive. They know immediately that the accident was intentional as the road is without brake marks and Mae had left a note to be easily discovered after her death. In actuality, the note is “an inventory, the same one she was compiling for the insurance company. The handwritten list is twenty-eight pages long, documenting every item she ever bought for the houses” (237). Her final actions were deliberate and planned. The inventory solidifies her legacy. The language that refers to the body is analogous to the inventory she takes; the body as payment or compensation is poignant. If the maternal body serves as a site for an imperialist patriarchal trauma, the wounds double with the trauma of migration. When her body can no longer serve as the site of male oppression and violence, the possessions she has amassed for the home come to represent the failures and successes of the material wealth promised with the American dream. The shell, the appearance of success shatters for them all. Kyung knows that he will “inherit their hopelessness, the same hopelessness that sent his mother headfirst into a tree, that had his father kneeling on the floor, begging for his own life to end” (324). More importantly, as the novel reminds us: “It’s like a disease they passed on through their bloodlines, mutated into

a new form for his generation” (175). This is an apt illusion to support the hauntings of familial and transgenerational trauma—inescapable and omnipresent.

In the end, we learn that Mae had not only secretly created her own shelter, securing a job in interior design and decorating her own separate apartment, but was doing so with full resolve to leave Jin and their family home. We are granted a glimpse of what she planned, what she was capable of, and an identity denied to her by both her husband and son. Jin attacked her when he learned of her plans and it was then that she ran outside to seek help—fatefully it was the Perry brothers who happened to be outside. She attempted to escape one violent context to invite a worse one into her home. Symbolically, this is the trauma of diaspora and migration compounded by trauma of and from the host country written upon her body.

Therefore, what is most notable about *Shelter*, in my estimation, is that when we compare it to canonical Korean American fiction, the maternal body bears wounds of both the past and present. Iconic works like *Comfort Woman* and *Dictee* that were analyzed in the previous chapter, treat the body as a manifestation of hauntings of the past, inflicted and carried from Korea. *Shelter* differs in that it attempts to subvert the appropriation and assumptions about the maternal body and its limitations. Mae’s suicide is more than the act of a woman deemed insane or deeply traumatized by a silenced history. Her final acts serve to demonstrate that she, despite her thwarted attempts to leave the oppression of her home and husband, is willful in her final act of power over her own body; it is of her own choosing and a direct result of her determination to leave it. Yun’s work situates itself into the canon with complexity, depth, and possibility for a narrative told and

inscribed upon the maternal body by a Korean American woman that is free from the home/shelter that binds her.

What is common among all these texts by Korean and Korean American writers, beyond all that is written on the female body, is the use of the domestic space and the traditional gendered roles of the traditional family as sites for negotiations of power. Furthermore, the men exert their power and masculinity by being sexually dominant. While the masculine figures rely on the home, the domestic space to assert their authority, the female figures, ironically, gain power and agency over their wounded bodies as sites for subversion. However, without house and home and without the wife, the Korean patriarch is left a wounded widower and victim of *sang chuh*.

Korean men's power, demonstrated on the female body and used to enforce the dominance they strive to maintain within their homes over the women that their masculinity seems to rely on, cannot gain agency within this paradigm. Earlier, when I mentioned Eng and racial castration, it was noted that the emasculated man is not very different from the stereotypes of the subjugated Asian and Asian American women. ChungMoo Choi in "Nationalism and Construction of Gender in Korea" (1998) writes:

The dominant discourse of nationalism in postcolonial Korea strategically chooses to suppress women's equivocality to privilege the masculine subject of the nation. Gendered nationalism thus antagonizes...women's desires for recognition of multiple female subjectivities as a kind of whoring, while valorizing multiple male subjectivities as nationalistic and therefore heroic. (28)

However, as Korean men attempt to negotiate Korean nationalism and the promises of the American dream, we find that the masculine subject of the nation does not

necessarily privilege the masculine subject in the United States. The Western patriarchal refusal to acknowledge the Asian phallus breeds contempt and self-loathing if we prioritize the Western male gaze and assume that the Korean male figure views and/or measures himself through that lens. The Asian man's desire for recognition is also subverted. Is the violence that the men inflict upon the women's bodies, therefore, more than an overpowering demonstration of power? Meaning, could these men essentially be trying to erase their own emasculation? If the Western male viewpoint posits the Korean man as feminine, then more than exerting power over their female counterparts, they may be striving to eradicate their own feminized status. The obvious and immediate consequence of this is further oppression and subjugation of women. Nonetheless, it also reveals that these actions only enforce the idea that outside of the domestic space/ the home, these men are still unable to gain agency.

After all, the control and dominance they attempt to enforce within the home is contingent upon the presence of the female figure which in many ways only goes to highlight that – outside of the home-- for the white/colonial/Western/patriarchal figures to emasculate Asian men, the feminization of the Asian male body has to be repeated. The Korean/Korean American women writers examined here do not allow a space for these men and these ideologies to flourish. Rather, they seem to suggest that violence will only lead to further marginalization and other means of exclusion. It's not that they provide a solution or answer to these conflicts, but they do seem to call attention to the need for a departure from emulations of white manhood and traditional familial norms. The wound, the *sang chuh* of their

collective loss is an embodiment of a long legacy of trauma, creating feminized ghostly figures to return again and again to ask, “How can a husband lose his wife” (Shin 158)!

**CHAPTER 3:
Identity, Sexual Suicide, Baby Dolls, and the Burden of the Interpreters:
Splitting Sisters in Contemporary Korean American Women’s Literature**

*...whose spirits could not be broken,
whose every breath seems to say:
after things turned to their worst, we began again,

but may you never go through what we went through,
may you never see what we saw,
may you never remember and may you never forget.*

-Suji Kwok Kim

Korean American feminism and literature by Korean American women has lagged behind other Asian American feminist discourses and literary criticism.⁹ Overall, Asian American women and other women of color have challenged and complicated modernist trends in transnational feminism, which is arguably Eurocentrically based. As Eliza Noh writes in “Problematics of Transnational Feminism for Asian American Women” (2003), “The experiences of Asian American women show that sexual domination cannot be separated from other oppressions...the inadequacy of feminism to account for multiple, simultaneous

⁹ In part, it is because Koreans immigrated to the United States later than their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. It is also in part due to the circumstances of the emergence of intersectionality after the rise of feminism. Asian American women, in particular, were included after other women of color.

oppressions, in particular the centrality of experiences of racialization and coloniality to sexualization” (141-142) demands a reconsideration of Asian feminist nationalism; it also reflects the urgency and inexplicability of racialized sex for nonwhite women.

Noh calls for a rehistoricization of how women of color and Third-World women have been “concerned with cross-national issues of labor exploitation, imperialism, migration, and racialized gender—which includes their radical departures from...Eurocentric definitions of gendered communities and subjectivities” (144). Implicitly, the focus on sexualization is connected to the body, femininity, and performance. To further complicate these ideas, in “Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities: ‘Doing’ Gender across Cultural Worlds” (2003), Karen D. Pyke and Denise L. Johnson argue that Asian American women “do not construct their gender in one cultural field but are constantly moving between sites that are guided by ethnic immigrant cultural norms and those of the Euro-centric mainstream” (37). What is notable about their study is their conclusion that these women “treat gender as a racialized feature of bodies rather than a sociocultural product...they manipulate racialized categories of gender...to craft identities that are empowering” (50). In essence, they display performances and replications of the submissive, sexually exotic, and dutiful stereotypically Asian identities to serve their own agendas.

Further, Leslie Bow’s *Betrayal and Other Acts of Subversion: Feminism, Sexual Politics, Asian American Women’s Literature* (2001) considers how female characters in Asian American literature attempt to gain control over their own policed and

regulated bodies – bodies that “become the site of struggle between duty and desire, ethnic loyalty and Americanization” (9). She explores the ways sexuality can signal acculturation and maintains that the expression of sexuality signifies and interrogates political alliance and ethnic collectivity. The female body is situated as a register of international and domestic political struggles- a site of national divisions and loyalties. Moreover, the body is positioned as fluid, expressing various ethnic affiliations.

Bow claims:

As Asian American women’s literature reveals, negotiating multiple affiliations becomes fraught as the language of betrayal comes to regulate fidelity and communal belonging...Sexuality becomes a gauge of progress, a gauge that informs the interface between Westernization and modernization...(T)he language of betrayal signals the artifice of nationalized racial, ethnic, or national belonging...Asian American women writers not only mediate sexuality’s construction as a tool of political persuasion, reconceptualizing “disloyalty” as resistance to repressive authority. (11)¹⁰

Bow determines that Asian American women do not “write to affirm a preestablished sociological reality of ethnic experience, but as agents who craft rhetoric for their own political purposes (12). To further enrich the scope, Laura Hyun Yi Kang’s provides insights on how Korean women are composed in her text, *Compositional Subjects: Enfiguring Asian/American Women* (2002). While the overall work considers the textual production of Asian American women, the traumas of forced migration, and how these women occupy a place of difference,

¹⁰ We must also consider the implication that while women may have benefitted from the weakening of Asian patriarchal authority through the process of immigration and labor as increasing women’s autonomy, there is a danger in equating feminism with westernization.

surveillance, and documentation, Kang's consideration of Korean women is particularly relevant:

Locating themselves in specific historical and social milieus of Japanese colonization, American military imperialism, transnational emigrations, resettlement, and forceful acculturation under often inhospitable circumstances, shifting patriarchal traditions, and class relations,...(Kang) highlight(s) how these particular explorations of identity acknowledge the constitutive power of, even as they often subvert, hegemonic prescriptions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. (26)

While Korean women's experiences have been bypassed and overwhelmed by other Asian male narratives and the West, the Korean American woman positions herself against the division of her country and her experience as an immigrant- the sense of displacement and splitting. Like Bow, Kang believes that the Asian American woman's art is "a site of active political and ideological contestation" (242). Kang specifically mentions the "legacy of stigmatizing certain Korean women's bodies" (243). It is this racialized and gendered body that often serves as the site for negotiations of power, identity, and violence. The history of how shifting political and racial formations in Korea and in the United States have been implemented on the bodies of Korean women sex workers – particularly the camptown prostitutes- has been widely studied by Asian Americanists and was addressed in an earlier chapter of this dissertation. This critical framework can and should include immigrant women and representations of women in literary texts as I have maintained, as well. In other words, the Korean woman's attempt to retain a national identity amidst transnational migration, along with the negotiation of power within and outside domesticity, and the occupation of the space between sexualized other and model minority, constructs the Korean American woman's

experience to be complicated, nuanced, and sometimes disembodied. Furthermore, beyond the victimization of these women's bodies is the potential to re-inscribe and engage in an expression of their own sexuality.

Collectively, these Asian American feminists suggest that the sexual domination and exploitation of Korean American immigrant women is not only written on their racialized bodies, but the representation of these gendered subjects in the literature of Korean American women become sites of subversion. As Korean American women writers are often left out of the Asian American literary canon¹¹, this interrogation seems all the more needed in the field of Asian American literature. Since the existing scholarship tends to prioritize the representations of comfort women, military brides, and matrilineal lines, I opt to consider how sisters are utilized as a trope to represent the splitting of the Korean immigrant woman's subjectivity and performativity. I draw from Mia Yun's *Translations of Beauty* (2004), Catherine Chung's *Forgotten Country* (2012), and Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* (2003) to interrogate articulations of sexuality and the body and to demonstrate how the texts negotiate prescriptive racial/gendered/sexual/national ideologies.

To begin, Mia Yun's *Translations of Beauty*, narrated from the perspective of Unah, a young immigrant woman who recalls her childhood with her twin Inah and the later quest of trying to find her, presents the Korean American woman's body as split. In this novel, the splitting is literally depicted between the siblings. One embodies the traditionally expected characteristics of the dutiful daughter (Unah), while the other portrays the rebellious sibling (Inah). The twins, while identical, are

¹¹ Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee* and Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* typically serve as the representative texts by Korean American women.

marked by one distinguishable feature; Inah has severe burn marks on her face from a childhood accident—an accident Unah feels tremendous guilt over it since her sister's wounds are the result of a squabble and chase over possession of a favored baby doll. In Korea, they had lived in a Japanese style house -- left over from the occupation-- which was haunted by the ghost of a Japanese schoolgirl, or so the girls imagined. While the traumas of Japanese colonization are manifested in the perpetual haunting of the ghost figure, the accident appears to leave the wounds of the Japanese's colonization on the girl's body literally and metaphorically; the implication of living in a Japanese house / under Japanese rule leaves a permanent scar on Inah's face.

The family elects to move to America in the hope that the United States would offer more opportunities for their burn-scarred daughter. Yet, immigration also has its traumatic implications. In the US, they "live like a refugee in another country, one eye always looking homeward" (55). Perpetually living in-between, they know "this lack of sense of place will follow" (58). Indeed, the trauma of immigration is articulated throughout the novel:

I still carry that undefined fear that transplanted people never seem to be able to lose. People who uproot themselves and plant their feet on new soil. People who are permanently marked by memories of another terrain. Immigrants...(3)...living the life of a transplanted tree, only half-rooted at best in mutally rejecting foreign soil (118)...a transplanted tree, its roots shriveled away, unable to adjust to the new soil (325)...A place of limbo. One foot there, the other here. Burdened only with duty. Old and new." (247)

Unah particularly "felt haunted with this sensation of slowly floating nowhere" (66). Occupying a perpetual in-between, the sister trope attempts to reconcile competing

loyalties. Burdened by their sense of duty and by their own sense of displacement and exclusion, they perform their roles in opposing ways.

Inah bears the wounds of her family's trauma--wounded not only by the trauma of Japanese colonization as previously determined, but the trauma of immigration. When they first settled into school in America, in Flushing, more specifically, a "holding pen of immigrants" (133)-- a neighborhood of Queens- the land of immigrants and cemeteries (187)--the other children call Inah "Ghost Face" and "Devil Face" and "KFC", an acronym for "Korean Fried Chicken" in addition to pulling up their eyes and calling her "Chinese" (76). She is ostracized. Unah felt too burdened by Inah. She reflects, "I wish Inah didn't tag along after me everywhere like a shadow" (77). Inah is a constant reminder of the past as she carries a visible wound. Her presence makes it impossible to escape the past and the racism and alienation they encounter in America. She dons the physical manifestation of the family's state as perpetual foreigners as her scar invites even greater alienation. Furthermore, Inah's refusal to wash her body recalls shame: "'The shame! The shame!' Mommy hisses and says she hasn't seen anything like it since the Korean War" (100). Inah's body is consistently associated with the history of Korea, even in America.

Unah who is always "Mom's movable bridge" (6) is urged to find her wandering twin in Italy later in their adulthood. Inah who "wants to run away until she's undefinable, unknowable, and unreachable" to seem "she has never existed" (194) is a stark contrast to her sister; Unah had stayed in NY to be "a good daughter" (198), "to make up for Inah's absence" (326), to live up to all the hopes and

expectations that Inah ran from and feels incapable of living. This reflects what Erin Khue Ninh explicates in *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (2011) as “a rendering of the young woman thereby produced: a paranoid self-policing subject, commended to herself as object” (18). Collectively, the twins represent the negotiation of their cultural and ethnic affiliations--that ever present juxtaposition of the dutiful (Eastern) daughter and the independent (Westernized) daughter.

When Unah finds Inah in Italy, she notes her appearance as ghostly: “Thin and appallingly pale” (25). She describes her sister:

Inah’s body is standing there...her mind is somewhere else, roaming some other terrain...impossible to reach...just floating through it all. Unconnected. Unnoticed. Unseeing. Lost...Loving as stealthily as unseen wind...That Inah who obliterates every trace of femininity...she has become a hidden fossil buried deep inside a rock, dead and unreachable. (156)

Not only is she ghostly, but she is also dehumanized, de-feminized and buried--like a corpse within a crypt. She is at once hidden and mobile; her unwillingness to situate herself reveals that it is only in her constant movement that she can avoid being seen quite literally. She comes to embody a perpetual state of haunting. Finally, Inah’s travels begin to make sense to Unah; the trip to Italy helps her realize: “In travel, your real life is put on hold. As long as you...keep on moving, you can defer it forever...You are forever a stranger and an outsider” (224). Inah’s body is stigmatized because of the scars on her face; it is only in her state of displacement and movement that she can reject further narratives to be imposed upon her body. Yun ultimately suggests that Inah’s attempts at subversion leave her in-between; abandoning her family and the betrayal that she is accused of is the only alternative

to the performance of the dutiful Korean daughter (Unah). Inah's fluidity is her means of resistance; again, as Bow argues, "negotiating multiple affiliations becomes fraught as the language of betrayal comes to regulate fidelity and communal belonging." While Inah may be deemed disloyal and irresponsible, it is only in her mobility that she can navigate her trauma.

Interestingly, the sexual freedom that would assumedly be associated with Inah's character is not granted to her; when they were teenagers, Unah noted that "it's as if Inah wills her body to stay" in a prepubescent and androgynous state. Inah is seemingly asexual and recoils from any association with a sexualized body during their adolescence. As adults, nothing changes:

...the body Inah hides like a secret, like shame...A twenty-eight-year-old sexual being with a beautiful body that must feel desires...how hard Inah must have tried all these years to become a stone...Her body...pristine and unexplored and untouched virgin territory...as innocent and pure as that of a prepubescent girl. (177-178)

Was this a means of self-regulation and self-policing and/or could it potentially be Inah's refusal to be marked further? While the wounds on her face were unavoidable and inescapable, perhaps agency over her body and her sexual/asexual identity is a means of garnering power over what else could potentially be written on her body. Further, the twin's lack of sexual expression may be considered as a rejection of exoticized Asian fetishization. To draw from Celine Parrenas Shimizu's *The Hypersexuality of Race: Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* (2007), "when we tend to run and hide from sex, we do not solve the problem of how the pathology of hypersexual images will haunt and return publicly, privately, and intimately...If the Asian/American woman cannot be imaged outside of sex, her

self-formation must occur in terms of redefining sex" (19-20). Arguably, Inah does not necessarily "run and hide from sex" but perhaps redefines her sexuality from the prepubescent state, "defer[ring] it forever." Again, this choice does grant her agency over her body. Also, Unah too defies and refuses categorization: she admits, "I hate my body...It seems all wrong somehow...more than I can carry and manage. I hate it enough to want to die...I cry and swear that I will never, ever marry" (320). Both girls reject sexual expression. According to Ninh, "much of a rebellious Asian American daughter's sexual practice: her overly enunciated sexuality/promiscuity, her penchant for partners outside the race" is motivated by her chasing her right to Western notions of freedom and the Eastern conventions of repression. Ninh makes an example of "Out-marriage" where the subject gets herself "out" of the family and ensures that she cannot reproduce it; she has married "out" of her race. Perhaps equally as poignant is the refusal to participate in reproductions of any kind at all, as Inah and Unah have opted to do.

Catherine Chung's *Forgotten Country* also utilizes the sibling trope and a similar narrative plotline; Hannah (Haejin) leaves her family and her sister Janie (Jeehyun) attempts to find her. Janie had always been responsible for her sister; even when they were smaller, she would constantly pick "Haejin up like a doll" (25). Through the course of the novel, we are given glimpses of their childhood in Korea and – as with Yun's novel – the move to America. We discover that Hannah was victim of sexual assault when years later she says, "He touched me and all of you knew it, everyone knew and you said to be quiet, don't talk, don't say anything" (212). It is only then that Janie recalls their first summer in the United States when

their aunt and her “two American-born sons” came to visit (69). The memory is layered since it is told from the perspective of a small child with Hannah’s doll, Baby serving as the surrogate victim. On that afternoon, Janie heard her sister cry out and “saw the bump behind the curtains and Haejin’s legs kicking out beneath them...Keith was holding Haejin still by the back of her neck. Gabe knelt over Baby, whose dress was pulled over her face, poking holes in her stomach with a dinner fork” (79). Once more, we are given one sister that serves as witness to the other sister’s injury as it occurs. Baby’s punctured belly is the wound of rape that Hannah comes to carry.

Janie, too, also suffered later at the hands of “the first guy [she] ever slept with, and the marks he left took days or weeks to fade” (119). The violence these women’s bodies endure does not heal. Chung writes, “The body remembers old wounds. It stores them away in your blood and your bones, long after you believe they have healed” (132). Janie was fearful and only felt safe in the confines of her home with her family; perhaps this adds to her insistence on performing the role of dutiful daughter. The difference between the sisters and the ways they confront their suffering is notable.

While Janie values the role of martyr, Hannah believes the martyr narrative “teaches girls to kill themselves...teaches them that their lives are just a debt they have to pay back to someone else” (129). And therein lies the splitting. Janie idealizes Queen Min and her mythology: she’d been torn apart by Japanese soldiers when she refused to accept Japan’s occupation of Korea. In response they’d hacked her to pieces, and then although she’d kept her legs closed, they’d pried her open

and hacked her to pieces there as well. They'd lit her on fire twice (106). On one hand, Queen Min's refusal to submit to Japanese authority is an act of rebellion; on the other hand, the idealization of the violence on her body does ignore the reductive complications of maintaining an equivalence of the female body to the nation, which problematizes autonomy and subjectivity of the individual woman. Janie's idolization of Queen Min reveals her affinity for the performance of the Korean daughter, both from a national perspective and from a more personal familial viewpoint. Janie maintains her loyalty to Korea and to her Korean identity. In this way, Janie's own wounds are those of a martyr; she makes herself the martyr. Victim to her first sexual partner, she finds stability within her role. While she may have suffered from male-driven sexual violence, she elects to keep herself and her loyalties intact. From Hannah's perspective, Janie's actions are merely "a performance by the perfect daughter" (278). Moreover, Janie knows she "had always been the dutiful one, the one who tried to always be the missing daughter, the missing son, the one who had to try to fill the missing pieces and keep our family together" (278). The ideological split between Hannah and Janie is analogous to the competing forces- what Bow earlier referred to as the struggle between ethnic loyalty and Americanization.

Suki Kim's *The Interpreter* carries the same themes and trope. The protagonist Suzy works as an interpreter for the court system, "the shadow...invisible...a keeper of secrets" (12). What unfolds as the novel progresses are the secrets kept from Suzy: her parents work as INS informants to secure their own citizenship, the connection of their murder to that work, and her sister Grace's

role in it all. We learn that Suzy's parents had disowned her for running away with a married white man. (After that relationship ends, she ends up as the mistress of another married man.) She admits, "She knows how to be a kept woman. She got her start early. She even sacrificed her own parents to be one, so she had better be damn good at it" (29). Suzy's insistence on being "kept" by white married men can be interpreted as rebellion and as an act of betrayal. Ninh details the self-destructive nature of the Asian American female subject:

The daughter who seeks release through sexuality chances an extraordinary wealth of injury, risking not only disownment but the kind of disease, pregnancy, heartbreak, attack that could devastate a life...And this richness of possibilities...is integral to its appeal....Suicidal sexuality is a most insidious thing, because the subject need not know her own purpose—performs it all the better the more oblivious she is to her desire to self-destruct. When unsafe sex is deviance, death is a promise, misery never far, and neither entirely the subjects fault...What carefree sex holds for the failed daughter, the bad subject, is the security of feeling that one's out is never far from hand, the consolation of sensing that release may come in any form or face or day, the half-formed expectation that some point of suffering will be enough. Such carelessness with life can be a way to persist in one's being, to comfort oneself for continuing to live. (156-157)

The idea of suicidal sexuality is interesting in light of the literary texts examined thus far. Beyond the physical risks, a suicidal sexuality is a relief from parental expectations and family obligations. The "failed daughter" or "bad subject" is depicted as the rebellious sister in these novels. It is not always a matter of promiscuity or carefree sex, rather that sexuality (or absence as evidenced earlier by *Translations of Beauty's Inah*) is a vehicle by which these women can reject cultural and familial gendered expectations.

The self-destruction of the Korean American subject is compounded by her will to survive given the limitations and expectations placed upon her. Like Inah

and Hannah, who understand that their survival is only possible outside of and apart from their family and their Korean affinity, Suzy too seems to stray. She ruminates, “Wasn’t that why she went with him despite everything, despite her youth, despite her then living parents, despite her ivy league college, despite all good common sense that told her to stay still, stay where she was, stay in her rightful spot as the good Korean daughter? Wasn’t this what she had wanted after all? To run away from all of this”(181)? To evoke the language of Bow once again, this “betrayal” attempts to navigate opposing loyalties. What’s more, her “suicidal sexuality” coupled with her betrayal is explicitly mentioned in the novel. Kim writes, “She could not embrace this place called America...She could not become American as long as she remained their daughter. She betrayed them, so she might live” (212). Yet she can’t fully escape; her life is riddled with hauntings and she herself is ghostly.

Throughout *The Interpreter*, Suzy is described as being mournful and ghost-like. Her lover says it’s “like fucking a ghost, a very sexy one, but a ghost nonetheless” (74). Additionally, their parents were haunted and their trauma haunts their children; “The reason was Korea...All of their discontent, their misery, their endless wanderings...happened only because they had left their country...The houses they kept moving through were temporary shelters...because American could never be home” (122). More, “leaving a homeland...cuts you like nothing else. It’s like an illness, haunting generations” (150). The word, “cut” evokes yet another wound. Like Inah’s burn scars, or Hannah/Baby’s puncture wounds, Suzy is cut by

her family's haunting trauma. Again, we see the trauma of the immigrant experience as a wound or injury on the female body.

On the other side, the so-called dutiful daughter continues to suffer for her own affinities. Suzy and Grace are so similar in appearance that they are frequently mistaken for twins. Moreover, anyone that interacts with either of the siblings note, "I'd never seen a young woman so haunted by grief" (245). Grace's grief, however, is different from Suzy's. We learn that Grace, as a young girl, had been the one to translate during all the INS sessions when their parents were prompting and aiding in the deportation of their fellow countrymen. It's also worth noting that, as adults, while Suzy works as an interpreter, Grace worked as an ESL teacher to help students gain fluency in English. Grace seems to move in one direction—working from Korean to English/American--while Suzy is more fluid and moves between negotiations of both languages and cultures:

Being bilingual, being multicultural should have brought two worlds into one heart, and yet for Suzy, it meant hollowness...Piling up cultural references led to no further identifications...She was stuck in a vacuum where neither culture moved nor owned her. Deep inside, she felt no connection. (167)

This ghostly figuration extended to Inah and Hannah earlier as well. While this fluidity and mobility is a necessary coping mechanism and a means by which the Korean American female subject can identify, it leaves them in a perpetual state of being in-between, exiled, and/or disconnected—bound by their collective grief.

Displaced and disconnected, these sisters try to navigate their traumas while also negotiating between themselves and their roles in the family. The novels examined here suggest that the split sisters go beyond representing the dutiful daughter in juxtaposition to the rebellious daughter. Rather, as the wounded female

body is situated as a register of national, ethnic, and familial struggles, these sisters navigate the tensions that exist within the family. Grace, when younger, had performed to all the expectations of the Korean daughter as she was not only valedictorian but earned a scholarship to college; her only form of rebellion came in the form of “the pursuit of English” (209). Her father viewed her study of the English language as antithetical to Korean loyalty. Further, while Suzy sought out relationships with older white men, Grace found religion and Jesus. Both figures—white men and Jesus Christ-- were seen as Asian colonizers to their father; the girls’ bodies were lost to Western male figures. In the end, “the two girls who couldn’t find their way no matter how they tried, how hard they studied, how many boys they seduced, how many husbands they stole, which god they worshipped...remained the same. Two girls with no parents, such fine American beauties” (294). Though split, they are bound to the gaps between their competing loyalties.¹² Ultimately, their experience is collective and they are bound in their grief and the trauma that rests in/on their bodies.

These sisterly binds are further complicated by the presence of baby dolls. These toy babies are not only feminized, but seem to serve as additional sites for interrogation. To review: in Mia Yun’s *Translations of Beauty*, it was the fight over a doll that led to Inah’s accident and burn scars; in Catherine Chung’s *Forgotten*

¹² This is similar to the sisters in *Translations of Beauty*. In a letter to Inah, Unah writes: I realized that I was forever tethered to you as we were once tethered to Mom together through umbilical cords. By fate and blood and love. And to be honest...it terrified me, the idea of being forever tethered to you (255). A similar notion is repeated in *Forgotten Country* as well. As Janie and Hanna bury their father in Korea, they stand together in their shared experience. All these sisters are tethered together as they try to negotiate the tensions and juxtaposition of their identities and family dynamics.

Country, the doll is utilized as the object of sexual assault in Hannah's place; and in Suki Kim's *The Interpreter*, we learn that Grace had gifted her friend's daughter – named Grace after her – a baby doll named Suzie. These dolls grant disembodiment and, subsequently, they seem to signal and symbolize an alternate site for the girls/women to gain agency. The female body, as argued thus far, is situated as a register of competing power struggles – a site of often-competing divisions and loyalties; the figure of the doll could potentially provide a space for the women to navigate their own desires and traumas. A doll, after all, is indifferent to trauma, to pain, to all experience and emotion; dolls serve as sites for projection for one's needs, fears, desires, etc.; fantasy can be enacted and inscribed on a given doll—projections of hope and projections of that which cannot be articulated. A lifeless figure, the doll bears all inscriptions; in a way, it is much like the female body but without the overt consequences.

This is most notably seen in Chung's novel. As a means to cope with what Janie's bears witness to but is too young to understand, she is only cognizant of the doll's mutilation and not Hannah's victimization. When Janie had come upon Gabe and her sister, her eyes fix on the holes he is making in Baby's body. When the assault is revealed to her years later, she exclaims, "I didn't know...I thought all they did was mess up your doll" (212). The doll is described as being "the size of a real baby" that "warmed to your body like a real child" with "plump arms you could squeeze" (75); she was outfitted "in a frilly red baby dress, the only one...brought from Korea" (76) – a dress that had been worn by both girls as infants. Hannah acts as a doting mother; she "guarded Baby obsessively" (77). The lifelike status of the

doll, its dress, and the girls' adoration for it reveals that it is an extension of the girls' bodies. Young Janie even "applied Band-Aids to Baby's oozing wounds" (79) after the assault. She attends to the doll because she doesn't know how to attend to her sister; meanwhile, Hannah made herself "dead weight...letting her head droop...making every limb go completely numb" (80). The doll and Hannah have essentially switched places to enable the girls to cope. What's more, when their parents discover and recover the doll from the trash, Hannah puts it back and Janie "was relieved when it was finally gone" (83). Being rid of the doll is analogous to being free of the reminder of the trauma – or a very naïve and child-like attempt to forget and a very urgent need to repress the trauma. Both sisters are transformed through their interactions with the doll. In a sense, Hannah is transfigured because she "loses" the daughter (her Baby) and, as outlined earlier, in her refusal to perform the roles of dutiful daughter herself. It is Janie, contrarily, who performs all her expected roles that becomes a lifeless figure manifesting the hopes and desires of her parents—perhaps, because she had felt she failed to protect her own "baby" sister.

The failure to protect one's sister and the utilization of the doll figure to rectify it is also present in *The Interpreter*. When Suzy meets Maria Sutpen in her search for Grace, she is startled that Maria has "A daughter named Grace with a doll named Suzie" (254) and startled that Grace had allowed her to live in their parents' old house. When Suzy asks, "Was it Grace who gave her the doll, the one named Suzie?" Maria Sutpen's daughter declares, "She made me promise to take good care of her, because Suzie's all alone in the whole wide world" (262)! First, the idea that

Grace wanted to recreate, in the family home, another incarnation of Grace and Suzy – with Grace as protector is notable. The figure of the doll serves as a representation of hope (in contrast to the doll figure in *Translations of Beauty*) and is a figure that bears the projections of the sisters' desires. In Grace's will, she leaves everything to little Grace with the exception of their parents' Korean market that is left to Suzy. This also seems to suggest that Grace, in feeling an on-going responsibility for her sister, continues to keep Suzy from the full scope of the truth: "Only Suzy would be spared. The silent witness" (293). What's more, as Grace's body is never found, she is replaced by Maria's daughter- the Grace that will look after "Suzy." The doll is, perhaps then, the harbinger for hope, for change. As little Grace is a fatherless, mixed race child, perhaps the implication is that she will not inherit oppressive patriarchal norms or the exploitative male gaze. Rather, this Grace will be better equipped to care for her Suzy and inscribe a new narrative on the doll.

Inah and Unah's fight over possession of the doll in Yun's novel suggests that ownership of the doll offers a chance, not only to step into the role of mother/protector, but also to project their personal narratives upon the doll. Inah play-acts: "You're a dirty, dirty baby," she says to the doll...mimicking Mommy (33). As the twins pull at the doll for a chance to "bathe" her and play the role of mother, Inah maintains, "She's *my* baby" while Yunah determines, "the doll looks miserable and frightened" and "seems to be pleading...for help" (33). As both girls fight over the chance to be the protector/maternal figure, the doll's arm gets pulled off and the chase that ensues ultimately leads to Inah's deformation. This continued thread

throughout these three novels is symbolic and metaphorical: the doll is not only coveted by the sisters and not only bears their projections, but the doll becomes a site for contestation that seems to represent the sisters' attempt to perform and rectify their identities. In some ways, these dolls serve as talismans as well—protective symbols that suggest there is one role they can perform, that of caregiver. Their determination to care for the dolls is ultimately transferred to the care for their sisters. As such, the attempt to care for the doll figures is analogous to care for the sisters, as they navigate competing identities. And yet, as this chapter has outlined, it is the negotiation of various identities that “splits” the Korean American women into a set of sisters.

As Korean American women's bodies are policed and regulated, the use of the doll is all the more significant. The doll figure provides an opportunity for re-inscription. How do we, as readers and critics, read not only the female body, but the dolls? How do we interpret the narratives and traumas written on the body? I am cautious and skeptical of the over-reliance on the woman-as-nation trope; it not only undermines a complex and individual human quality, but it seems to mythologize womanhood and ideas of nation. However, I think that is what is next for Korean American feminists/scholars/writers – to determine whether to seek empowerment through their own sexuality and expression of sexuality or to bear witness to trauma and create new tropes to work through those wounds, or perhaps both. As Elaine Kim maintains in “Dangerous Affinities: Korean American Feminisms (En)counter Gendered Korean and Racialized U.S. Nationalist Narratives” (1999), “Korean American women writers and artists have been

attempting to create alternative spaces for memory, performance of identity, and social critique by addressing both material conditions and ‘structures of feeling’ in work about Korean immigrant women as well as about women in South Korea” (5). Though Kim invokes *Comfort Woman* as an example of how women “reclaim their selfhood through the language of the body” (9), I extend the idea further to include the sisters in the literary texts I have discussed in this chapter. Kim argues that the characters claim their own subjectivity and bodies “which are more than the national spaces of Korea and the America contained within the lines on world maps and which allow for letting go of patriarchal postcolonial Korea and making her own body her ‘home’” (9). Ultimately, Kim argues that Korean American feminist writers do not “push the reluctant Korean female body onto a stage lit up for pornography and commodification but instead reaches for the lines of affinity that might link us in a mutual struggle to understand and struggle against our respective experiences of colonization, racialization, and gender oppression” (10). The sisters in the novels by Yun, Chung, and Kim demand testimony and that Korean Americanists and writers must not only reconcile their own traumas, but bear witness to them--to hold in the balance the gap between their varied and fluid identities.

We, as Asian American feminist and literary critics, are interpreters – like Suzy-- who “possesses an ability to be at two places at once...[because] Languages are not logical. Thus an interpreter must translate word for word and yet somehow manipulate the breadth of language to bridge the gap” (91). In our interrogation of

literary texts, we are called upon to participate in new ways of imagining the Korean American women's immigrant experience.

You have immersed yourself in beauty, poverty, ugliness, richness and loneliness, and yet you're not healed. So if you must, lose every boundary. If necessary, forget everything. Every language, even Korean, the language full of an untranslatable trove to express love, joy, anger, sorrow, and pain. You can invent a new one to express them. (338)

Perhaps that is the only recourse; to invent a new means of defining and articulating the trauma that is written on the Korean American female body.

CONCLUSION

Break open that moment and out of it will come massacre, torture, violent repression. It gets shoved aside, beaten to a pulp, swept away in the tide of brutality. But now, if we can only keep our eyes open, if we can all hold our gazes steady, until the bitter end...

Please, write your book so that no one will ever be able to desecrate my brother's memory again...

-Han Kang, *Human Acts*

We have the burden and opportunity to recontextualize how the socio-cultural and literary fields revision Korean Americans and Korean American literature. The culmination of the traumas compiled by immigration/migration, the Japanese occupation, the Korean war and division of the country, and gendered subjectivity gives us a wealth of considerations. What is compelling is not only in the writing of these histories, but the witnessing of it in its literary manifestations. The challenge is in preventing this literature from being a niche genre and exoticized and to take these narratives –which often involve trauma—and present (and study) them without sensationalizing the events. It is daunting when engaging

with stories involving comfort women, sex workers, victims of war, victims of colonization, orphans, and exiles. Yet, it is the duty we face.

Korean/Korean American literature by women writers highlights contemporary issues that confront us all, as Korean Americans manage hybridized identities, intergenerational conflicts and trauma, implications of diaspora, and representation (or lack thereof). The value of the inclusion of not only Korean/Korean American literature but women writers will enrich the fields of Asian American Studies, Literary Criticism, and Women's and Gender Studies. The various nuances and eccentricities revealed in the texts studied here reveal the depth and complexity of the Korean American woman's identity in particular. There is still so much work left to uncover and yet to be done for both writers and scholars in bearing witness to women's subjectivities and silenced histories. I hope this dissertation has contributed to the exposure and dissemination of these narratives.

I end this dissertation with the introduction and interrogation of another literary text. Translated and published in 2016, Han Kang's *Human Acts* is the most recently published text I will have examined here. I chose this purposefully to connect the previous works in the Korean American canon to what will hopefully evolve in the future. Tasked with the responsibility of writing trauma, the writer and narrative voice beckons the ghosts to speak through them in the texts examined thus far. Kang's *Human Acts* is also exemplary in this regard. The writer-narrator has been charged with writing the book to bear witness to the atrocities of the Gwangju uprising in 1980.

The novel opens with Dong-ho, a middle school boy, who is searching for his best friend, Jeong-dae's body at the Provincial Office. He ends up volunteering--responsible for the ledger that keeps record of the corpses and tagging the bodies. He meets and works with Eun-sook, Seun-ju, and Jin-su. The next chapter is from the perspective of Jeong-dae's ghost; his body is one among a large pile of corpses; he witnesses his body's decomposition. It is only when soldiers burn the bodies that his spirit is freed. He decides to find Dong-ho but in that moment Dong-ho is shot dead as he surrendered to soldiers who invade the city and Provincial Office. The novel then shifts to Eun-sook's life five years after the massacres. She recounts the seven slaps she received in an interrogation room during questioning regarding her work as an editor and her interaction with a wanted writer. The description of the seven slaps is inter-dispersed with narratives of the past, in particular the night of Dong-ho's death. In this chapter, she also delivers a heavily censored script from the ledger's office to a theater; later when she attends a play, since she had been familiar with the manuscript, she is able to read the lips of the actors who silently mouth the lines that were edited out. She notes that the play is about Dong-ho and his death. The fourth chapter is from the perspective of a prisoner who was captured in Gwangju and tortured. He shares a cell with Jin-su (and many others) and they remain friends after their release, until Jin-su ultimately takes his own life. This narrator too recalls the night of Dong-ho's death and provides more details into those final moments. Next, we are offered Seun-ju's perspective and given insight into her factory work, involvement in the labor union before the uprising, her hiding, capture, assault, and her life as a transcriber after; she too is traumatized.

The sixth chapter is from the viewpoint of Dong-ho's mother. Thirty years after his death, she continues to draw on his memory. The epilogue reveals the writer's objective. Not only had she lived in Dong-ho's childhood home, occupying his room, but she is tasked with writing the book to preserve his memory.

All these characters feel responsible for Dong-ho's death. They are haunted by his memory. Each of their narratives adds to complete the picture of the night of his passing. The horrors of the Gwanju uprising were "Acts of violence committed in broad daylight, without hesitation and without regret" (209). Kang fills the novel with images of unburied and unclaimed bodies. Much like trauma, the bodies continue to rise to the surface in shallow graves refusing to be forgotten or repressed. Jeong-dae's ghost explains, "Our bodies are piled on top of each other...[a] random jumble of bodies (55). His chapter stands out because he remarks numerous times that his spirit is anchored to his body; unable to escape, he notes, "I was stuck, unable to detach myself from my body...Unable to look away from my ghost pale face" (59). Watching his body decompose, he ruminates on how the body is a ledger as it "bore the traces of hands that had touched it, a tangible record" (62). This leads to a profound hatred of his flesh and he explicitly turns to his memories as a means of escape; he recalls moments of his life and concludes, "I needed more memories" (64). As he fondly remembers his childhood, he abruptly notes, "*I think of the festering wound in my side*" (66) and it is the recollection of how he was shot and killed and how he wishes the soldiers would be haunted by their actions. What is notable here is that memory, wounds, and haunting are all inextricably linked.

In the Korean context, violence upon a body that is then denied a proper burial and denied the proper familial rites is also an assault against the soul or spirit. This not only suggests that the spirits would be at unrest, but that the bodies carry messages beyond the physical world; in other words, much like trauma, it is not only a physical wound that is left but a psychic—and perhaps even a spiritual—one. In this way, memory, trauma, and the body are also inextricably linked. When the writer is asked to record all the narratives surrounding Dong-ho's death, she becomes responsible for all the bodies piled on in the text. What's more, the ghost speaks through her. She pleads: *Dong-ho, I need you to take my hand and guide me away from all this. Away to where the light shines through, to where the flowers bloom* (216). She appears to beckon the ghost to not only lead her but to take her beyond the bodies.

Ultimately, it is the Korean/ Korean American woman writer that works towards healing the traumas written on the body. What's more, it is they who give space for the ghosts of the pasts to speak; it is they who unearth the bodies and bury them; it is they who bear witness and keep the record. In this way, they are the link between Korea and the United States, the past and present. Whether it is the voice of the ghost of the lost and wounded wives, the traumatized sisters, the baby dolls, the comfort women and their descendants, or the hauntings of the Gwangju uprising—which “had become another name for whatever is forcibly isolated, beaten down, and brutalized, for all that has been mutilated beyond repair” (210). Korean/Korean American women writers become the recorders and keepers of a broader collective trauma. They become the voice for the narratives of history, of

identity, and of the corpses depicted in their texts. As presented in the earlier chapters, the layers of trauma inflicted by not only the Korean patriarchy, but Western powers, and even the traumas of the immigrant experience are all negotiated on the female body. As these bodies bear the wounds of the past and of power struggles, the texts they are represented in are also vessels for these archives for the reader—if we can hold our gazes steady, until the bitter end.

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